THE UNCOUNTED COST

By

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"Fools Rush In," "The Silent Ones"

Third Impression

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By T. WERNER LAURIE

TO THOSE WHO HAVE

HELPED ME

I dedicate this Book

WITH

GRATEFUL THANKS

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THE UNCOUNTED COST

CHAPTER I

A HELPING HAND

"Land me, she says, where love
Shows but one shaft, one dove,
One heart, one hand.
—A shore like that, my dear,
Lies where no man will steer,
No maiden land."

ANNE LOVAT was coming along the pathway when she caught a glimpse of Kitty Pearce's face between the clustering pink roses that festooned the window. It wore no welcoming smile, such as she felt she had a right to expect. Kitty must have seen her, yet she moved back quickly, and for a moment Anne stood still and debated whether she should go back. But Lettingbourne was an hour from Victoria, and The Cottage at least twenty minutes' walk from the railway station, and she was hot and very thirsty. Besides, Kitty was good-nature personified. Anne guessed what was the matter. Mrs Pearce was entertaining her latest admirer and did not want her *tête-à-tête* to be interrupted. A natural attitude, her cousin would have thought, if her desire had been for one man, but Anne sighed as she remembered the husband in West Africa, and the many others who dangled round pretty Kitty. Then she laughed a little. She did not believe there was any

real harm in Kitty. Her speech might be cynical but her actions were invariably kind, and she felt no one would be more sorry than Mrs Pearce if her self-invited guest went away without tea. She went quietly round to the back door.

Sitting on the kitchen doorstep, her face hidden in her apron, sobbing noisily and heart-brokenly, was a damsel in the neat black dress and smart white cuffs and collar of a maid-servant. Anne stood still and surveyed her for a moment, but the girl was lost to everything but her own woe.

"Why, Ellis?" she asked at last, "what is the matter?"

There was a pause, then Ellis apparently swallowed her grief, raised a face sodden with tears and looked at Anne with swimming eyes.

"It's—it's Sam Latimer, please, miss."

Anne was all sympathy in a moment. "Sam Latimer! Oh, poor Ellis, is he ill? But Mrs Pearce will let you go down to see him. You can go to-night and I'll stay and help her."

"He isn't ill, miss," with a gasping sob. "He's disrated. That's what's the matter."

"Disrated? Oh, Ellis, are you sure you aren't making a mistake? Why, Lieutenant Bullen told me only the other day that he's one of their best stoker petty officers."

"But he must be disrated, miss," cried Ellis, with a fresh burst of weeping. "He's given me the go-by, the chuck. Here's his letter, and he says as how he can't marry me," and she held out a crumpled ball of damp paper to Anne.

Anne straightened out the sheets. Sam Latimer had

been very brief, apparently considering that the least said under the circumstances the better, and he had written down his change of mind in a neat round schoolboy hand. " I'm very sorry, but I can't marry you," was the burden of his song.

Anne considered the matter. Fair before her lay her own life. She was very sure of a man's love, the love of the one man in the world for her, and her own assured position made her very pitiful and tender-hearted to those who were less fortunate. She searched for some comforting word to say.

" Don't cry, Ellis, don't cry. You see he says he's sorry. Perhaps there is some mistake. I know Lieutenant Bullen ; shall I ask him to speak to Sam Latimer for you ? "

Ellis gulped down the remainder of her sobs. " I was wondering if I dare ask Captain Cunningham, miss," she said. " Sam thinks a sight of him and he's in the drawing-room."

Captain Cunningham was in the drawing-room. Enlightenment came to Anne. She liked the commander of the *Irrepressible,* and had always heard his praises sung by the man whose word was her gospel. Then she inquired further.

" Is Captain Cunningham going to stay to dinner ? "

" Yes, miss."

Then, thought Anne, I can certainly stay for tea without trespassing unduly.

" Go and tell your mistress I am here," she said.

Kitty rose to receive her with a smile. " Anne ! " she said, " how nice to see you again ! Why, you haven't been down for ages ! "

" No," said Anne diplomatically, " and I am afraid

I can't stay very long now. I have to get back to dinner." O mendacious Anne! "But I thought I should just have time for a cup of tea. How do you do, Captain Cunningham?"

Cunningham had naval officer written all over him, from his clean-shaven, ugly, intellectual face to the soles of his serviceable boots, and he rose up smiling, greeted Anne and found a chair for her while Kitty, quite easy in her mind now that she understood Anne did not intend to stay, busied herself with the tea.

"Isn't Ellis a picture of woe?" said Kitty, as her maid left the room after replenishing the teapot, "a living picture. I should label her: 'Alas for the love that lasts alway.' Now how long will it take her to get over the gentleman's defection? Two months? I think I must ask you to lend me a nice-looking sailor-man, Captain Cunningham, to do up my garden. If he's appreciative it would be a certain cure."

"But I've been privileged to read his letter," put in Anne, "and from the point of view of an outsider I am by no means sure that the gentleman at the bottom of his heart wants to give her up. He was repenting while he wrote. If she could see him, and if somebody would put in a good word for her——" She looked across at Cunningham and smiled, and he answered her smile.

"The number of disconsolate wives and sweethearts who appeal to the captain of a ship is astonishing," he said with a little laugh. "It's not much good appealing to O'Flaherty though. He just chucks the effusions in the waste-paper basket."

"I suppose they have better luck with the commander," suggested Anne, smiling into the keen clever face.

"Well, I think he's more of a fool," said Cunningham.

A Helping Hand

"It's wisdom not to interfere with other people's love affairs," said Kitty, leaning back comfortably in her arm-chair. "Let a man love while he can, and when he can't keep it up any longer don't try and heat up cold porridge, it's never worth anything. Don't you meddle, Captain Cunningham, or only to the extent of a nice man to do up my garden. That's my idea of a cure."

"It isn't mine," said Anne with fervour and a little blush at her own earnestness. "I do believe there is such a thing as a love that lasts for ever. What would life be worth otherwise?"

"My poor Anne!" said Kitty. "Is that your confession of faith? Haven't you realised yet that the virtuous world is an extremely dull one? And you call yourself a novelist!"

"Dull to read about," said Anne, "but I don't think it's dull to live in. Happy is the woman who has no history."

"And happier is the woman who has many. Tom, Dick, and Harry come awooing, and they all do it differently, and they all do it delightfully. Now take my advice, Captain Cunningham, and don't speak to that stoker petty officer as man to man. I see in your eyes that's what you are contemplating."

Cunningham laughed, and looked from one woman to the other.

"I could do that," he said, "and I'd probably have some influence, more especially if you gave Ellis a day off and she came down to Sheerness and met him on the mat when I send him ashore."

"And in a year's time two people would be hating Captain Cunningham," laughed Kitty. "Ellis will remember she missed my nice young gardener."

"Oh, do, Captain Cunningham," begged Anne. "I know Kitty. She isn't nearly as bad as she pretends to be. If you talk to that faithless petty officer tomorrow she will give Ellis the afternoon off."

"This cousin of mine, Captain Cunningham," said Kitty whimsically, "is the most fervent believer in true love, true love spelt with a very large capital L. Every man keeps his vows or he wouldn't make them, and every woman—well, every woman is prepared to sacrifice her uttermost farthing in the cause."

Anne blushed, but she blushed happily, for she believed that she at least had found true happiness, whatever the rest of the world might have done.

"Why should I not believe in goodness and truth," she said, "for after all that's what it means?"

"The side issues, you observe," said Kitty, "are as nothing to this budding novelist. It's easy to see why she doesn't keep her motor car. Now Stoker Petty Officer Latimer sees a pretty girl and he wants to kiss her—what more natural? Why should he be bound to one? I don't see why you should restrict a poor sailorman's pleasures in this way. He hasn't many."

"But poor Ellis?" put in Anne, thinking of the sobbing girl on the back doorstep.

"You must have a thunderstorm occasionally, it clears the air. When Ellis sees my nice new gardener—oh, mine's the best plan! If Captain Cunningham patches this up a year hence the pair will be calling down something very different from blessings upon his head. I recommend the gardener, and after the gardener, say the grocer, and then perhaps another petty officer, until——"

"She finds out she's missed all the sweetness in life,"

said Anne, rising. "Kitty, I must go" — Kitty, she knew, would be pleased with her discretion, "but I want to be sure before I do that Captain Cunningham will speak to Stoker Petty Officer Latimer as man to man," she laughed, "and find out whether he really is tired of Ellis, or whether his mother and sister have been 'saying things,' and in his heart he's hankering to recall that letter."

"I will, Miss Lovat, I assure you I will," said Cunningham. "And if Mrs Pearce will send the damsel down to Sheerness to-morrow afternoon I'll see that Latimer is on the pier at three o'clock and risk their hating me for the remainder of their days."

"Thank you," said Anne gratefully. "Now I must go, after a word with Ellis."

"Tell her she must cheer up," said Kitty. "No man was ever won by tears, and she'd better put on her very best frock, and smile as if the world belonged to her, and she didn't care a straw whether she married him or not."

"Is that the way to manage a man?" asked Cunningham.

"The average man," said Kitty. "But it is very unwise to let you behind the scenes like this. Anne, if you must catch the five fifty-two——"

"I must run, I know. Now, Captain Cunningham, everything depends upon you. Good-bye. Good-bye, Kitty dear. Mind you let me know the end of Ellis' love story."

CHAPTER II

"INFIDELITY, LIKE DEATH, ADMITS OF NO DEGREES"

"You came, and the sun came after,
  And the green grew golden above;
And the flag flowers lighted with laughter,
  And the meadow-sweet shook with love.

"I saw where the sun's hand pointed,
  I knew what the bird's note said;
By the dawn and the dewfall anointed,
  You were queen by the gold on your head.

"As the glimpse of a burnt-out ember
  Recalls a regret of the sun,
I remember, forget and remember,
  What love saw, done and undone."

"WELL, Anne," cried Kitty, coming into Anne's sitting-room a few days later, "you've played Providence. Ellis and her unfaithful swain are in each other's arms again and I'm looking out for a new maid. They're to be married in six weeks' time, if they don't change their minds meanwhile. Think of the anathemas that will be hurled at your devoted head six months hence. Why, Anne! Whatever is the matter?"

Anne turned a face to her cousin out of which every particle of colour and life seemed to have gone, the face of a woman who had lost everything.

"Anne!" said Kitty again, throwing off her hat. "Anne! My dear! What has happened? I know Dicky Bullen's all right, because I——"

"Dicky Bullen," repeated Anne, in a voice scarcely

above a whisper, " what do you know about Dicky Bullen ? "

" My dear sweet little ostrich," said Kitty not unkindly, " do you really mean to tell me you think I did not know. More than once it's been on the tip of my tongue to implore you not to make a fool of yourself, but after all you are not a child, and when a woman like you is in love it's no good arguing with her, she must go her own way. But Dicky has never thrown you over ? "

Anne looked out of the window as if she could not bear the fact put into words. It was a hot, still June evening. The heat of the sun rose from the baking pavements, and away in the distance she could see the muddy river flowing by to the sea, and the roar of London came to her ears as a subdued murmur. She was hurt with a hurt that she felt would last her all her life, but, alas ! that would not kill. What a long dreary vista of years she was looking down !

" I didn't do it lightly, Kitty," she said in sudden protest. " I didn't do it lightly."

" More's the pity," said Kitty. " Anne, why didn't you do it lightly ? There is not a man in the world worth breaking your heart over. Oh, Anne, Anne, if you would only take amusement as it comes ! "

" But—" and Anne rose and began restlessly pacing the room—" it was not amusement, it was serious, sacred, holy."

" Oh, don't talk nonsense," said Kitty. " Let us look the thing straight in the face. You and my cousin Dicky Bullen fell in love with one another, as anyone could see, and as the pay of a lieutenant in the navy, even backed by the earnings of a novelist who hopes she is going to rise, would not justify you in openly

setting up housekeeping together you decided to postpone the official ceremony. He came up the stairs and swore, 'This is our bridal,' and you, poor little fool, believed him. Then in due course he grew tired——"

Anne shuddered. It was the truth shorn of the daintiness and prettiness and all the fervour she had seen in it, the delight she had had in trusting everything to the honour of the man she adored, her faith in his love and tenderness, that indescribable something that for Kitty had never been on sea or land, but for Anne made all life rosy and golden.

"He wanted me," she said, interrupting, "and you know I have always held that if two people lived together first before they bound themselves irrevocably there would be more chance of happiness in married life."

"My dear," said her cousin, "there are many drawbacks to matrimony, I admit, but it's the best arrangement we have struck yet, more especially if you don't take it too seriously. If Dicky had married you he wouldn't have left you—he wouldn't have wanted to leave you."

"He said," went on Anne, "that mentally, morally, and physically we suited each other and—and—oh, I am ashamed—ashamed," and she dropped her head on the table. "I was so proud of trusting him and he has thrown me away as if I were a worn-out glove."

"My dear, he's a cad," said Mrs Pearce, as if that settled it. "And you must make up your mind to forget him as soon as you can."

"After two years! It's impossible. Why has he done it."

"My poor Anne, you are not the woman to play that sort of game."

"It was something in me," then said Anne. "I was afraid—I was afraid——" Her voice was shaking.

"Did he come and tell you? No, of course he wrote. Let me see his letter."

Anne hesitated a moment. Her lover's letters had been sacred things, read and re-read, lending glamour to the commonplace day. This one was different. It seemed to her it had broken her life. Possibly Kitty might read it differently. It was the forlornest hope, but she was desperate, she must catch at straws. She handed over the letter.

"MY DEAR ANNE" [it began],—"I don't know how I'm to write this letter to you, but it has got to be done. You are too good for me, Anne, much too good. I'm a swab and ought to be kicked, but I want you to break your engagement, to give me back my freedom, for I can't marry you and therefore it isn't fair to you to go on. It wasn't fair to you to begin, you'll say. I know it wasn't, and I could grovel in the dust at your feet when I think of what I have done, but you are so good you'll let me off, I know. Don't fear that I shall think lightly of you because of what has been between us, you will always be one of the best women in the world to me. You have your work, you'll be famous by-and-by and soon forget one who was never half worthy of you. Do you want to know why I have changed? I have never changed in my high opinion of you, but—well there is a girl I have met since we parted, and, if you give me back my freedom, perhaps I shall try to win her. I don't know why I tell you this, only it seems fair to let you know all there is to know. I am

frightfully cut up about the whole affair, but, Anne, don't think of me any more. I'm not worth it."

And the letter was signed with initials—" R. L. B."

Kitty tossed it aside contemptuously, and Anne, with anxious eyes devouring her face, read no comfort for her there.

" It's exactly as he says, you're too good for him. The average man doesn't appreciate truth and constancy in a woman. He's regarded her as his slave and plaything for so long, that when she gives him a chance he acts in the old, old way. Take his advice and don't think about him any more. He's not worth it."

" I can't answer it," moaned Anne, " I can't. Why are vows made in church or declarations in a registry office more sacred to him than vows such as we made? I shall keep them all my life."

" I hope devoutly you won't."

" I couldn't give him leave to marry another woman." She was walking restlessly about the room again. " Why should I put myself on a level with a woman of the street ? "

" Oh, don't answer it," said Kitty with decision, " I should like to punish Dicky, and waiting for an answer is always chastening."

" Then I'll write," said Anne hastily, " I don't want to hurt him."

Kitty changed her tactics. " My dear, he would only think the less of you for your pains. He wants to break with you, and the mention of another woman makes it final. You know very well if he hadn't said something of the kind you would have written imploring

him to come to you, and done your best to win him back."

"Of course," said Anne simply.

"He knows how to manage you."

Anne shivered. The words sounded so brutal. But Kitty Pearce was kind. She knew that the danger was lest Anne, like many another loving woman, should not realise that the man wanted the thing over and done with. If she sank her pride now it would only be to suffer fresh humiliation afterwards.

"I wish I were dead," Anne whispered.

"Nonsense. He isn't worth it. Follow his suggestion, Anne, work and make a name for yourself. Your new book is sold, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Anne, "I thought he would be so pleased." And the thought of the pleasure she had hoped to give him brought the tears to her hard hot eyes, tears that ran over on to her white cheeks. "I thought my books——"

"You misread Dicky Bullen if you thought he would take an interest in your books. My dear girl, he never read a book in his life except the Navy List. You and Dicky hadn't a thing in common except your love, and that you idealised. Think of him as ordinary common clay and you don't know how it will help you to pull through. I know my cousin Dicky, and I assure you he is very ordinary clay. I didn't think he'd do quite such a mean thing, but in a way it was your fault. You would regard an ordinary flirtation as Love, Love with a very capital L indeed."

"I should have been ashamed to have done anything else," said Anne below her breath.

"It was a very foolish proceeding in the case of a

commonplace young man like Dicky. He couldn't stand the rarefied atmosphere in which you made him live. A year hence you will be thankful he did throw you over. You're a nice girl, Anne. Any man might admire you and sit at your feet for a little, the mistake was that you should be so desperately in earnest over a thing that ought to be taken lightly."

Anne turned away and flung herself face downwards on the sofa. There lay the bitterness. She had counted this thing high and holy, and he, the man of her dreams, showed her that he considered it an ordinary liaison. For him it had involved no responsibility. "I am a swab and ought to be kicked," he had written, but she knew that a man who really felt that would not have thrown her over. Such words counted for nothing.

"Anne," her cousin bent over her and put her hand on her shoulder, "listen to me a moment. I know you feel utterly wretched now, but there are other things in the world besides love. Don't you know that the great fault in your writings has been that you always make your women yearning to lay their heads on some man's shoulder. Your men are right enough. They know there are other things in the world worth winning beside a woman. You've a plot in your hand now. Make a name for yourself."

Anne knew her trade and laughed bitterly. "Don't you know that you can't sell a story that ends badly?"

"Make it end happily then. Exaggerate, change, do anything you like, but use the central idea for a foundation. You're so great on ideals you can make the woman who had an honest purpose succeed and the man who betrays her fail—no, not fail—just miss the best in life."

Anne's face was drawn and pinched with pain. "It night come afterwards, I suppose," she said. "I am ld enough to know that success in a small thing is etter than failure in everything, but if you only knew what it is to think of getting through even to-night."

"That's the way to take it," said Kitty. "One hing at a time. To-night. I think we can settle that vith a good dose of sulphonal. Anne, I'm going to stay vith you to-night."

"If you only would," said Anne, who felt terrified t the idea of being left alone with her thoughts, Kitty, I don't think I can go on living."

"Nonsense, the story is only just begun. You'll ave many good times yet. Don't give him the satisaction of thinking he was wise to cast you off. I am ever likely to make a name for myself, but I understand the beginning of the process, it has to be done ttle by little. A good night's rest to-night and tonorrow you will begin to write your book."

"It wouldn't matter if one didn't love," said Anne earily.

"Of course. That's it. It's the greatest mistake. m always watching the effects—in others. I'm afraid ou may do the same thing again though."

Anne shook her head. If she could only die.

The last hot rays of the sun were turning the muddy ver to gold, the roar of the streets was like subdued usic telling of the sorrow and the struggle of the great ty. "It is better to strive, it is better to strive," so sang to those who could hear. Kitty heard it witht understanding, but Anne's whole soul was crying out gainst its lesson. "I can strive no longer," her heart as saying. "I am crushed and broken. I want to die."

CHAPTER III

THE WOMAN'S PLAY

> If one should love you with real love
> (Such things have been,
> Things your fair face knows nothing of,
> It seems, Faustine)."

"I DON'T think you should, Kitty."

Kitty Pearce lay back in her chair and looked out of the window at the sunshine on the lawn and laughed a little low well-satisfied laugh.

"Why not, may I ask? Are you not yet converted to the belief that any man is fair game?"

Anne flushed. Who was she to reprove another woman? It was not a week since in the glorious June weather she had received the death blow to her hopes. How wearily the days had passed she alone knew, though Kitty might make a fair guess. But after all, even a great shock does not alter a person's nature. Ever since she was a child Anne had believed in the truth of the people she had met, and, as we generally find what we look for, in most instances she had found truth and kindliness; and the very unfaithfulness of the man she had trusted so absolutely seemed but one of the exceptions that prove the rule.

"I don't know about being fair game. But it isn't honourable to play both men false."

"Honourable? Oh, my dear Anne! Here is Fred away in West Africa, amusing himself in all probability with

various dusky beauties, and instead of wearying him with regrets and reproaches I am just making the best of my lonely lot. Do you think he would appreciate me one scrap the more because I let my charms rust? It's only wise to keep my hand in."

"It seems to me," Anne Lovat lowered her voice, she was always a little ashamed of being so desperately in earnest, more ashamed than ever now, "that the woman who has the good fortune to have gained a good man's love ought to go——"

"Oh, Anne, Anne, no wonder you came to grief! Hasn't your experience taught you wisdom? Having gained a man's love—and all men I may tell you are much the same—the way to keep it is not to care too much but to keep yourself young and charming, and the way to keep yourself young and charming is not by burying yourself for a year, brooding over the adored one far away, but by taking life's amusements as they come along. As the first amusement in my case happens to be Joe Cunningham, I give him a pleasant time, and when Fred comes back——"

"Ask me to dinner then?"

"You dear little goose! Don't you know that two is company and three none. Do you think either Joe or I would enjoy ourselves with you playing propriety, for the matter of that do you think you would enjoy it yourself?"

"I don't," said Anne frankly, "only I do feel it's rather compromising for you to have Captain Cunningham down here all by yourself so often. He's a nice man, and you're nice, Kitty," and she threw out her hands with a little sigh.

"Man's fire, woman's tow, you would say, but the

mistake you make, Anne, is that I'm not tow, I'm only asbestos, and that, as you know, fire cannot hurt, however bright and glowing it may make it appear," and she leaned across the table, helped herself to a cigarette and lighted it. "Leave us alone, Anne, to go our own foolish pleasant way. Because you don't like the primrose path of dalliance yourself, I don't see why you should interfere with me."

"It is not that I don't like the primrose path," said Anne, and her lips quivered a little, "but I can't play at love-making."

"And that earnest love-making is like free trade, the ideal thing if only the other nations would fall into line, but as they won't I'm for protection."

The little lawn was dappled with the sunshine that came through the leaves of the elm-tree, the hawthorn hedge that bounded the garden was gay with pink flowers, among the yellow tassels of the laburnum a thrush was trying his notes, going over and over them softly, as if he must be sure of his love song before he gave it to the world, and there rose a rich perfume from the bed of lilies of the valley just below the window. Summer, the beautiful perfect summer of these northern latitudes, which comes to rejoice our hearts so seldom, was on all the land, and Anne longed to drink in its gladness. If only—if only—was no one happy? She beat her fingers against the frame of the window.

"You can't take pleasure at another's expense."

"The great thing in life is not to think about the expense."

"Or who pays?"

"Certainly not. Everything will be paid for in the end, you may be very sure of that, and my experience

is that the one who has the best time pays least. Don't worry, Anne—why will you worry ? "

"I don't think I have worried much—considering," said Anne in a low voice.

"Not worried much ! " Kitty threw up her hands. "Anne, I do believe if it had not been for me you would have committed suicide last week."

Again the colour crept into Anne's white cheeks. She was fond of Kitty, deeply grateful for her sympathy and help, but for her how could she have lived through these days ? How could she possibly have remained alone in the little empty flat at Westminster ? Although the dainty cottage at Lettingbourne would always remind her of the cruellest days of her life yet even in her pain she knew it would also remind her of that friendly kindly sympathy. Kitty was a better woman than she thought herself.

"Oh, Kitty, I'm grateful, but I'm not sure that I think life is worth living."

"You'll be very ungrateful to me if you don't manage to pull through till Monday. You can come back then, you know. But I must be free to-night."

"Because Captain Cunningham is coming ? " There was a wistful ring in Anne's voice. Was not Captain Joseph Cunningham commander on board the *Irrepressible*, where Dicky Bullen was gunnery lieutenant ?

Kitty blew a long ring of smoke from her cigarette.

"Anne, for a long time longer than you guess I've taken a great interest in the gunnery lieutenant of the old *Irrepressible*."

"Kitty ! " It is not quite comfortable to get a side-light on our own doings.

"Joe Cunningham is beginning to be quite concerned at my interest in Dicky Bullen's matrimonial projects."

"Then you do know who she is?" and Anne's heart fluttered and stood still and went on again, and she sat down quickly and tried to keep the world from whirling round.

"Well, Joe Cunningham thought it was Maud Somerset. You know the old admiral took her with him from Vigo right up to the Shetlands, and Joe said Dicky was inclined to be attentive. In fact he couldn't make Dicky out. We wondered why he didn't clinch matters, as a match with Maud Somerset would, of course, be the making of him. I might have enlightened him," she knocked her ash off into a little Burmese tray, carefully keeping her eyes the while away from her cousin, "if I had been disposed."

Anne gathered together all her strength. "Is she—is she pretty?"

"Oh, so-so, fair-haired and blue-eyed and willowy and rather innocent, perhaps if she weren't an admiral's daughter we might say a little inane."

"Younger than I am?"

"A good ten years younger than you, I should say."

"She couldn't be the companion to him I was," said Anne slowly in a half whisper, as if she were weighing her rival's charms.

"A man doesn't want a companion I tell you. He wants the excitement of the chase, and you made the mistake of letting the hunter come up with his quarry. Don't think about him."

Anne might put a man out of her life. Her pride enabled her to do that, but it was impossible to put him out of her thoughts in a week. She did not think she would be able to accomplish it in a year, or ten years. In the watches of the night, all the livelong day, in her thoughts she was going over her relations with Dicky

Bullen. She even thought sometimes she understood his action. He had only his pay and she was a struggling storywriter, no wonder that an admiral's daughter, fair, young, influential, had tempted him from his allegiance. He so hated sordid poverty. She was not afraid of poverty, she would have been afraid of nothing with him beside her, but it was characteristic of her that she did not demand as much as she was willing to give. If he married that would be final; but if he did not marry what difference could his infidelity make to her ?

"Because I have failed," said Anne, "it does not prove that my ideas are wrong. It does not even prove that they are unworkable. If love is perfect——"

Mrs Pearce interrupted ruthlessly.

"For a budding novelist, Anne, you are a very one-idead person. To hear you talk you would think there was but one thing in the world for a woman."

"It is the salt of the earth either for a man or a woman."

"Nonsense. There are other things in the world, other interests. You must realise that now."

Anne could hardly breathe, but she stuck to her point. "It's the salt of the earth, I said, neither bread nor meat, but without it bread and meat have lost their savour."

"Anne, don't be intense. You must do as I do in the future. I take my pleasures. I live and let live. I can't always be thinking whether I'm pleasing or shocking, or even hurting, my next-door neighbour."

Anne felt she was giving Kitty the lie direct when she wrenched her thoughts from her unfaithful lover and insisted on speaking of Kitty's absent husband.

"You might think a little of Fred. Something is surely due to him. You should not ask Captain Cunningham down here so often unless you invite someone else, at the same time, so that the enemy may have no occasion to scoff."

Kitty tossed away the stump of her cigarette and deliberately chose another.

"You're a dear good girl, Anne, but you must let me play my own game. I can assure you the hunter will not come up with the quarry if he stays here till you arrive again on Monday."

"Oh, I—I——"

"Even in your thoughts you don't think so ill of me as that. Oh, Anne, Anne! Don't worry about me, there never was anyone more capable of taking care of herself. Now go and put on your hat. It will be so much easier if you are not here when Joe Cunningham arrives. Cheer up, be brave, and don't think about Dicky Bullen. If you could only see him as he really is you'd be surprised at what a poor figure he cuts. But you can't—well, no, come over on Monday and tell me you've written the first two chapters of your novel."

There was nothing for it but to take her departure. Alone with her thoughts, alone with a desperate longing for her lover, she began to face her desolate life as it must be in the future. On her walk to the station, and in the leafy lanewhere the elderberry-trees were already a mass of white blossom, she passed one of the broken-down landaus that did duty for a cab at Lettingbourne. On the back seat was Commander Joseph Cunningham, and beside the driver was his suit case. So he was going to stay the night? Kitty Pearce was certainly sailing very near the wind.

CHAPTER IV

HALF A LOVER

"When the game began between them for a jest,
He played king and she played queen to match the best.
Laughter soft as tears, and tears that turned to laughter,
These were things she sought for years and sorrowed after.

"Pleasure with dry lips, and pain that walks by night;
All the sting and all the stain of long delight;
These were things she knew not of, that knew not her,
When she played at half a love with half a lover."

"A TELEGRAM, ma'am."

Ellis stood at the open French window in the light of the shaded lamp peering out into the soft warmth of the moonlit garden. She judged that her mistress was somewhere there in the scented shadows and she would not have disturbed her but that a telegram seemed to her of the greatest importance, her last mistress had always made a point of screaming when she received one, beides it was not for Mrs Pearce, but for Captain Cunningham and she felt it ought to be delivered.

For a moment there was silence, then she heard a man's voice on the seat under the big elm say, "Tell her to bring it here."

"No, I'd better go. It might be to say the African mail is in and Fred has landed. Stay there; I'll be back presently."

A shadow came from under the tree, and Ellis thought her mistress looked wonderfully attractive as she came

across the lawn in her flowing white evening dress. She went towards her. "The boy is waiting to see if there is an answer, ma'am."

"Go back, you silly girl. I can't read it in the dark, can I?"

Ellis went back obediently, but when she reached the lighted sitting-room she turned, protesting.

"It is for Captain Cunningham, ma'am."

"Oh!" Kitty gave a start. "Go and tell the boy he shall have an answer in a minute."

When Ellis had gone Kitty stood looking down at the brownish envelope in her hand. She turned it over a little angrily. Joe Cunningham had no right to give her address and have telegrams sent to her house, to tell anyone he was coming there. She half turned towards the window, and then she turned back again. He *had* no right, and she dropped the envelope into the writing-table drawer. Then she touched the bell and went out into the garden.

"Ellis," she called back over her shoulder, "tell the boy it is all right—there is no answer," and she went slowly down across the lawn again, her white skirts trailing over the short grass. Joe Cunningham had risen from the seat under the elm, she could see the gleam of his white shirt front.

"Come back," he said, "come back; who is spoiling the beauty of our evening?"

She looked up. Through the branches of the elm-tree the moonlight filtered and showed her his clean-shaven face. It was a clever intellectual face that no one could have called handsome, but she thought she liked the way his wavy hair grew over his forehead, she liked the look in his eyes that might spell love for her,

she even approved at that moment the cut of his waistcoat and his dinner jacket.

"It was nothing of any consequence," she said, "at least I don't think so."

"Then, if you don't think so, it isn't. Come back here."

"Don't you think I look nice in the moonlight?"

"Too nice. I dare not look, I want you."

She raised her face and the moonlight showed him her waving golden hair, her parted smiling lips and the soft folds of white chiffon that rose and fell on her bosom.

"I like you to want me," she said, her voice just above a whisper, and she had quite forgotten the telegram and all the anger she had felt against him. It was nice to have a good-looking man making love to her. Nothing could come of it, of course—there was always Fred away in Africa in the background—but still it was very pleasant, and surely this summer night would have been wasted if it had not been given to love.

"I shall do more than want you, I shall take you," he said, making a step forward, but she retreated and waved him back, laughing.

"No, no. I shall perhaps come and sit down beside you presently if you are good, but please remember it is more than probable that Ellis is keeping an eye on the garden, and the proprieties must be observed."

"Bother Ellis!"

"I do very often, I assure you. And now, Captain Cunningham, R.N., have you told anyone you are dining with me to-night?"

"Most certainly not. What do you take me for?"

She thought he lied, and looked at him wonderingly. His manner was so honest and straightforward, and at

the moment he looked as if there were no other woman in the world for him but her. And yet he had given her away; if only by giving her address to his servant he had given her away.

"I don't believe you really think as much of me as you pretend," she said. "It is so easy to say pretty things in the moonlight."

He seemed to stiffen suddenly.

"Oh," he said with a sudden ring that was almost pain in his voice, "I am afraid there is no pretence about me. I am beginning to be afraid when I think how much I do care. You are so dainty and sweet and beautiful, and when I think—I think—— Kitty, come here."

She came with a sudden submission which touched him.

The man put his hand on her shoulder. "I'm beginning to care too much, Kitty. I'm afraid."

Now there is absolutely no harm in a charming young married woman whose husband happens to be serving his country in some unhealthy spot in West Africa receiving an equally charming young naval officer, giving him dinner, and even putting him up for the night. No one, as Kitty herself had pointed out to her cousin, would expect her to lead a solitary life and shut herself away from society, yet, as Anne in her turn had urged, it is generally wise to use a little discretion. Discretion usually cuts us off from many pleasant places, discretion makes us walk warily, and to walk warily is tiresome. Yet if we do not walk warily—well there are pitfalls in the way. But to Kitty Pearce a little excitement, even a little spice of danger, was as the very wine of life. To stand there before this man and know she was influenc-

ing him ; to know that the thought of her was making his heart beat and sending the blood rushing through his veins, made life to her worth living. She was not a bad woman, she was kindly and good-natured according to her lights, but she did love excitement and the excitement of this forbidden fruit seemed to put the finishing touch to the glorious moonlight night. To-morrow—well, to-morrow could take care of itself. It would be pleasant to greet him in the morning, to give him breakfast under the shade of the trees—and she gave herself up to the delights of the hour.

It *was* pleasant to give him his breakfast under the shade of the trees, the fresh morning air was almost as delightful as the evening, the golden sunshine had a freshness that the silver moonlight had lacked, the discreet Ellis, the only servant in the little cottage, cooked the breakfast excellently, and served it to perfection, and Kitty herself, with the sunlight making patterns on her white dress and playing hide and go seek in her golden hair, was more than content with life. This man sitting opposite watching her every movement pleased her. There was a little excitement about him, a little gladness, a little sadness, a touch of regret and a little pride as of a man who is conquering.

" It's to be hoped you like scrambled eggs and bacon," said Kitty, piling up the strawberries and setting out the cream and sugar, " because it is all that Ellis and I can attain to at present. By-and-by, if you give us time, and honour us with your society again, we hope to be equal to an omelette, and after that there are no heights unto which we may not attain. I like the simple life, you know, but it must be the simple life with variations. Yes, Ellis, what is it ? "

Ellis appeared with a telegram on a little brass salver of Calabar work.

"It's for Captain Cunningham, ma'am."

"Oh!" cried Kitty, suddenly dropping the strawberries and turning towards the house.

"But who knows I am here?" said Cunningham, wonderingly taking up the telegram and looking at it as if it were some strange specimen of animal life he had never met before.

Kitty was into the house and out again with last night's telegram in her hand before he had opened it.

"That's exactly what I want to know," she said severely. "I wouldn't give you this last night because you must have told someone you were going to stay here."

"On my honour I told no one." And he tore open the telegram.

"Handed in at Sheerness," he read, "at 7.45. Ordered to sea at 6 A.M."

And it was signed "Bullen."

He opened the one Ellis had just brought, but it was a repetition of the other:

"No doubt about the ship's going. Come if you have to take a special.—BULLEN."

He rose to his feet and let the pink paper flutter to the grass.

"Absent without leave," he said dully.

"Nonsense," said Kitty briskly, but there was something in his face that frightened her. "You told me you

had forty-eight hours' leave. You've only been away a little over twelve hours."

"We can generally get short leave if we leave our address so that we may be recalled," he said, and his voice had still that dull tone as if his thoughts were away seeking vainly for something he had lost.

"Then you did leave your address?" she said with sudden reproach. "Oh, Joe, and I trusted you!"

"I did not leave my address," he said. "I can't think where Bullen got it from."

"My letters!" with a woman's quick intuition she guessed.

"They are locked up in my despatch box. There were only three or four I cared about keeping—only when you—when you——" And his eyes seemed to fall on her fair troubled face and her pretty dress without taking them in.

She made a little impatient movement. She did not like to see him like this and her heart smote her that she had not given him last night's telegram.

"Oh, my dear, I am so sorry," she said. "What a wretch I was not to give you that telegram last night. It is too late now, the ship must have gone. Captain O'Flaherty won't be very angry. Sit down and drink your coffee. It's good coffee, I made it myself, and it'll make you feel better."

"It isn't a question of O'Flaherty's anger," he said, still in that toneless voice, "though O'Flaherty will be pleased enough to get his knife into me. But I have broken my leave, and breaking my leave means——"

"Oh, my poor boy, what does it mean?" and her voice was very gentle and sympathetic. "You know, you know I wouldn't have hurt you for the world."

"Breaking my leave without valid excuse means dismissal from my ship and ruin."

She thought a moment.

"Joe! Joe!" She was beginning to understand. "And if you say you spent the night here—— Oh, Joe! Joe!" She stretched out appealing hands, and laid them on his arm, dainty, delicate little pink hands. He looked down at them as if they were something new he had never seen before.

"I am not going to bring you into it, never fear. But I must go at once."

"But the ship has gone," she pleaded. "Be a nice boy, and have your breakfast in peace. I'll let you go after. We can talk it over and see how we can make the best of it."

"There is no best possible," he said bitterly. "Here endeth Joseph Cunningham, R.N., and we close the book on the first lesson. I am not very sure that it wouldn't be well to close the book altogether."

CHAPTER V

BLOODY-MINDED

> "Is it worth a tear, is it worth an hour
> To think of things that are well outworn?
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Earth is not spoilt for a single shower!
> But the rain has ruined the ungrown corn."

THE summer had gone when Cunningham stepped out of the station at Sheerness dockyard. The wind whistled drearily down the narrow paved streets, the little commonplace houses that he had always scorned seemed to be mocking him.

"You have laughed at us," they seemed to say, "but now it is we who may jeer. You are of no account."

He stepped on to the long windswept pier and looked out over the dull grey river with the tide racing in, but No. 7 buoy was vacant. He had known it would be. The great grey bulks of the *Colossal* and the *Triumph* broke the skyline, torpedo boats and destroyers were panting busily backwards and forwards, a couple of barges with red sails lent a note of colour to the seascape, but the *Irrepressible* had gone.

He went back to the naval barracks quickly. There was no necessity for hurry, but a fever was burning in his veins. The commander was sitting in his room and looked up as he entered.

"Hallo, Potiphar, old man, I thought the old Rippy went off to sea this morning."

"I've come to report myself as having missed m ship," said Cunningham sombrely.

The other sprang to his feet. "Potiphar, old cha he cried, "don't look so glum about it. It isn't healthy Did the South Eastern miss connection, or what ?

"I can only say I missed my ship," repea Cunningham, his eyes on the crossed swords above t mantelshelf. He could not meet the other's frienc glance.

"Am I to report to the captain then ?" as Commander Carter, dropping all friendly chaff.

"Please."

Commander Carter rose up. "You might as w sit down till I come back. There's the paper."

But Cunningham did not sit down, nor did he rea the paper. It is curious how little interest we take the doings of the outside world. Such things are on for our hours of ease. He marched up and down th room until Carter returned.

"Come along to the captain," he said quietly enough for he saw the other was in no mood either to b questioned or sympathised with.

The captain was an elderly man with kindly blu eyes.

"So you missed your ship, Cunningham," he said.

"Yes, sir."

"And how do you explain your absence ?"

He asked the question lightly. It was a thing that surely might be explained quite easily, even though Captain O'Flaherty was Cunningham's superior officer and might desire to get his knife into him.

But no explanation was forthcoming.

"I'm very sorry, sir, but I forgot to leave an address."

"Tut, tut," said the old man, "that was a very unwise ning to do, and always requires a deal of explanation. m afraid, Cunningham, I must confine you to barracks the return of your ship."

There was nothing for it but the dreariness of in-tivity until the *Irrepressible* returned. And to have sit still and do nothing is perhaps the hardest thing life. To march up and down the room watching the urs, the precious moments that go to make up a life, themselves off uselessly, to know that they are only ding to one hopeless, undesired end, that is a thing hat puts lines in a man's face, silver in his hair, and ds years to his life. Carter saw his old friend's uble and was sympathetic, he wanted to sit with m, he got a couple of other fellows to play bridge, he me with drinks and offers of counsel, but Cunningham ould have none of him. He had made a mess of hings, he was savage, and he wanted to be alone. He d worn a track in the Government carpet right round he table across to the mantelpiece and back to the door efore the *Irrepressible* was sighted and Carter came to eport her as making for her old anchorage at No. 7 uoy. But he had made up his mind. There was in act only one thing to be done. The matter must not e gone into. He could not give Kitty Pearce away. He must send in his papers to avoid a court martial. It was ruin, of course, socially, financially, every way; it was wrecking his career, but it had to be done. This was the price he was to pay for his folly, for a woman who was nothing to him, who never would be anything to him, who seemed to have passed out of his life. He had admired her, he had done more, he had loved her for the moment. He wondered in a dull sort of way

what love was. Was it a desire to kiss a pretty woman? Well, he certainly did not want to kiss her now, but he had to protect her, though it would cost him everything he counted of value in the world. And in such wise was love never nurtured. For the woman who sacrifices herself on his account the man who does not love her may feel some tenderness, but the surest way to kill love is to exact an unwilling sacrifice, and never was man more unwilling than Cunningham.

"I've got a boat for you, Potiphar," said Carter's sympathetic voice.

"Thank you," said Cunningham, and went out and into her without another word.

At the gangway Lieutenant Bullen met him.

"Potiphar, didn't you get my telegram? I know it was a beastly indiscretion touching your despatch box, but——"

"You are a good chap, Dicky. I'm infinitely obliged to you. It isn't many men who'd have been so ready and so equal to the occasion. I can't thank you enough. But this is the end. I'm going to send in my papers."

"Nonsense. Don't be a blooming idiot."

"There's nothing else for it."

They were on the quarter deck, and a soft rain coming out of the west beat against their faces, and for the moment the low shores with the dockyards and piers were blotted out. There were not many on board that ship who knew that Commander Cunningham had been absent without leave, but to him it felt as though everyone knew, and was wondering what excuse he would give, and what he was saying to his friend and chum, Lieutenant Bullen.

The officer of the watch knew, and had his eye upon them, but he stood apart a moment.

" She isn't worth it," burst out Bullen passionately. He was a staunch friend, and for Cunningham he had a great love and admiration. " I tell you she isn't worth it."

" You don't even know that there is a woman in the matter," said Cunningham. " I tell you there isn't, Dicky," and he turned away to the officer of the watch.

" Will you tell the captain I've come on board ? "

Presently the officer of the watch came back again. " The captain will see you in his cabin."

Cunningham braced himself. Relations between him and O'Flaherty had always been strained, and he had been careful to walk the straight path, as if he strayed from it but an inch he felt he had but little mercy to expect from his superior officer. And now he was in the very worst possible mood to meet him. He was seeing red.

" Go slow, go carefully, Potiphar ; do go slow," urged Dicky Bullen by his side.

" It won't make much difference, the end'll be all the same," said Cunningham, and he went down the companion to the captain's cabin.

O'Flaherty, a somewhat truculent Irishman, was standing in the middle of the wide cabin. He was rather a coarse-grained man, not perhaps altogether bad-hearted, but he and his commander had not pulled well together from the beginning. Possibly he himself was not aware how pleased he was to have a real grievance against him.

" Well, Commander Cunningham," he began, " what is the meaning of this ? Of course, you have some explanation."

"I have no explanation, sir." Cunningham knew his voice was cold and steady. "I should prefer the matter not to be gone into, and request permission to send in my papers to avoid court martial."

"The devil!" Captain O'Flaherty was so astonished the exclamation broke from him before he was aware of what he was saying. Cunningham said nothing. He stood silently in front of his captain, his eyes on the great head of a bush cow that hung against the wall. The fierce horns were pointed at him, the glassy eyes were staring at him. Then O'Flaherty pulled himself together.

"I must take a little time to consider the matter," he said, evidently putting restraint upon himself. "I'll see you again presently."

So there was to be more waiting. Outside Bullen met him, sympathetic, and they went to Cunningham's cabin. He looked round it as if it were some strange place and all the things in it struck him afresh. He would not be looking at them for long.

"Well, I'm glad he was decent for once," said Bullen. "It's midsummer madness to talk of sending in your papers. If he only overlooks it, and he well might, you'll be all right, and, after all, if you're court martialled the very worst that can happen will be your being dismissed the ship."

"That's finish."

"Not for you. There's little Day will have you to-morrow. Do buck up, Potiphar, and take more cheerful views. A lot depends on you."

"I can't take cheerful views. You know very well the service was the only thing I really cared about."

"You don't care about her. No, never mind, I know

you don't. What's the good of denying things. I know who she is."

Cunningham made a dissenting gesture.

"Tommy rot! Of course I know, but what I don't understand is why you didn't get my first telegram. It must have arrived."

"It was not delivered to me till next morning," said Cunningham monotonously.

"Carelessness or—no, by Jove, you don't mean to say she kept it back on purpose?" Bullen rose and walked angrily up and down the cabin. "A woman like that deserves—deserves——"

"One thing is quite certain, in this world," said Cunningham bitterly, "a woman never gets what she deserves."

"If I had anything to do with her——"

"You would be compelled to do exactly as I am doing."

"I don't know what you are doing yet. Do take my advice, and knuckle under to old shiver-the-mizzen. Ten minutes of holding your tongue even will do it."

Cunningham looked dubious. But he had done so well. His career lay before him so invitingly that Bullen's words were having some effect. Why throw it all away merely for the sake of quarrelling with his captain? He knew well enough he would have the sympathy of the rest of his messmates. A little courtesy to his superior, a little bending of his pride to sue——

Bullen saw the effect he was producing, and like a good fellow rammed the suggestion home.

"Look here, tell him the truth and throw yourself on his mercy. The man can't be a brute at bottom. You

know yourself what you'd do for a man in a hole if his record was clean, even if you hated him personally."

"I can't tell him the truth. I can't tell you."

"No need to tell me. I know. Say to him, 'Look here, sir, I'm sorry, blessed sorry, beastly sorry'—any adjective you like to use, only pitch it strong enough—'I can only throw myself on your mercy. Of course I know you must have guessed there's a woman in the business, whom I can't give away. If you won't help me I'm a ruined man.'"

"I can't," said Cunningham.

But Bullen knew he was considering it.

"Potiphar, don't be a blooming idiot! Think of the ghastliness of drifting about wondering if you'll get another ship, and though I feel sure, if the worst comes to the worst, Day'll help you if he can, still, there it is against you. Something to be lived down. Five minutes' civility—five minutes—three minutes—two minutes—get one word of sympathy out of him and you're right as rain."

Cunningham got up and looked out of the scuttle. Then he turned to his friend.

"Upon my word, Dicky, there's sense in what you say. I've been like a raging savage ever since I got your telegram."

"Bloody-minded," said Bullen. "Don't make such heavy weather of it."

An orderly came to the door.

"Please, sir, the captain will see you now."

"Good luck, Potiphar; now keep your temper and hold a candle to the devil."

Outside the captain's cabin Cunningham met the first lieutenant. No. 1 was an excellent first lieutenant,

but it was hardly likely he would ever be anything more than a lieutenant. He was older than Cunningham, who with Bullen, in the privacy of his cabin, had been wont to laugh at Somerville's little set ways. He was no man of the world ; if he had been he might have got on better, but he was straight and conscientious to a degree. The younger man saw he was pitying him, and was irritated by the thought that he was in a position to be pitied by anyone. It added another touch of bitterness to the mood he was in, and heaven knows he wanted no bitterness.

The first lieutenant stepped back to allow him to pass and Cunningham pushed open the door.

" Well, sir," the captain's voice rang out, " I've thought over this matter. I suppose you were off with that woman of yours——"

Where were the wise counsels of Dicky Bullen ? Where all his good resolutions—his intention to knuckle under ?

" You damned hound ! " Cunningham sprang forward, his arm upraised, and behind him stood the first lieutenant. He was not a ready man, and he stood there for a second too long. Then it dawned on him that he liked his commander, he did not like his captain, and he had heard a great deal too much. He turned to beat a hasty retreat.

" Mr Somerville," the captain's voice thundered, and Cunningham's sudden wrath died almost as soon as it was born. He stepped back, his hand fell to his side, but it was too late.

" Mr Somerville ! Mr Somerville ! Did you hear that ? Did you hear Commander Cunningham threaten me ? "

Mr Somerville cast about in that conscientious mind

of his for something to say, and nothing but an affirmation came. Another man might have lied, and stuck to it that he had heard nothing. Not so No. 1. He looked apologetically at Cunningham, as a dog who had stolen a bone might have looked, but he answered :

" Yes, sir, I heard."

" Commander Cunningham, you will consider yourself under arrest. This matter must be publicly investigated, and I shall apply to the Commander-in-Chief for a court martial."

Somerville followed Cunningham to his cabin, and there Dicky Bullen tackled them both.

" Back already ! Why——"

" A court martial," said Cunningham dully. He was like a man who had fought Fate and been worsted. " I lost my temper and——"

" I am so sorry, sir," burst out Somerville. " It would have been all right if only I had not heard."

" And what the devil did you mean by hearing anything ? " asked Bullen angrily. " What the dickens are your ears given you for, but to be deaf on occasion ? "

" But I did hear the commander call the captain a d——d hound," protested Somerville, " nobody could have been sorrier than I, but——"

" You'll hear me call you a damned fool presently," went on Bullen. " Of all the unutterable idiots——" And then he changed his tone. " Look here, Somerville, you know you can't be certain. You might so easily be mistaken."

" I wasn't mistaken," said Somerville obstinately.

" Oh, nonsense ; you might so easily have been. If

you wern't deaf you were mistaken. It was you, not the captain, Cunningham cursed. He goes in to see the captain on an important and delicate matter and you come crowding in on his heels——"

"Unfortunately I know it wasn't me. I don't think Commander Cunningham knew I was there. I am extremely sorry."

"Oh, get out," said Bullen, "get out and be sorry in your own cabin. This extreme sorrow crowds us too mightily here. Get out."

Somerville cast one glance at Cunningham looking gloomily out of the scuttle at the grey sea beyond and then turned on his heel. He was a straight, honest man, but he considered the good of his own immortal soul above all else in the world, and not to have heard would have imperilled that soul's health. Bullen banged the door after him.

"No go. Lost your temper?" he asked.

"I wish I'd knocked the words down his blackguardly throat," said Cunningham, and he did not speak loudly but he spoke as a man without hope. "Court martialled. I shall plead guilty, and that'll finish it."

"Nonsense, man, nonsense. Cheer up, Potiphar. Tell me exactly what did happen?"

That was soon told, and Bullen cursed Somerville again, but Cunningham only laughed, though there was no mirth in his laughter.

"Poor old Somerville!" he said. "I shall plead guilty, and then——"

"Now, don't get bloody-minded," said Bullen. "With all your good record behind you, with all the influence you have made for yourself, it'll go hard if we

can't circumvent this mad Irishman. Look here, there's Day and Inglis and——"

"I shall plead guilty," said Cunningham doggedly. "And when I am out of the service I shall kill O'Flaherty."

He was bloody-minded.

CHAPTER VI

THE UNION JACK AT THE PEAK

"Soft snows that hard winds harden
  Till each flake bite
Fill all the flowerless garden
  Whose flowers took flight
Long since when summer ceased,
And men rose up from feast,
  And warm west wind grew east, and warm day night."

THE day of the court martial broke bleak and cold over Sheerness. The strong tide raced in up the river, and a keen wind blowing before it a misty rain came down from the north. It had forgotten to be summer, and winter seemed come before his time.

Cunningham had not slept all night. The weary hours had gone round, and he had counted the strokes of the bell, remembering as he did so how often he had heard them, and that this was for the last time. As a small boy on the *Britannia* he had lain awake his first night in the navy realising with a keen joy that he was now a naval officer, serving his queen and country. He had not slept that night because he had dreamed of the deeds he would do in the future, and now he did not sleep because all the deeds he should ever do were done, and his career was ended. He rose and dressed, dressed very carefully, and he was looking out of the scuttle at the grey sea, and the red sails of the barges that gave the spot of colour to the seascape, when Dicky Bullen knocked and came in.

"Boom!" It was the salute of one gun the Navy gives her prisoners, innocent or guilty, and Cunningham remembered that the Union Jack must be flying at the peak, the sign that a court martial is being held on board. "There it goes," he said. "The only salute I shall ever get."

"Don't," said Bullen. The thing got on his nerves and hurt him. "Oh, d——n the women."

Dicky Bullen had reasons of his own for damning the women, which Cunningham did not know. The gunnery lieutenant was feeling he had an unpleasant quarter of an hour before him. He only hoped the interview he felt impending could be compressed into a quarter of an hour. No man who was not an absolute blackguard could write such a letter as he had written to a woman whom he knew loved him desperately without feeling some compunction. And Dicky Bullen had nothing of the blackguard in him; he was only a gay, careless young sailor. Anne, when she had recovered from the blow he had dealt her, would, he felt sure, insist on seeing him. She would beg and pray, and would he be able to resist? He must resist, because he knew that the moment he left her side he would remember how impossible it was for a lieutenant with only his pay to marry a struggling writer. What a fool he would be to throw away the chance of improving his position that had come his way! If he married an admiral's daughter, and an admiral in active employment—— He had said many things, he knew, in his moments of passion, but must a man be bound by his moments of passion? If Anne would not take the matter so seriously, if she would only be her gentle, kindly self? After all, other men did this sort of thing every day, and weren't made to feel black-

guards for it. Oh, hang the woman, why didn't she write, say all she had to say and get it over. "D——n the woman," he repeated again.

"After all," said Cunningham dully, "it was as much my fault as hers."

"If the baggage had only given you my telegram."

The bitterness of it welled up in Cunningham's heart again. "Never trust a woman even in little things, Dicky."

'I don't propose to," said Bullen, but he could not help thinking that occasionally it was the woman who suffered for trusting. "Look here, throw yourself on the mercy of the court. Tell the whole story without the woman's name. It'll get you through."

"I'll do nothing of the sort," said Cunningham. "I'll have no more tinkering with the thing. I'll plead guilty and have done with it. I won't have the thing gone into. I won't have that brute O'Flaherty prying into my affairs, revelling over the details. I tell you, Bullen, I shall plead guilty."

When Cunningham called him Bullen, Dicky knew it was pretty hopeless to try and move him.

"I have a good mind," he said, "to appeal to the woman herself."

Cunningham turned on him savagely. "I told you there was no woman in the business. How dare you suppose any such thing, Mr Bullen ?"

Dicky shrivelled.

"Oh, Potiphar," he said humbly, "I beg your pardon. I was only trying to think of some way out."

Cunningham pushed his breakfast tray away, the food was as sawdust in his mouth, and looked out of the

scuttle again. There was silence for a moment, a moment that seemed to Dicky strangely long, then he turned.

"Old man," he said, his voice softening, "I know you meant it all most kindly. There never was a better friend. But look here, as you do happen to know there was a woman in the business you must know that whatever happens I can't bring her name into it. I don't know where we were drifting. I'm inclined to think she had her head far too well screwed on ever to have got beyond a flirtation——"

"You don't mean to tell me," interrupted Dicky, a little astonished, "that——"

"Oh, I'm not saving a woman's good name now, I assure you, it was nothing more than a flirtation."

"Though she let you spend the night in her house?"

"Though she let me spend the night in her house. My dear fellow, she's not the woman to be moved on her own account, she only wanted me to dangle, and I did it to some purpose."

"You're sacrificing yourself for a woman who is absolutely nothing to you!"

"Absolutely nothing to me. I hope I never see her again. But I don't see any way out."

Neither did Dicky. His code of honour did not forbid him to take all a woman could give under the impression that she was all in all to him, and then to throw her off like a soiled glove, but it did forbid him to brand a woman openly, even though she had in great measure brought the trouble on herself. Cunningham could not be rescued by the confession of Kitty Pearce that she had kept back the telegram. Such a confession was not to be thought of for a moment.

"Have a smoke," said Dicky miserably, offering his cigar case.

Cunningham took a cigar and put it between his teeth, but he forgot to light it. In his heart he was remembering that this was the last day of his career, the very last. He listened to the lap-lap of the water against the ship's side, the sound of the men at quarters on deck, even to the swish of the broom as some servant swept the passage outside his door. One moment the minutes were flying swiftly, and the next they were crawling on leaden feet, while Dicky Bullen sat opposite to him alternating hopeful remarks with curses on women. To Cunningham they all meant the same thing—Dicky was a good fellow, but he could not help him.

Five bells struck, loud and clear, and the court martial was at eleven. He looked out again at the grey sea. The tide was racing in and a launch was coming up on it. Some of the members of the court martial were in the stern. They were shrouded in waterproofs, and he noticed dully how shabby their cocked hats were and how tarnished the lace. Each man had a tin case beside him. Oh yes, he knew the meaning of that well enough. The good cocked hats were in those japanned cases. They would be produced for his condemnation, and he laughed. Couldn't they hoist a man out just as comfortably in old cocked hats as in new?

"Don't," said Bullen; "don't laugh. You'll pull through all right. There are some things one feels can't happen."

"But they do happen, old chap; they do happen. I'll face it."

"It will be all right, if you'll only have a little common-sense."

"I'll do all I can, you may be sure. Don't harp on that string, Dicky. There are some things a man can't do, and you know it."

Again there was silence. Every man draws the line somewhere, and each of these two drew it in his own way.

The Provost Marshal knocked at the door. "Please, sir, the court is open."

"And they want the body of the prisoner. All right," said Cunningham grimly.

The court was deadly still as he entered before the Provost Marshal. The room was the captain's outer cabin, the place where he had had that fatal interview only last week. Now one of the tables was gone and in its place two stanchions covered with red and a red cord running across made a dock for him, the prisoner, to stand in. The Navy does not err on the side of mercy: there is no accused, he is the prisoner. Round the table on which lay his naked sword sat his judges: an admiral four captains and three commanders, men personally known to him, one or two of whom he counted among his intimate friends. By a table at his left sat O'Flaherty, the prosecutor, and on his right was Bullen, who was to act as prisoner's friend. Mechanically he looked round. Again his eyes sought the great bush cow's head with its glassy unseeing eyes, underneath it was a cartoon of Sir John Fisher from *Vanity Fair* and another of Lord Charles Beresford hung on the other side. He had the same in his own cabin. They had stood to him as object lessons of what a man might do; and now he had stumbled and fallen; they could interest, could influence him no longer. Over the heads of the judges hung a couple of large brass trays from Calabar, and between them an *ora* from Ibadan. He knew the *ora* well

enough. It marked the subjugation of women. Well, in England here the women weren't subjugated and yet they had to be protected, and for their protection man must suffer. He thought of the old proverb about paying too dearly for his whistle, but he had to pay, and hadn't even got a whistle.

Some of the officers of the *Irrepressible* were there, some from the other ships at anchor round, and one or two civilians, their friends. He had an uncomfortable feeling that someone was sketching him and turned his face away, but after all why not? He turned back again and gazed steadily at the *ora* that hung between the brass trays. The trays caught and reflected what dull daylight there was, and it troubled him a little. He looked out of the port. A black destroyer broke the grey sea line, a Thames barge with red sails followed it, there was a shrill whistle from a launch, and then the Deputy Judge Advocate rose to his feet and began to read out the warrant and the names of the officers whose attendance had been commanded.

It was a relief to Cunningham. From the faint sigh and rustle that went round the audience possibly it was a relief to others too. And the Deputy Judge Advocate read well. He was a clean-shaven young man, the admiral's secretary, a man who would have made a good actor, and he played his small part well.

He turned to Cunningham and asked if he objected to any of these men acting as his judges. Cunningham had no objection. As well be judged by them as by anyone, were they not his friends? It was to him as if they were all playing parts.

The clean-shaven young man turned to the judges and in his crisp clear voice administered the oath.

"I," they repeated after him, each man putting in his own name, "do swear that I will duly administer justice according to law, without partiality, favour, or affection, and I do further swear that I will not on any account, at any time whatsoever, disclose or discover the vote or opinion of any particular member of this court martial unless thereunto required in due course of law. So help me God."

It was a confused jumble as they all read it together, but Cunningham knew it so well that to him each man seemed to enunciate sharply. Then one after another they bent forward and kissed the book with its white cross on the front.

Cunningham was wearily impatient before the Deputy Judge Advocate had gone through the formula. It was only a formula. Why not get it over quickly? His mind wandered from the business in hand, as our minds do sometimes wander at critical moments of our lives, and he looked at the spick and span cocked hats that lay on the table round his own sword. He could almost have laughed; those were the hats that had come on board in japanned cases. When his attention came back again the Deputy Judge Advocate was reading the charge against him.

"For that he, Joseph Cunningham," he heard, "Commander belonging to H.M.S. *Irrepressible*, being then a person subject to the Naval Discipline Act, 1st, Was absent without leave between three P.M. the 19th day of June and noon the 22nd day of June. 2ndly, Used threatening and insulting language to Captain O'Flaherty of the said ship, his superior officer, being in the execution of his office."

He laid down the paper from which he read and took up the circumstantial letter.

"SIR [he read],—I regret to report the following acts of misconduct on the part of Commander J. Cunningham with a view to his being tried by court martial should you think fit. On the 19th day of June, H.M. ship under my command being ordered to proceed unexpectedly to sea, it was found that Commander Cunningham had gone on leave without giving any address, and the ship had to proceed without him, he being absent without leave 69 hours. On the 22nd of June, when sent for by me, Commander Cunningham, in violent manner, addressed to me the following words :—'You damned hound, if I had you ashore——'

"I have the honour to be,
"Sir,
"Your obedient servant,
"CONRAN O'FLAHERTY.

"The COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF,
"THE NORE."

How sordid it all sounded, and how damning. Explanation there was none, there could be none. O'Flaherty sat shuffling the papers on the table before him and irritating Cunningham beyond all bearing. One of the lieutenants among the audience bent forward and touched Dicky Bullen on the arm, giving him silently a piece of paper on which something was scribbled. What had Crawford in his wisdom evolved ? Nothing, it seemed, for Bullen crumpled up the paper and shook his head.

Cunningham shivered a little. He had been to many court martials. It was all so familiar, and yet it hurt

more than he could have supposed possible. He was numb, he must be numb, and yet it hurt him. All his future had lain so fair before him—a commander at twenty-nine, what might he not have hoped for, and now—now he was a ruined man. A ruined man, the waves that lapped against the ship's side were whispering it, the panting launches that crossed the blot of grey in the portholes shrieked it on their shrill whistles, it came as an undercurrent to the Deputy Judge Advocate's clear voice. He was addressing Cunningham now.

"You are not required," he said, "to plead either guilty or not guilty. But should you desire to plead guilty now is the time to do so."

The President leaned forward. Cunningham was keenly conscious of it and hardened his heart. The President had always been interested in him, and had watched his career from a lad up, the career of a man without interest and without money, and yet who had borne himself well. He unfolded a big bandanna and passed it over his bald head. Cunningham found himself wondering how Admiral Somerset, strict disciplinarian and punctilious man as he was, had so far forgotten himself as to use a coloured handkerchief in uniform, the bandanna lending a bright spot of colour to the general greyness. He saw the kindness in the admiral's face change to something like consternation as he realised his mistake and hastily put back the offending handkerchief into his pocket. He had forgotten Cunningham, so would they all forget him soon, but what did it matter? Nothing could ever undo that threat, that threat that could be sworn to by Somerville. The only thing was to get it over quickly. Again he was conscious of the pleading in Bullen's face.

"Make a statement in mitigation," his face urged; but what was the good of any mitigation, what was the good of going out as a man branded, a man with something to live down? It was surely better to go altogether than to lose his high place, to see other men go over his head, to linger on hoping in vain for the promotion that would never come. Besides, he wanted to kill O'Flaherty. He did not dare look at his friend, he turned his eyes from his pleading face, and said very distinctly, "Guilty."

His words caused a sensation. No one but Bullen had expected them, even though Bullen had explained to the ward-room that "Potiphar was bloody-minded."

"Do you wish to make any statement in mitigation?" asked the Deputy Judge Advocate in his smooth voice, although even he was apparently a little astonished.

Dicky Bullen started forward and laid his hand on his arm, but Cunningham shook him off.

"I have no statement to make," he said, and his voice seemed to him to belong to someone else. What was the good of any statement?

"Do you wish to bring witnesses as to your general character?"

Again Dicky Bullen's eager eyes were begging him not to let this chance go. What a good fellow he was! What a splendid chum! But Cunningham felt he knew his own business best. He must go. The quicker it was over the better, for this was hard to be borne.

"I shall bring no witnesses."

Bullen handed the Judge Advocate Cunningham's roll of certificates and he read them over. The prisoner had no doubt about those certificates. No man could have had better. Always his conduct had been "Very

satisfactory." He was sober, and he had never taken sufficient alcohol to annoy any official superior, who had to judge as to the amount that was good for him.

The court was cleared for the framing of the sentence.

Dicky Bullen followed the prisoner. "You might have put in mitigating circumstances," he said reproachfully. "There wasn't a man there, from old Somerset downwards, who wouldn't have listened."

"What would be the good? Might as well make a clean sweep of it," said Cunningham doggedly. "Dicky, I can't have the thing inquired into. They'll hoist me out, of course, and then——"

"And then?"

"I'll thrash O'Flaherty within an inch of his life."

The court took a very short time framing the sentence, and presently it was reopened and the Provost Marshal brought back his prisoner.

The day if possible had grown more dreary. The rain, like a dirty grey sheet, seemed to cut all within the ports off from the rest of the world, and the launches that steamed past had their outlines dimmed; but Cunningham kept his eyes on the square port. His first glance had told him that it was as he had known it would be. The members of the court all wore those spick and span cocked hats, and his sword lay on the table with its point towards him. It hurt far more than he had thought it would do, far far more. His thoughts went back to his childhood when he had defied authority, and been sent to bed for some childish fault. He had said he would not mind, and he had minded. He had turned his face to the wall, and wept till his mother had come and comforted him and remitted his punishment; but there was no remittance here—none—none. He

was reaping far more than he had ever sown, and he set his lips and looked away from the sword ; but he could not shut out the voice of the Deputy Judge Advocate reading the sentence that brought ruin on his life.

"The prisoner having pleaded guilty the court considers the charges proved, and therefore adjudges him, the said Joseph Cunningham, to be dismissed from his Majesty's service."

It was signed by all the members of the court.

"Remove the prisoner. Court is dissolved. Haul down the Jack."

Cunningham walked out of the room blindly looking away from the men who followed crowding round holding out their hands. Absent without leave ! It might happen to any one of them, and as for calling O'Flaherty a damned hound, there was not a man on board the *Irrepressible* who did not heartily concur.

It had come, the very worst had happened. He was disgraced in the eyes of all men, and all for the sake of a woman—a light, good-natured, kindly woman, whom he had played at loving, who had played at loving him. The beginning of it all seemed very remote now. She was a dim figure in the background. It was with an effort that he brought her into the business at all. He had no thoughts of rushing off to her for consolation. She was made for happiness and summer sunshine, not the woman to go to in a storm. This must be faced alone.

He was in his cabin staring dully at his belongings. Bullen had brought his sword back and laid it on the table, his cap lay beside it, a new cap, and he would never wear it now.

"You can thrash O'Flaherty within an inch of his life," said Bullen with a choke in his voice. He wanted

to sympathise, he wanted to help, and there was nothing in all the wide world he could do.

Cunningham felt that he did not even care about thrashing O'Flaherty. The spring had gone out of his life. His youth was gone, he had nothing to hope for, and nothing that he could do would give him back the hopes that were dead.

He felt physically weak and ill, the strain had been too much for him. He sat down by the table, and pushing the sword and cap out of his way dropped his head on his arms. He had braced himself ever since the receipt of Bullen's telegram with the thought that he must see it through ; and now it was all over his strength gave way. There was nothing more to be done. It was the end.

CHAPTER VII

THE ROSE OF YESTERDAY

"Come, fill the Cup, and in the Fire of Spring
Your Winter Garment of Repentance fling:
The Bird of Time has but a little way
To flutter—and the Bird is on the Wing.

"The Wine of Life keeps oozing drop by drop,
The Leaves of Life keep falling one by one,
Each morn a thousand Roses brings, you say:
Yes, but where leaves the Rose of Yesterday."

THE July evening was very hot and breathless, with that stifling breathlessness that makes the heat of London harder to bear than the heat of any other part of the world. The stones of the streets had absorbed the sun and now that he was set were giving out his heat over again. There was no air, no freshness, and Anne Lovat, sitting at her wide-open window, was gasping. She was very weary, perhaps more mentally than physically, but the mind reacted on the body. She thought of the country, of the yellow fragrant hay-fields, of shady trees and babbling brooks, and then there came the remembrance of the heavy scent of roses and lilies, roses that seemed to breathe forth the incense of love itself. She heard again the sound of a voice telling a man's passionate love. She felt the clasp of his hand. She saw the look in his eyes.

"I love you. I want you. I shall never want anyone but you."

She had believed and trusted, and he had played her false. Even her remembrances now were a shame to her and made life more intolerable. It had lasted for two years, and then he could write that he would try to win another woman. Oh, was that what men were like? Was it true, as her mother had always said, as Kitty declared, that man was ever the hunter, tired at once when he came up with his quarry. It did not matter whether it was true generally or not, individually she had failed, failed, and the question was, was it worth while going on living? No, that was not the question. She knew the answer to that. To-night it was not worth while, but the only way out was death, and death would mean talk, and all manner of sordid detail, such as she shrank from. It was the going on that was so hard.

A pile of papers lay before her. She had worked despite herself, it was as if she had been dragging a heavy load through the Slough of Despond, and Castle Beautiful was not beyond but behind, and every weary step she took brought her closer to a dreary barren land where for sole companionship she would have her unattainable desires.

In a sudden utter abandonment of misery she had flung herself on the floor, hopeless and heartbroken, beyond all tears, when she was roused by a sharp knock at the door. Her heart gave a bound, and she knew that hope was not dead in her, that every minute of her life she was waiting for him. He would surely come to see the woman he had professed to love so desperately. She looked in the glass and saw the faint colour in her white cheeks. The knock came again, hurried, imperious, and with sinking heart she realised that it was not his knock. But if life was to be lived, the small

things must to attended to, the door must be answered.

"Kitty!"

"Oh, my dear, I was so afraid you weren't at home."

"Come in, I am glad to see you," and indeed she was. Only one person in the world would she rather have seen than Kitty Pearce, and at least with Kitty she could have the relief of talking about him, would perhaps hear something of him.

Kitty came in, tossing off the scarf she wore about her shoulders. "Oh, my dear, I'm in such trouble, and I want your advice."

"Take off your hat." This Kitty did with a certain respect. The hat could not be refreshed with an iron, like the scarf; and then she flung herself into an easy-chair. Anne's mind went off fruitlessly wondering what she would have said, how she would have felt, had Kitty been Dicky Bullen.

"Anne, I'm in such an awful state of mind."

"About what, Kitty?"

"About Joe Cunningham, of course."

"Then he was with you?"

Kitty dabbed a small square of lace to her eyes and mouth.

"You knew he was. You knew he was coming."

"Yes, I know." She was sorry for Captain Cunningham, but after all he was a man, and a man's life could not be wrecked like a woman's. "Alone, alone," the refrain of an old song kept recurring to her, "I am alone, alone." All her life she had dreaded being alone, and now she was to be alone for ever and ever.

But Kitty misinterpreted her silence. "Anne, you are a dear. Most women would have said, 'I told you so.'"

"It's bad enough without that," said Anne, bringin her thoughts back to another's trouble.

Kitty made a little movement with her hands. "I'r breaking my heart about it."

Then Anne did glance up quickly, and laughed a litt with that other side of her mind, that could always se the humour of a thing, for Kitty looked like some brig butterfly, a creature not to be associated with tragedy

"How do you look when you are hurt, Kitty?"

"Exactly as I do now, I suppose. I shouldn't drea of mourning in sackcloth and ashes. I'd as soon cut myself with a knife like a savage. When I feel mise able I always put on my best clothes, at least it save my self-respect."

"Then judging by your clothes you must be ver miserable indeed."

"Anne, what would you have done?"

"I don't know," said Anne truthfully enough, and back of her mind, hurting her with a cruel pang, came the thought that there was no Dicky Bullen now to ask what should be done; he would have known. "Of course Captain Cunningham can say nothing, but it is a big sacrifice for you to accept."

"He isn't Captain Cunningham now, only plain Mr Cunningham," wailed Kitty. "I wrote to him and told him how much I appreciated what he had done," and she laughed a little ruefully.

"Poor fellow! What did he say?"

Kitty held out a crumpled telegraph form with a whimsical smile.

"I came like Water, and like Wind I go," it said, and it was signed "Cunningham."

"What's one to do with a man like that?"

"What did you write to him?"—we must take an interest in the affairs of others whether we will or not. The world goes steadily on for all our woe.

"How sorry I was, and if he would come to see me I'd do my best to be nice to him, and comfort him. Oh, surely, Anne, you can guess. An afternoon, an evening with me would have cheered him up. I'm not really sad, you know, I'd have given anything for this not to have happened, but since it has——"

"Since it has he doesn't expect you to rush forward and give yourself away. What is he going to do?" Again the thought would intrude itself that she ought to be asking this question of Dicky Bullen.

"I don't know. I remember him saying once in joke that if he did try and go overland he'd have to go to West Africa. I suppose he means this to be the end of the flirtation. It's one way of breaking off; I never thought he'd do it like this."

"Did you expect him to break it off?" asked Anne. She would not be self-absorbed, she would think about other people. Hers was not the only trouble in the world.

"My dear girl, of course. What else? Such things can't go on for very long if you are to keep straight. A little doubt, a little amusement, a moment's certainty, a little weariness and then good-bye. It's the way of all things, you know that."

"Oh no, no," Anne was vehement. If the bitterness in her own life hurt, she found it still worse to think that no one was in earnest, no one cared as she cared. "Surely sometimes a—a flirtation, an attraction lasts?"

"I don't think so," said Kitty, and she really spoke

very thoughtfully. "Married people get accustomed to each other, and sometimes they manage a little excitement, especially if they've been apart for a time, but they only stick together because society has wisely ordained that they must, otherwise a couple of years at the most would see the end of the most intense devotion."

"Please, Kitty," said Anne, with a little quiver in her voice.

"Doesn't that idea give you some comfort? Anne, your case isn't unique. You know, or you ought to know, it is always the one who cares most who suffers. If you had thrown him over he would be running after you still."

Anne rose from her chair. "Kitty," she said, "can't you understand I am not made like that? I cannot play or make believe when I care. He has thrown me over. I don't know whether it was my fault or my misfortune, but I did my best, and I know my love was worth having, though he may have thought otherwise."

"Well," said Kitty, "I expect he's very uncomfortable now, wondering what you are doing, and simply hating you because you have not answered his letter."

Another stab for Anne. It hurt her to think that the man who had protested such love should hate her; but life had to be lived, she told herself again, and even Kitty must not be wearied with her affairs.

She sat down. "I was not thinking about myself for once," she lied, "but about Captain Cunningham's trouble, and you, of course."

"Don't include me. You see he won't even accept my consolation."

Anne lay back in her chair, and put her hands behind her head.

"I don't understand," she said. "This man ruins himself for you, and you accept the sacrifice, and yet you neither of you pretend to care. You don't even want to see each other."

"You do me an injustice," said Kitty ruefully. "I want to see him very much. It is he who declines. He has too much on hand to be bothered with a woman at present. Oh, I understand thoroughly, poor dear, and no one could be more grateful for what he has done for me than I am. If ever I can do anything for him I will. As for me—well, I know one or two others who will be quite pleased to come and sit down under the trees, and say pretty things."

"Kitty, I believe I should think more of you if you ran away with someone," said Anne vehemently. "I think your views of life are shocking."

Kitty stretched her arms above her head. "Personally, I find life very flat. Africa could hardly be worse."

"In mercy to Fred, then why don't you try?"

"It is exactly because I am merciful to Fred that I don't. Here something might turn up, but in Africa, if it were dull, and we know beforehand it would be, deadly, there would be no getting away from it. A doctor can't afford to pay his wife's passage home once a week."

"Oh, Kitty, I would go to the ends of the earth for the man I loved."

"I know you would, you little fool," Kitty spoke very kindly. "Oh, Anne, what views you have about men and women!"

" I am right, in spite of the fact that I have failed," said Anne. " I know there are reliable honest men in the world, worthy of the very best a woman can give them, and if she—she——" Her voice was shaking ; all she had hoped and lost came so vividly before her.

" I know—your old story—if she is economically independent you want to say ; but although you think a woman must be economically independent in order to be happy with a man, you allow yourself to be so dependent on a man for love that you are bankrupt when he leaves you. Use the same common-sense in your feelings as you do in your monetary affairs——"

" I can't," said Anne, and all her loss swept over her again with full force, " I can't."

" Pooh ! Some other man will come." Kitty had talked herself into a cheerful mood again, but Anne interrupted.

" No ; never, never. Don't you understand what it was to me ? He was—he was——" She stopped, unable to go on, unwilling to break down.

" Oh, my poor Anne. You don't know what a comforter Time is."

Anne turned her face away. " I don't want to be comforted, if the only comfort is to be had in forgetfulness," she said in a whisper.

Kitty put her hand on her hair very kindly.

" Anne, some good will come of it. Cheer up, some good will come of it, and you have your work."

" Yes, I have my work," said Anne forlornly.

" What troubles me is that poor Joe Cunningham hasn't even that. I wish I could help him somehow," and she knitted her brows and looked so desperately thoughtful that Anne laughed.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MEDICAL OFFICER IN CHARGE

> "Thou shalt fear
> Waking and sleeping, mourn upon thy bed;
> And say at night, 'Would God the day were here!'
> And say at dawn, 'Would God the day were dead!'"

THE Medical Officer in charge sat on his wide verandah and looked out on things in general. Things in general were restricted. About one hundred yards away was the dense-growing bush. He had made a clearing round the bungalow, but its maintenance required constant and unceasing effort, and young shoots from the roots of felled trees, creepers and grasses, taking a vigorous delight in their new-found existence, made every effort to crowd him out. Underneath his verandah was the dispensary, on his left was the court-house, his servants' quarters were behind, and from where he sat he could see the narrow path that led to the native village, by way of the forest.

The doctor was a philosophical person. He tilted his chair back and shouted for his servant.

"Amo, Amo." There was no answer. "Amo, what the devil do you mean by upsetting the peace of the evening in this way? Can I conscientiously call you by your ridiculous name when you are inducing me to cuss vigorously?"

Amo popped round the corner.

"Yes, ma."

" Amo, I am not your maternal relative, nor am I even feminine in gender, as your address seems to imply. Do you think you could say ' sah,' Amo ? "

Amo grinned all over his good-tempered black face. " Yes, ma," said he affably.

The doctor waved his hand hopelessly.

" Those rooms be fit for commissioner ? "

" Yes, ma. They be fit."

He rose from his seat, and with the aid of a stick limped along the verandah, and peered into the rooms beyond his own. They looked very forlorn. The sitting-room was a big empty bare room, the floor painted green and highly varnished, in the centre a deal table, also green and varnished, there were a couple of bentwood chairs, and one broken-down cane chair. The room beyond was even more forlorn. The floor was just the ordinary boards ; a sort of cage of mosquito-proof wire stood in the centre where the occupant could have a bed, and beyond a couple of boxes there was nothing else in the room. The bare walls showed signs of damp, the distemper had faded and worn off in many places, and there were nails here and there, and the marks where nails had been, and had fallen out.

" I guess there are worse places in the world," remarked the doctor, and limped back to his chair again, but he added conscientiously, " not many, I hope."

Behind he heard the clatter of Amo laying the table for dinner, and he lighted his pipe and looked at the lengthening shadows. The sun was not hot now. In West Africa, though few people in England can be made to believe it, it is generally pleasant enough between the hours of four and sundown, but the solitary white man looked a little wistfully down the path that led south through the forest. He had been the only

white man here at Dalaga, a little station buried in the dense forest of the Mahogany Coast, ever since the last district commissioner had died three months ago, and he was very, very tired of his own society. The only break was the mail, that came in once a week, and even that emphasised his loneliness, for he had no one with whom to discuss it. Now he was expecting the new commissioner, and no one but the man who has lived entirely without companionship for many weeks can understand the intense interest with which he was looking forward to seeing the new-comer. Native rumour, and native rumour was generally very correct, said he ought to arrive this evening, therefore he had had two chickens killed instead of one, had exhorted his cook to put his very best efforts into the tinned julienne, and had got out some tinned peaches and the last of his tinned cream, and given strict orders they were not to be opened until the commissioner was actually in the compound.

He filled another pipe and waited. A plate was broken behind him and he took his pipe out of his mouth to curse the breaker solemnly, by all his gods, and finding that did not produce any more effect than a vigorous clattering of spoons and forks, he rose and, standing in the doorway, gave Amo his views on the iniquities of negro servants in general. Amo listened stolidly, then there suddenly came a flickering light into his face.

"Commissioner come, ma."

The doctor turned round quickly. Out of the dense forest, along the little pathway leading from the native village, came trotting along a couple of spare hammock boys followed by a hammock strung up so tightly that all the man in it could see of the landscape was the pole above his face. After him tailed the

usual following of carriers with uniform cases and chop boxes on their heads, and an agitated native policeman far in the rear rounded up the stragglers.

The bearers brought the hammock right up to the verandah steps, stopped, and the white man got out and stood before the doctor, a somewhat slight man of medium height with a clean-shaven, intellectual face, on which was written hopeless dejection.

The doctor rammed his hands down into his trousers pockets, screwed up his mouth as if privately taking himself into his own confidence, and then bent over the railing of the verandah.

" Mr Cunningham, I presume ? Welcome to Dalaga."

Joseph Cunningham came slowly up the steps, taking in the negro faces that appeared at every corner peering out at the new commissioner.

" Yes, I am Mr Cunningham, and you are the Medical Officer, I suppose. Thank you for welcoming me. I'm afraid I have not heard your name, or if I have I have forgotten it."

" God bless my soul ! What manner of man are you who doesn't even inquire who is to be his companion in Hades ? "

Cunningham laughed a little. " I'm afraid I didn't quite realise when I left the coast and the last outposts of civilisation that we two were to run the place alone. I'm sorry for the people, for I know little enough about it."

" You'll settle down. A decent white man's all they want. I can give you a few wrinkles, and the Lord knows you'll be a godsend to me. The only time I hear my own voice is when I'm discoursing to Amo on his iniquities or pointing out to the sergeant of police the error of his ways. I thought we'd have dinner to-

gether to-night. Your quarters are quite separate from mine, and of course you are in a way my superior officer, so if you like to feed alone as a rule——" The doctor stopped, but there was a sort of wistfulness in his tones that the other caught and understood.

"Only two white men here, surely it would be ridiculous. I don't see why we shouldn't mess together."

"I'll be so thankful. Only a recluse can feed alone, and the Lord omitted to make me a recluse when He sent me to Africa. Come in and sit down, and have a cocktail. Amo can make cocktails, though I refuse to subscribe to his own belief that Providence placed him on this globe for that purpose alone. Here, Morli, Morli, you see that the commissioner's things are brought in one time."

"Thank you," said Cunningham, dropping into a chair and putting his helmet on the table. "Have you hurt yourself?"

"Rheumatism, just rheumatism born of utter weariness. The very thought of your coming has made it better already. I daresay a decent yarn may cure it altogether, though you don't look, you know, as if you were enamoured of the country."

"Oh, the country's right enough," said Cunningham. "I don't see anything against it, and my carriers have worked like good plucked ones. I never saw better boys. I daresay I'll get on all right, once I settle down."

"That's the way to take it. The country's all right if you don't drink too many cocktails, and take cheerful views."

"The last's the difficulty, I suppose. Was that why my predecessor turned up his toes?"

"I certified poor old Baxter as having died of fever,

but as a matter of fact it was too many whiskies and sodas complicated with sheer ennui, and I'm inclined to think it was the ennui and not the whiskies that finished him off. Nobody on this coast gives proper place to that terrible enemy. I know it's responsible for my rheumatism. I don't know yet where you'll break out," and he looked at the new-comer thoughtfully.

Cunningham laughed in spite of himself, the doctor was so cheery, and so unaffectedly glad to see him.

"I shall try to keep a stiff upper lip," he said. "Perhaps the work'll keep me going."

"I'll tell you about that presently. Now dinner'll be ready as soon as you are. Morli's showed your boy where to get a bath, and I suppose you'll change. I always make a point of it, you know; keeps a man from sinking to the level of the savages round him."

Cunningham took the hint, and presently the two men were seated at a table decorated with pink clusters of the corallita doing full justice to the roast chicken and tinned peaches.

"Not much variety in our feeding," said the doctor. "I'm afraid you'll get sick enough of it before we're done. Amo, how often am I to explain to you that it does not enhance the value of the bread to be handed about in your paws."

"It fit for bre'fus, ma."

"Let it alone. It lib for dead. Now go. Make yourself scarce one time. Amo, for my good fortune or my ill luck, I don't know which, was trained by an economical lady, a missionary lady, and not only does he systematically address me as 'ma,' but I'm obliged to secrete all the scraps of toast and bread I leave else they are served up for my next meal."

Cunningham laughed. There was a time when Joseph

Cunningham had laughed wholeheartedly with his eyes, but that was before he had been held up before all men to scorn. Now he merely smiled with his lips, as in duty bound, and the doctor noticed it.

"Come along outside. He's put the coffee on the verandah."

Cunningham pushed back his chair, or rather tried to do so, but it had stuck fast. It appeared to be jammed in under the table.

"Push," exhorted his companion, "push hard. It's our Public Works Department. There's something wrong either with their varnish or their green paint. This place has been varnished for the last three months, ever since poor Baxter went, but it won't dry. I guess the Public Works Department knew we were likely to be dull here and did its little best to provide variety. Oh, you'll have to push harder than that."

Cunningham exerted his strength, and the chair went back with a screech.

"That's all right," said the doctor serenely. "It's a nuisance, but it forms a sort of makeweight to the Rewah Fetich."

"The Rewah Fetich?"

"Oh, didn't they tell you about that on the coast? It's a secret society that is simply spreading like wildfire. It looks most innocuous, sort of love-your-neighbour-as-yourself sort of thing. It's built to appeal to the white man, but when you look into it it's most disconcerting."

"Why shouldn't the beggars have secret societies? Freemasonry flourishes with us."

"Well, for one thing the only penalty of this secret society is death. If you covet your neighbour's goods, or your neighbour's wife—death; if you leave the society

—death ; if you send your child to school—death ; if you don't help your neighbour in time of need—death."

" Whew ! " Cunningham was interested in spite of himself. " That's a little rough. Is that clause about the schools directed against the missionaries ? "

" The whole society is directed against the white man. Don't you see ? The difficulty has always been that the Ashanti and the Fanti and the Falabi, and the other tribes, did not pull together, so when the Ashanti rose he rose alone, and the others helped the white man, if not with fighters at least with carriers, but this society has provided for all that. The next time the Ashantis rise all the tribes round will belong to the Rewah Society and the whole of the Gold Coast and the Mahogany Coast will be in a flame."

Cunningham sat up.

" And if you deprive the young ones of all chance of education——"

" Exactly. I'm glad you see the danger. I have been prodding on at headquarters all last tour, but they are so thick-headed they wouldn't see it, and only now, when the thing has got a firm hold, has it been proscribed. We're going to have our work cut out, I can tell you, for the headquarters of the whole thing is here. Poor old Baxter simply would not be interested. A nigger was a nigger to him, and all his ways were dark, but not in the least to be feared."

" And you think they are to be feared ? "

" Well, we've every chance of getting into a very nasty hole. Perhaps not this tour, maybe not even next, but before the next five years I'm afraid there'll be a rising of some sort. These men are working for a definite purpose, and they are wise, as those who went before them have not been wise."

Perhaps for the first time since Cunningham had left the *Irrepressible* a disgraced and broken man he forgot himself.

Mrs Pearce had been right in her guess that West Africa would see him. West Africa is not now dependent for her servants on men broken from other services, but Cunningham happened to be related to those who had strong influence with the powers that be, so that, in spite of his want of legal knowledge, within a week of his dismissal from the Navy he had found himself gazetted district commissioner, and on his way to the Mahogany Coast, a disappointed man, sick at heart, beginning life again at thirty-three with small hope, and less interest in making a success of things. He had worked so hard at his profession, he had hoped much, and a woman and sheer ill luck had cast him down, had shamed him before all men. It did not seem to him likely he could ever rise again.

" Beastly ill luck, I call it," Bullen had said ruefully. " I actually chanced breaking open your despatch box—blooming cheek on my part, and you might have cut me for it. There I found some warmish letters, so I sent the telegram to the address on top. All for nothing."

" You've been a good friend, Dicky. You couldn't have done better for me. Hang all women ! "

" Buck up, old man. You always succeed in whatever you put your hand to. You'll be Governor of the Mahogany Coast before you've done."

But Cunningham didn't feel in the least like being Governor of the Mahogany Coast at the present moment. He was a loose straw drifting before the wind, a loose straw that cared not where it drifted, but this place looked so lonely, so cut off from all civilisation, that the thought of possible danger did stir him a little. One

man at least got what he wanted, for the doctor found an interested listener, and for perhaps the first time since Baxter's death forgot his rheumatism in pointing out to the new-comer the growing evil that was threatening the land.

The moon rose over the forest, silvering the little clearing ; there came the low growling of a leopard from the thick growth beyond the fence of the compound ; and the ringing cries of a sloth or tree bear, like a little child in pain, startled Cunningham more than once, but it was midnight before the doctor had had his fill of talk. Then he apologised.

" I'm more than obliged to you, you've done me all the good in the world. By Jove, I wanted some cheering."

" I'm glad if I've helped," said Cunningham, with a curious feeling that, although his life was no good to him, it was well he should help a fellow-being a little. " I suppose it is time to turn in. Well, you've given me more understandable information about Africa than I have raised yet."

" It's a wonderful country, a wonderful country, and a rich country," said the doctor, " and the trouble is, England as usual does not realise the richness of her inheritance. She's inclined to hold it very cheap indeed, and the men who come out to administer it hold themselves cheap. Drink, debt, or divorce is supposed to be responsible for the presence of most of us, and I suppose no one would believe me if I said I came to earn an honest livelihood, that I'm never drunk, never in debt, and that I'm a faithful husband."

" I'll endeavour to believe you the embodiment of all the virtues if you'll extend a like complaisance to me, and I'll go bail you're keenly interested in the country,"

said Cunningham. "I've learned more about it this evening than on all my fortnight's voyage out or my thirty-five days' tramp up country. Well, I suppose I'd better say good-night. Look here, considering the state of your mess-room floor, hadn't we better mess in my sitting-room till we can get yours altered ?"

"The Public Works Department is nothing if not impartial," said the doctor. "Haven't you discovered your floor is considerably worse than mine, because it has not been subjected to the padding of Amo's bare feet. No, if you don't mind I think we'd better breakfast here."

"All right. By the way, here have we been yarning all the evening and I don't even know your name."

"My name, my name ? Why does a really honest man hesitate over pronouncing his own name. I assure you I'm not in the least ashamed of it, and yet——"

He laughed and, reaching over for a book that lay beneath the lamp on the table, shook some dead flying ants from its cover and opened it at the title-page.

"That's my name." And Cunningham bending over read, written in a large, clear hand, "Frederic Pearce, M.D."

CHAPTER IX

THE REWAH FETICH

> "Rain in spring,
> White rain and wind among the tender trees;
> A summer of green sorrows gathering,
> Rank autumn in a mist of miseries,
> With sad face set towards the year, that sees
> The charred ash drop out of the dropping pyre,
> And winter wan with many maladies;
> This is the end of every man's desire."

"THE fact of the matter is," said Pearce, "you've got to take things standing up. That's the way I look at it. If all our life were serene there wouldn't be much merit in keeping a stiff upper lip."

Cunningham looked at him thoughtfully. There were a few hundred white men scattered over British West Africa, so why the Fates should have sent him for his only companion the one man he would wish to avoid puzzled him to explain. Looking back he felt it was more by good luck than good management he had done him no wrong, for that Kitty Pearce had only been a seeker after excitement with no ill intent he could hardly bring himself to believe. The same Fates had ordained that it was he who should suffer, should ruin himself for the sake of a woman for whom he cared not a brass farthing. He had played at caring. He had been ready to care, but when she had tricked him, and he had had to give up everything to protect her, then indeed he gauged with cruel nicety the depth of his feeling for her. It was as dead sea fruit to his mouth, dust and

ashes on his lips, and he had thrown away his whole career for it.

The experience had changed him. From a light-hearted hopeful man he had become bitter and morose. For his servants it was a word and a blow, for Pearce, the white man who shared his solitude, it was silence, or cutting caustic remarks. Cunningham was not taking it standing up, he had gone down before his trouble and had allowed it to overwhelm him.

Pearce, of course, knew his story, as much of it as was public property, and at last, out of the pity and kindliness that was in his heart, he spoke.

"Keep a stiff upper lip," was the burden of his song.

"I beg your pardon, Pearce," said Cunningham apologetically, and he tried to push back his chair, but the Public Works Department paint still stuck heroically. "It's pretty rough on a cheerful chap like you to have a miserable failure like me dumped down on you. Here's to your better luck next tour," and he poured himself out a stiff peg of whisky, and was proceeding to fill up from a sparklet when Pearce lent forward and laid a detaining hand for a moment on his sleeve.

"My dear chap, don't do that. It is too early for a drink. Drinks are the curse of Africa. We drink because we're glad, or we drink because we're sad, or we drink because we've nothing to do, or we go in for a steady soak because the mail day's a week ahead, and the chances are there won't be much worth having in it when it does come. Look here, I don't want to pry, I suppose there was a woman at the bottom of this. She isn't worth making yourself into a worthless sot for anyhow."

"She isn't," said Cunningham, with a fervour that

convinced his companion that whatever else was the matter with him it was not love.

"Then buck up. Put your back into the work. Show her you're worth something."

"But I don't care what she thinks of me," said Cunningham, with sudden passionate fervour, "good, bad, or indifferent, her thoughts are nothing to me. I care no more for her than she does for me. Look here, Pearce," and he was glad the opportunity had come to him, "I'll tell you the very worst of the story though I can't in honour tell you the woman's name. She was a pretty little married woman whose husband was away in—in India," he lied, and Pearce felt intuitively that, wherever that unknown man might be, he was not in India. "We met and—well we wrote to each other foolish letters, but nothing worse. I believe I was smitten, but I'll swear she was only amusng herself," again he was thankful to be able to say this to her husband, "there's the bitterness of it. For a couple of months I used to go and dine, and as I could not get back easily two or three times I stayed the night. I don't believe she meant any harm. She liked to play with me."

"Oh, I know," said the doctor, rubbing his nose a little ruefully, "I know the type. Very lovable and charming, but there's generally one man she manages to hurt, very often two. So, of course, there came the night when the ship went without you, and you couldn't give her away."

"Exactly."

"It's bad," said the doctor, rubbing his hands through his hair and lifting first one foot, and then the other from the departmental paint. "But look here, you're a bally sight better off than that woman's husband."

Cunningham acquiesced, and acquiesced heartily.

"And after all you can begin again with a quiet conscience. You have nothing worse to live down than a blunder, and a blunder that almost reflects credit on you."

"Just twenty years of my life thrown away," said Cunningham, but he poured the whisky back into the decanter. Men in West Africa learn to be careful and economical.

"Not wasted considering you made a success of them. I don't see so much in the Navy nowadays," opined the doctor thoughtfully. "While you're young it's probably jolly enough, but once you're an admiral a discriminating country that calls herself the mistress of the seas has decreed that if you haven't any particular influence you shall spend a considerable part of your time on half pay, which is chastening for a man in the prime of life, and when you are on service—well, it's pretty lonely. Upon my word I'd rather be Governor of the Mahogany Coast."

Cunningham laughed.

"That billet has not been offered me," he said.

"You never know your luck. My own private belief is, in spite of the appalling red tape under which this unfortunate country groans, that there are no end of chances for the man who sticks to his job intelligently. Mind you, intelligently. Don't get slack and work like the very devil."

Cunningham laughed again. "Anything else?" he inquired.

"Well, yes," said Pearce, ramming down his pipe thoughtfully with his little finger, "don't mix yourself up with the native women. It isn't dignified, and what's more, it isn't wise. Moreover, I'd have thought——"

Cunningham moved a little uneasily, and finished the sentence for him. "That I'd had enough of women. I have. Oh, hang it all, do you think I care a straw about the girl."

"Why seek her out then?" asked the other judicially.

"Seek her! Good Lord! She chucked herself at my head. I'm not a Joseph. I saw a girl like a bronze statue in the water at Addudimi, made a few complimentary remarks, and next evening I'm blessed if she wasn't in my compound. It made a break in the deadly dulness of things." He got up and walked up and down the verandah. "Look here, Pearce, the thing nauseated me before I began. I wish with all my heart I'd let her alone."

Pearce looked thoughtfully across at the little yellow weaver birds building their nests in a palm-tree opposite.

"Send her back to her people."

"I have. I gave her twelve pounds, and sent her back. If that doesn't buy her another husband—I hope you think I paid dearly enough for my whistle," he said grimly. "No, I don't do it again. It's too expensive, even if I fancied the game."

"The trouble is," said Pearce, "that I am told by Amo, who gets to know everything, that she was Kudjo Mensa's favourite girl."

"Chief at Addudimi. Oh, the devil!"

"I have heard, you know, that Kudjo Mensa has had not only a mission school education, but is a graduate of one of the universities. There is a rumour that he took Holy Orders once, and I know he's got some sort of an English name."

"Well, the thing's done now," said Cunningham, with a sudden feeling of disgust at himself. "Upon my word

I'll never look at a dark woman again—or a white one either, for that matter. I don't suppose one girl more than another'll make much difference to Kudjo Mensa."

"We'll hope not," said Pearce, "but that's why I thought I'd speak. It is apt to lead to awkward complications, you know. That's what I mean by sticking to your job intelligently. I believe it will pay you in the end."

"You certainly practise what you preach, even the abjuring of the whisky wine."

"If I hadn't stuck to bugs in the interests of tropical medicine I should have been stark, raving mad, or stiff with rheumatism by now. Good Lord, man! do you think you are the only man who hasn't found life pan out exactly as he could wish. There's your orderly grinning and bobbing away at you like an apologetic Othello."

The orderly in his dark blue serge jacket and red fez was standing on the steps that led up to the verandah. He stood silent, but every now and then when he thought he had succeeded in catching his master's eye he saluted.

"Well, what is it, Yamba?"

"Rewah palaver lib, sah."

"Here we are!" said Pearce, and Cunningham rose up.

"Where palaver live?" he asked somewhat uninterestedly. The lassitude and weariness, almost the hopelessness, of Africa was upon him. He had marked out the dull routine for the day. He looked out into the blazing sunshine, and felt he did not want to face it.

"Palaver lib behind Addudimi village."

"By Jove!" commented Pearce, "of course, a most likely place. There's a secluded pool down the stream

in the forest there, and this is Friday, the day they hold holiday."

"Well, I suppose the beastly thing's got to be looked into. Do you care to come?"

"Rather. What luck!"

It was hot and it was damp. It had rained the night before, rained with tropical violence, and from the forest all round the sun was drawing up the steamy miasma. The little path that led to the village was blotted out in a white mist, which lay too on the other sides of the clearing, rent in streaks like a torn gauze veil, and through it here and there the dripping vivid green of the forest showed itself. It was beautiful to look at, but it made the ordinary white man, especially the white man who felt himself aggrieved by Fate, feel more than disinclined to move.

Pearce's expectant eager eyes were on Cunningham, and he accordingly put on his helmet, and the two of them went down, and interviewed the Mendi sergeant of police who stood in the shade by the court-house awaiting the commissioner's orders.

Cunningham ordered half-a-dozen of the police to follow him silently. They were armed with old Lee-Enfields, and he saw to it that their bandoliers were well supplied.

"How you find 'em?" he asked, and the sergeant dragged up from the shade by the white-washed swish wall of the court-house a long, lean, truculent-looking man in a white robe with a green glass bangle on his arm.

"This man Rewah medeci man, sah."

"Oh, that's a Rewah priest, is it? He dun find 'em."

"We've got to walk," said Cunningham discontentedly. "The path'll be too narrow for hammocks."

"Do us good," opined the doctor, "nothing like exercise in this climate."

"The thirst it'll produce ought to make us blind drunk long before midnight."

"We're not such blooming idiots," said the doctor cheerily. "It's a mighty narrow track to Addudimi, but I guess we can manage it."

The track was narrow. Overhead the trees, palms and great cotton-woods, met and made a leafy tunnel through which only occasionally came a shaft of sunlight like a golden rod. On either side the undergrowth was dense, and sometimes a trailing creeper, sometimes a thorny branch, sometimes the grey buttress of a cotton-wood tree stretched across the path. It was not exactly hot, but the atmosphere was the enervating one of a Turkish bath, dull, heavy, lifeless.

"How far?" asked Cunningham.

"Well, it's five miles to Addudimi," said Pearce, taking off his helmet and mopping his hot face. "The sergeant'll tell you how far beyond. It's lucky the Mendi aren't touched with this superstition."

"Oh, hang the whole beastly country, and the beastly man and brother and all connected with the thing," said Cunningham, and they went on again in silence.

After about an hour's tramp, a very silent tramp, for the Mendi police were barefooted, and Cunningham sternly enjoined silence, there were signs that they were approaching a village. The forest was a little clearer, here and there they came upon small banana plantations and a couple of patches of guinea corn. Then Cunningham called to his sergeant in a low tone.

"Sergeant," he said, "we can't get through village. I think somebody will go tell them we come. Go look another way."

The black sergeant scratched his head.

"All right, sah. I go look find 'em."

The informer was guarded by two constables but came as quietly as the others. Cunningham wondered at it. He wondered if when they approached he would repent and yell, and shout and warn his friends. But already he had wondered at many things during his short stay in Africa, and had come to the conclusion that he had not sufficient energy to get beyond wondering. The new path was narrower even than the one they had been following and evidently much less frequented. There was no sign of bird or beast, no rods of golden sunshine, only the dripping forest, and the dark steamy oppressive atmosphere. Once they crossed gingerly a long line of driver ants, and once the man ahead of Cunningham kicked away a round brown object out of the path and, looking down, he saw at his feet the bones of a human arm and hand.

"I don't suppose it's relics of a human sacrifice, though they have them, I've no doubt," said the doctor, coming after him. "They chuck their slaves out when they're dead, they're not worth bothering to bury, and the hyenas and vultures and ants do the rest."

"Ah!" There was a sound of voices at last, voices raised in a dull monotonous murmur, and the forest grew a little less dense. They could see the sunlight now, and through the trees they caught the silvery gleam of water, and heard the pleasant sound of its trickling over the rocks.

Cunningham motioned his men to stand still silently while he crept forward with Pearce and ensconced himself in between the buttresses of a huge cotton-wood tree from which he had a full view of the open space round the little pool.

The ground was all cleared, and right in the centre stood a hut, or rather the thatched roof of a hut, for the sides were merely archways between pillars of swish

smoothed and highly polished and coloured a deep pink. Inside they could see a sort of altar rising apparently in tiers and beside the hut was a flag pole from which floated a dirty white flag. Rows of men and women sat silently on the ground. Two men with tom-toms were seated at the end of the rows, but they were not beating the drums. About half-a-dozen men and two women with just a scrap of blue cloth round their loins were close against the fetich house, crouching before a little man in a long white robe. In a calabash on the ground were a heap of sixpences and shillings, the fees evidently for their initiation. Their faces, arms, and all the upper parts of their bodies were smeared with white clay, while on each shoulder was a superficial cut from which the blood was trickling. There was another great calabash on the ground full of a greenish slimy liquid, and as the priest ceased speaking he stooped and filled a small gourd with the repulsive-looking stuff, which he offered to the man nearest to him. He took it, drank it with a face on which for a moment fear was written, and then the sticks came down with a crash on the tom-toms. The still hot air quivered with sound, and, as if taking it for a signal, Cunningham raised his hand, a sign to his hidden men.

In a moment they were upon the terrified villagers, waving their rifles, screeching, yelling, gesticulating like the half-civilised demons they were, and the onlookers fled away shrieking for their lives, but the newly initiated, and the white-robed priest, in less time than it takes to write it were prisoners.

It was such a sudden transformation scene that Pearce, who was always ready to take cheerful views, sat himself down on a stone close to the gourd that held the sixpences and shillings and laughed.

"Rung down the curtain and cleared the house.

By Jingo ! And even the cash falls to our share ! And here's the fetich. Let's have a look."

The floor of the fetich house and the altar, rising up in steps in the centre of it, were of the same highly polished swish as the pillars and the arches that supported the roof, and had the effect of pink marble. At the top of the pillars hung various offerings, a long piece of rope apparently steeped in blood, a gin bottle of palm oil, a bag containing some hard object which turned out to be a bit of cocoanut shell, and some very elderly palm nuts, an empty Bovril bottle and some eggs of the year before last. At the foot of each pillar was laid a skull, half-a-dozen human, but the rest of animals—leopards, bush cats and deer. Over the altar hung a hooked stick, and from it hung by one foot a very small land turtle. The poor little beast was still alive and Cunningham, reaching up, cut it down.

" What's that for ? "

" Good Lord, how do I know ? I never saw one here before. Rewah's in a hollow at the top of the altar, I suppose."

Cunningham looked into the central hole.

" Nothing here but a mass of squashed leaves."

" Oh, that's Rewah."

" Strange taste in gods," said Cunningham. " Now what is this ? " and he lifted up a crooked stick set in a handle studded with cowries.

" That's Yago, I believe. The man sitting on the altar steps and holding that has the power of divination. As a matter of fact Yago does the denouncing."

" And those skulls ? "

" Ornament or propitiation or something. I long ago gave up the working of the negro mind."

They stood looking at the place a moment, then

Cunningham put his hand in his pocket and drew out his match box. At first the palm fronds, damp with the rain of the night before, refused to catch, but he dug with his knife for a dry spot, and presently a stealthy little blue flame was creeping up one side. He encouraged it till a still damp smoke came stealing out on the hot still damp air, the little flame ran up to the roof and down the other side, and it was evident to the stolid prisoners that their sacred place was not only profaned but doomed. They stirred a little uneasily, the priest moved a step or two forward, as if he would have interfered, raised his eyes, and apparently for the first time caught sight of the man who had turned traitor and betrayed them. He had not taken advantage of the *mêlée* to slip away, and was crouching behind the buttress of a cotton-wood tree. His eyes had been gloomily regarding the roof as it burned away with dry snappings and wild little reports. Perhaps he was repenting his day's work ; but his presence seemed to explain everything to the man who had been taken red handed. With a bound like a wild cat he was upon him ; the policemen who were guarding the informer were hurled aside by his impetuous onset. In a second, though twice his size, he had the man on the ground, and with tooth and nail was at his throat. For a moment both white men and policemen stood paralysed onlookers at the rude justice being dealt out to the traitor and then both Cunningham and Pearce waked up to the fact that murder would be done unless they interfered. Pearce made a grab at the priest's feet, and Cunningham, throwing all his weight upon him, caught his murderous hands ; he looked up at him snarling.

" Let me alone, can't you, you scum," he said ; but he did not speak coast English, he spoke pure finished

English, the English of the schools, the English of Oxford, that is unmistakable. The commissioner loosed his grip in his astonishment, but one of the policemen, who saw no difference in any English, fell upon him and caught him round the body. It took but a second or two to drag the men apart, but the police had been interested, and the other newly made prisoners had taken advantage of their interest. By the time peace was restored the policemen were looking at one another blankly, and the initiated of the Rewah were hiding in the impenetrable forest.

"D——n," said Pearce with feeling, "we've wasted our morning."

Cunningham looked at the remaining prisoner. He was black as the ace of spades and draped in a white cloth, but his accent was the accent of Oxford.

"Where did you come from?" asked the commissioner.

The man looked at him with a slightly disdainful smile.

"You're not an ordinary coast nigger."

"I don't know what you mean by an ordinary coast nigger," he said in refined and polished tones, "I am a priest of the Rewah, as you see."

"Well, I'm jiggered," said Pearce.

"How did you come here?"

"I was born here."

"But you were not educated here?"

"What is that to you?" Then he burst out angrily: "No, I was not. You English educated me and you must take the consequences. I am a graduate of Oxford, if you want to know. I am a priest of the Church of England as well, and——" He made as if he would fling out his arms, but the stolid Mendi policemen held him fast.

" And you have come to this ? " cried Cunningham wonderingly.

" Why not ? " asked the other mockingly. " I'd rather reign in hell than serve in heaven any day, wouldn't you ? Oh, you taught me that in your schools. A beastly, ghastly, pitiful job you've made of it. Now what are you going to do with me ? "

The two white men looked at each other. Already the interest was dying out of Cunningham's mind, and only the question remained what was he to do with this man. He waved to the policemen to take their prisoner on ahead.

" By Jove ! " said Pearce as they dropped into line again.

Cunningham said nothing. If he had he would have endorsed the negro priest's words. " A beastly, ghastly, pitiful job," he had made of his life, and he had no one to blame but himself.

" Kudjo Mensa himself," said Pearce. " He looked as if he could slay you."

" I'm not so easily disposed of," said Cunningham. " But I suppose it behoves me to keep my Christian friend well guarded. Come on, we've got a five-mile tramp through the heat and stuffiness. I shall be in a fit condition to meditate on the advisability of handing over the country to its own people by the time I get there," and he turned wearily to the forest path again. Pearce followed him.

Once back in their quarters the doctor went off to his own rooms. When he came back to the sitting-room a meal was spread, but the commissioner did not make his appearance. He sent Amo to inquire, but that worthy came back presently with a smile.

" Commissioner say he lib for sleep, ma."

" The more fool he for not having something to eat first," said Pearce, and sat down to his own meal. Then he too slept.

When he wakened the evening had come, and Amo was standing in the doorway calling him.

" What the dickens is the matter, Amo ? Why can't you let me alone ? "

His servant turned and made a remark to the man beside him, and then Pearce, rubbing his eyes, saw it was Yamba, Cunningham's orderly.

" What for you wake me ? " he asked again angrily.

" Rewah medeci man, he no 'gree for stay," remarked Yamba, as if he washed his hands of the matter.

" No, I don't suppose he does."

" He dun gone," said Yamba philosophically.

That roused the doctor thoroughly.

" Gone has he ! The dickens ! Have you told the commissioner ? "

" Commissioner lib for sleep, ma," said Amo again.

Pearce sat up.

" Has he got fever ? "

" I not knowing, ma."

The doctor went along the verandah, and looked into his comrade's bedroom.

Cunningham was lying on the bed half dressed. His face was flushed, his breathing heavy, he had not even taken off his boots. On the camp table beside him stood a whisky decanter half empty and on the floor lay a broken tumbler.

CHAPTER X

A MAN OF THE SUBJECT RACE

"That which the palmer-worm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the canker-worm eaten; and that which the canker-worm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten."

It is not a criminal offence to get drunk. Our grandfathers regarded it as the natural ending to a day of pleasure or of toil, our fathers looked upon it as a very forgivable lapse from the paths of virtue, and even nowadays there are many to be found who regard it as merely a regrettable incident, and one that may easily be laughed at and condoned.

Perhaps in the ordinary course of events Cunningham would have taken this latter view. Had he merely exceeded because he felt convivial he might have forgiven himself, but there had been no cheerful happy conviviality about it. It had all been so sordid, even the negro who spoke with the culture of the West. To have known Oxford and sunk to a cloth and a heathen superstition! Had he too had high hopes and had they come to this? Was a negro capable of high hopes? And then Cunningham drank and drank, hoping for exhilaration, and none had come, only a sodden sleep, from which he wakened at dawn, with aching head and a tongue like leather. His boy stood over him with his early morning cup of tea.

He drank the tea, with its sweetish preserved milk, rejected the biscuit that accompanied it, and then lay

back on the pillow again. Another weary day to be got through.

His boy was filling his bath, and the negro, being a cheerful, sociable soul, is always ready for a gossip.

"Dokiter dun fetch medeci man," he remarked. "Him tink him done gone one time."

Cunningham was out from under the mosquito curtains in a moment. The boy retreated to the verandah because he hardly liked the looks of his master. Cunningham followed him and there at the other end, opposite his own quarters, was the doctor fully dressed lying back in his chair sipping his tea. On the table beside him was a plate with a yellow mango upon it, and some bread and butter.

"Hallo, Cunningham." He spoke as if they had parted as usual last night, but Cunningham could not but remember he had not joined him at dinner.

"What is this about the Rewah priest?" he asked half apologetically, and there came to his thoughts the looks of men in the morning who had been drunk the night before. Their eyes had been yellow and bloodshot, and the rims were red. He remembered and was ashamed.

"Don't worry about him," said the doctor, stirring the tinned milk into his tea. "He's safe enough now."

Cunningham put his hand on the verandah rail to steady himself. He had been hoisted out of the Navy because the Fates had been against him, but never before had his own conscience told him he had failed in his duty.

"Sit down, man, and have your tea in comfort," said Pearce. "Here, Amo, Amo, bring master some tea. Take it strong, it's the best thing in the world for a pick-me-up. Now then, Amo, clear out one time."

"The Rewah priest," faltered Cunningham, but for the life of him he could not meet the other's eyes.

"Some of his faithful followers cut a hole in the hut, and, your precious policemen being engaged in watching the front door, he managed to escape by the back way," explained the doctor, as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world.

"And I—and I——"

"The sergeant came to report, and when I found you were sleeping the sleep of the just, and not to be wakened, I told the men you had fever, and went back on our tracks after the gentleman. It was the simplest thing. These negroes have no initiative. Even this educated man can't run away from us. He clears back to his native village, and squats in his own hut, waiting for us to come and take him. Privately, I believe the whole boiling of them were afraid of the dark, and they were as mild as milk to me and the three policemen. The informer cleared out at the same time, but as we took the priest red handed I don't suppose that matters. I couldn't lay my hands on him, but this man won't get away again."

The doctor finished his tea.

"Now, I suppose you'll give him six months' hard, or will you make it a fifty-pound fine? Then he'll come back and begin again. No, hang it all, let's have six months' peace. Look here, I'll tell you more about it by-and-by. I think I must just turn in for a little," and he nodded with a friendly smile towards Cunningham and limped off to his bedroom.

Cunningham stood still for a moment, then went back to his own quarters and, because of the vision of the unkempt red-eyed man he had in his mind, he bathed and dressed and shaved far more carefully than he had

done for many a long day, and coming out on to the verandah sent word by his orderly that the prisoner was to be brought in.

He came between two policemen and escorted by the sergeant. They climbed the verandah steps and the policemen saluted.

" Rewah medeci man lib, sah," said the sergeant.

The priest had not the powerful physique of the ordinary negro, and he was undersized. The dust of the road was still on his feet, and the white cotton robe he wore was soiled and disordered, in one corner was a dark stain like blood. Cunningham thought it probably was blood, and wondered idly where it had come from.

He was a man of perhaps the commissioner's own age, and he carried his head with a contemptuous air. As he looked at his captor Cunningham thought for a moment he had never seen such fiendish hatred on any man's face ; but the look passed like a flash.

" What have you got to say for yourself ? " asked the all-powerful white man.

" Nothing," said the dark man coldly and contemptuously, and again Cunningham noticed the culture of his accents.

" The Rewah Fetich is proscribed."

" La, la," and he flicked his fingers.

" It is extraordinary to me," said Cunningham, " that a man like you, who knows better things, can lend himself to such a gross superstition."

The other looked at Cunningham, and laughed, laughed low ; so might any man of the world have laughed.

" Have you ever analysed, or tried to analyse, the superstitions of your own race ? " he said. " You must

admit that looked at calmly, and without the glamour lent by faith, some of them are just as gross."

"I do not."

"That is because you are accustomed to them from your youth up. Bring in a cultivated mind from the outside and he will tell you a different tale. Some of the symbols you hold sacred are just as horrible."

The sailor-man felt he could not hold his own with the man from the schools, even though he were of the despised colour and race.

"Why lend yourself, then, to any gross superstition, mine or yours?"

A light flashed over the dark face, and died down again; but it was as if he had spoken.

"You want to be a power among your people," said Cunningham.

"It is a possible and a forgivable ambition," said the negro.

"But you with your education, your power, might influence them for better things," said the commissioner, enunciating a platitude.

"Thank you," said the other, with a careful adjustment of disdain for the sentiment and respect for the speaker, "that is to say, make them the perfect servants of the white man. I see the advantage from your point of view."

"A good servant is at least better than a barbarous savage," said Cunningham, arguing with the ordered mind of the man who had been accustomed to discipline from his earliest youth, and counted it no disgrace to take orders, but supreme disgrace not to carry them out to the best of his ability.

"There we differ," said the dark man. "Will you white people never understand how far apart are we

dark races. You look upon us, the best of you, as hewers of wood and drawers of water, and mostly we are, but we are not incapable of better things, only the better things must come from within and not from without."

Cunningham was interested. He had never in his life discussed ethics with a prisoner before.

"Well, help them to come from within. You have had your chance and know the great world, why not help these people?"

The prisoner made a mocking little bow. "I have learned many things at Oxford," he said, "oh, many things that they did not intend to teach. Two stand out clearly."

"Yes."

"One is that it is a mistake to be a man before your time," Cunningham assented, "and the other is that there are two men in most of us—the man who can desire and appreciate culture, and the man who can revel in savagery."

"No."

"Yes. A man who is before his time can get no pleasure out of culture, but there is always the other thing—out here. Now, Mr Cunningham, a negro has told you the truth for once."

Cunningham looked at him thoughtfully. A great pity was in his heart for this man who was finding a refuge from himself in savagery. After all was there much to choose between them, he of the conquering, this man of the conquered, race? Yes, there was. He, the white man, could walk uprightly without hope of reward or happiness. Though he found no peace in life, though all were grey and dreary, still he could do his best because—because—he failed to find the reason.

Possibly there was no reason save that honest self-respect that is so strong in some of us, that we will not fail although success bring us no crown of glory. It is the basis of all sacrifice ; it stands behind all long-suffering ; the Church can advance no stronger argument in favour of a God above all.

These things passed through Cunningham's mind vaguely, and the prisoner spoke again :

" You do not hear the truth from my people as a rule."

" Oh, I've grasped that," said Cunningham, coming down with a rush to commonplace life again. " By the way, what is your name ? "

" Kudjo Mensa. At the mission station they baptised me John Trotter. Before I left Balliol I was the Rev. John Trotter, B.A."

" I am afraid, Mr Trotter, there is nothing for me to do but give you six months' hard labour. I have not the prerogative of pardon : the thing is proscribed, and the leaders taken red handed are to be dealt with summarily. Your English education——"

" I tell you I have put that behind me."

" Very well, then, you will be judged as an ordinary negro. Probably it's better for you. Sergeant, remove the prisoner."

Cunningham remained on the verandah. The ground in front of the bungalow was beaten hard, and up and down marched the policeman on duty, the black tassel of his red fez swinging slowly in time to the rhythmic march of his bare feet. Beyond was the wall of green, a living emerald green, lighted up now by the golden sunlight. The people began to pass along with loads on their heads bringing provisions from the village, palm wine and kenki, fu-fu and ground nuts, bananas and mangoes, eggs and chickens. They called out greetings

to the policeman as they passed, and he answered cheerily, and at length, as is the habit of the negro, but Cunningham neither saw nor heard. He was busy with his own bitter thoughts, and if it is bitter when others condemn us it is tenfold more bitter when we condemn ourselves, and know that the condemnation is just. He had failed, that was the burden of his thought. This negro was deliberately choosing savagery, and was not he, the white man who counted himself immeasurably the superior of any dark man, whatever his learning and education, putting himself on a still lower plane ? There might be nothing in this life to hope for, it was exile without a redeeming feature, but he saw, as in a mirror, the greater depths to which he might sink. He had kicked against the pricks, but until last night he had never failed in his duty. The doctor had done it for him, and if he had not no one would have known—but the man who had been accustomed to an orderly discipline all his life could not excuse himself. He knew he had taken a great step downward. He saw himself sinking, and the end would be a grave in the forest here. In his present mood there were attractions about the grave, but it must not be a dishonoured one. He could not even die till he had reinstated himself in his own esteem. The thought was a bitter one.

We allow fate to decide for us, we drift with the stream, till suddenly the roar of the rapids in our ears tells us we have already left the safe and placid river we thought we knew so well, and the current is carrying us swiftly on to the rocks. If we would turn back the pull will be all against the stream, and the effort will be terrible. Will it be worth that effort ?

Cunningham had not the slightest doubt. All his

training from his youth up tends to make the officer of the senior service a self-respecting, self-reliant man. Some there be who fail, as in all companies there be men who fail, but there are not many, and if Cunningham had slipped, the strain had been severe. As he sat there and thought, there came to him a feeling of thankfulness that he had heard the roar of the water against the rocks warning him of his danger while there was yet time. Pad, pad went the naked feet of the policeman up and down, up and down in front of the bungalow, and to the man sitting there they spelt out a decision. He had been a fool, worse than a fool. It is good to have some great thing to achieve, some high hope ahead, but if all our hopes are taken from us, all our desires are unattainable, there is still life to be made the best of, still the simple daily duties to be carried out to the best of our ability. You have no hope? Then do it for your own honour, simply because it is better to do a thing well than ill, because you yourself are too proud to fail if the failure is to come through your own fault.

Cunningham touched bottom. Henceforward his steps might falter but they would always be on the upward road. He sat on. Amo began clattering over the late coast breakfast.

"Bre'fus ready, sah," but he paid no attention.

Then came Pearce, rubbing his eyes, but cheerful as usual. He took his seat at the table, and Cunningham drew up his chair.

"Chicken and rice," said Pearce, lifting off a cover. "Amo, what the devil do you mean by putting that toast on the table again? I told you yesterday I would not eat it. The thing's all mildew. Cunningham, did you buy that guinea fowl for dinner?"

Cunningham looked at him sombrely. He had not

heard a word he said. He was making up his mind to an apology, or at least an acknowledgment of his fault.

"I was drunk last night," he said, "disgracefully drunk."

"My dear chap," said the doctor a little whimsically, "it sounds as if you were threatening me, and I do not think it is an adequate excuse for not buying a guinea fowl this morning."

Cunningham laughed. "Is that another duty I have left undone. Oh, somebody did offer me a guinea fowl. I was thinking of what you had done, gathered up all the frayed ends for me, tramped back to that village again, worked all night——"

"Don't enumerate my virtues. I feel sure you'd have done the same for me."

"I feel quite sure I would never have had the chance. All the weeks we've been here, it is you who have been cheerful while I have never left off grousing and cursing my luck."

"God knows you've had excuse enough."

The doctor ate heartily, but Cunningham had no appetite.

"What are you going to do with Kudjo Mensa?"

"I'm giving him six months' hard, without the option of a fine. There's something in what you said, let's have six months' peace to look round us."

"I suppose he carried on like a thing demented," said the doctor, who knew the emotional negro.

"No, he took it as quietly as I might have done myself. Went off without a word."

"Oh! I don't quite like that."

"Neither did I. It looked as if he were biding his time. But I really don't see what he can do. He was civil enough when I spoke to him, and carefully polite,

but once I got a glimpse of his face, when he did not know I was looking, and upon my word, Pearce, I never saw such fiendish hatred in any man's eyes."

"Personal to you, I expect," said Pearce thoughtfully. "It is that girl, Cunningham, though I don't suppose he'd say anything. His education would make him hold his tongue on that subject."

"I reckon him a dangerous man," said Cunningham.

"They always are when they're educated and go bush," said the doctor.

Silence fell between them. Englishmen do not find it easy to give thanks or apologies or indeed to speak as if there were anything below the ordinary commonplaces of life, and yet one of them was feeling he had come to a place where he must speak.

"I owe you a great deal, Pearce," he said at last. "I've been cursing Fortune and never seeing that she sent me the best chap in the world for a companion."

The other held out a silent hand.

"Buck up, man," he said. "I'd hate you to go under. You're worth something."

"I won't. You may be sure of that—now. I suppose a man can carry on when he's lost hope of all great things."

"Well, he can," said Pearce, "he can. It's astonishing how the little things of life count, if you make up your mind to be interested."

"To be interested?"

"The interest comes if you carry on."

CHAPTER XI

THE WORK OF A DISTRICT COMMISSIONER

"By the brand upon my shoulder, by the gall of clinging steel,
By the weal the whips have left me, by the scars that never heal,
By eyes grown dim with staring through the sunwash on the brine
I am paid in full for service—would that service still were mine.

"It may be that fate will give me life and leave to row once more—
Set some strong man free for fighting as I take a while his oar.
But to-day I leave the galley. Shall I curse my service then?
God be thanked—whate'er comes after I have lived and toiled with men."

No man conquers fate in a day—or in a week or a year for that matter. His first surprise is when he finds that the overwhelming blow which he thought had crushed him utterly has still left him sufficient vitality to feel and feel keenly. The desire to recover himself is there, but hope is stunned; then comes the tiniest flicker, but its power is a feeble thing, and the way towards even outward serenity, to say nothing of inward peace and happiness, is narrow and steep, beset with stones and thorns, and every turning leads back to the Slough of Despond.

Of all places in which to recover equanimity of mind perhaps a station in the West African bush is the very worst. The fierce sun pours down out of a cloudless sky upon a steaming earth, or the torrential rain blots out everything and deadens all sound with its ceaseless roar, and for the man who sits on his verandah, and looks out on his surroundings, there is absolutely nothing to do. The dark peoples are there, they may have their

hopes and desires, possibly even their ambitions and their loves, but they are very far apart from the average Englishman. The arm-chair traveller talks with interest of the black races and their development, but he takes them in minute doses in his leisure hours sandwiched in between other interests. It is very different for the man who lives amongst them. He realises, as men at home who talk so glibly cannot realise, the almost impossible barrier that lies in race and colour. The black people cannot make up to the exile for the delights of the land left behind him, for home and all that home spells, affection and comfort, amusement and luxury, and when he has come out under a cloud, as Cunningham had done, the weariness and desolation of the hours are doubled and trebled.

Fortune, however, had not been wholly cruel. She had sent him a pleasant housemate. Cheerful, tolerant and understanding, had he searched the world, Joseph Cunningham could not have had for his exile a better companion than Dr Pearce, the man for the sake of whose honour he had lost everything. He smiled a little bitterly to himself in the privacy of his own quarters over the irony of fate that had flung them together, and yet he had to acknowledge that Dalaga would have been utterly intolerable but for the doctor's kindly presence.

Not that things always went smoothly. That perhaps was too much to expect. Cunningham never exceeded again, but when the only chance of interchanging thought is between two people tempers are apt to wear thin, and there were times when the two men so dependent on each other for companionship only exchanged snappish words. Cunningham acknowledged it was generally his fault, but felt powerless to mend it. Was this to be

all, he would think, as another hot day dawned, and he rose weary from his camp bed ; was this all, as he sat and listened—through an interpreter—to an interminable woman palaver, an inextricable tangle of men and women and divorce, in which no feelings were involved, only the possession of a certain amount of gourds and mats and yams and plantains, rising sometimes to beads and sometimes to a goat, with an occasional child thrown in ; was this all, when he sat down to his evening meal, and the mutton tasted like burnt horn, and the yams had been fried in stale lard ; was this all, when the flying ants came in thousands and committed suicide in the clockwork lamp, and made the evening game at picquet a somewhat doubtful joy ; was this all, when the lamp was out, and the weary day was done, and there was only the sound of the tom-toms on the hot night air, telling that the villagers were still on the alert.

Cunningham never got drunk again, but he did lose his temper over trifles.

" I beg your pardon," he said, after a burst of irritability, " I'm an unmannerly brute, but this place has got on my nerves."

" In so short a time," said the doctor, " you mustn't allow that."

" And how am I to help it ? " The question was almost a challenge.

" Do something, man. Learn the language."

" An isolated little language. It isn't worth it."

" That you can't tell. It may be worth something. Take up bugs then."

" Not in my line."

" Run a garden."

" You want to begin in your youth, and they didn't encourage gardens in the gun-room."

"French literature, Italian mysticism."

"Oh, go hang," said Cunningham, retiring savagely to his own quarters and feeling worse than ever because there he had no one to vent his wrath on, his own particular body servant having very wisely removed himself to a safe distance. This was his life; this was what all his high hopes had come to, and he cursed his fate with the bitterness of the man who knows there is nothing to be done but to endure, and that night, though he did not fly to the whisky bottle, he took sulphonal, because he felt, as we have all felt at times, that he must have oblivion at any cost. And when he awoke next morning he made up his mind.

He would go for a little tour round the villages in his district. It would not be exciting, and he did not expect it to be profitable, but when he came back he would probably be so thankful to see a white face that he might even hope to be bearable to the long-suffering doctor. He was so full of the idea that he was rather late for breakfast, and when he went into the doctor's quarters Pearce had already had his meal.

"Dokiter had bre'fus," volunteered Amo, but Cunningham paid no attention, till it suddenly dawned upon him that the same bright idea had occurred to the doctor, and that he had decided to leave him to his own devices until he recovered his temper. The sulphonal had deadened his sensibilities somewhat, and he laughed at himself for an ill-conditioned bear; but he stuck to his resolution, and went for a week's tour among the little villages dotted about the dense forest of his district.

It rained, it rained heavens hard, the narrow paths were heavy with mud or transformed into rushing torrents; overhead the trees met in a leafy archway through which the water poured down as if through the

holes in a cullender, and the damp only made the heat more stifling. It was always a relief when a village was heralded by more sunlight ahead breaking through the tree tops, and great clumps of bananas or serried rows of Indian corn. In the village street the raw-necked vultures gorged themselves on the carrion or squabbled for the garbage, the little laughing naked children stopped in their play to stare at the white master, the women looked at him curiously and admiringly and the village elders greeted him, and escorted him to a seat under the village tree, and laid various complaints before him. They seemed very trivial, these complaints, but by the end of a week he began to see dimly that this going about by himself, and giving his whole attention to the matter in hand, was the only way in which he could arrive at a proper understanding of the people. He was actually glad he had come, he had not been uninterested ; still, by the time he reached Addudimi, the last village he proposed to visit, he realised that he was looking upon the bungalow at Dalaga as home.

His irritability had worked off, and yet he had not spoken for a week, except to give an order, every hut had leaked ; and this one leaked the worst of the lot; the place produced about sixty-eight different varieties of flying ants, and each sort came in thousands to visit him the moment his lamp was lighted for his bath and dinner ; there were other livestock in the hut too, as he was uncomfortably aware ; he had used up most of his provisions ; he had stuck up the mail and got only a note from Dicky Bullen, very much down on his luck; the eternal chicken and yam was only just better than no chicken and yam, and he was looking forward very much to a yarn with Pearce.

There was another thing.

Three times he had been turning down a narrow pathway in the forest and three times he had been stopped in some trivial excuse or another. As he sat smoking the last of his tobacco, and looking out on the pouring rain, it struck him for the first time that possibly that stopping had not been as trivial as it seemed. He began to think they did not wish him to go down that path, and immediately there arose in his mind a determination to explore. To-night? No, after all perhaps better not. It was no good running full tilt against the prejudices of the people. He would consult Pearce. It was wonderful how he was looking forward to seeing Pearce again.

Next day it cleared, and the sun came out fierce and hot. He had walked religiously six miles a day for his health's sake, and to-day he had to walk because the forest path was too narrow for a hammock. This was the village where they had captured the Rev. John Trotter officiating as a Rewah priest. There was the little pool, and the open space where the initiates of the fetich were sitting when they came upon them and burned the fetich house. Kudjo Mensa, the man who had boasted of his return to savagery, had not done three weeks of his time before he had made his escape. They had scoured the country for him, but apparently he had vanished into thin air, and one or two of his luckless guardians were now suffering for their slackness in his stead. As he plunged into the forest again Cunningham smiled to himself, a little pityingly. Poor beggars! But after all prison was no disgrace to them, they would come out presently serene and contented and smiling as of yore, apparently bearing no malice. He felt sure the Rev. John Trotter was made of different stuff. He could not but remember that look of hatred he had

surprised on his face. If he should come across him alone in the bush! Well, he wasn't likely to do that anyway, and he smiled as he realised what a lordly person the white man is in Africa. He wondered why he remembered it all to-day, but probably it was because he was passing over the same track and because the people had three times turned him back when he wished to go down that pathway. Presently the forest thinned a little, he got into his hammock before his own particular village appeared, and then the European bungalows came into sight. Cunningham peered out. Yes, a white man had risen from his long chair and was leaning over the verandah railing looking for him. He sprang out of his hammock.

"I'm damn glad to see you," he said.

"And I you," said the doctor, and laughed.

Dinner that night seemed festive, and the food by comparison excellent. "I ran out of everything," he explained, "no whisky, no flour, no milk, no coffee, and vegetables a homestaying British sow would have disdained."

"And no conversation," said the doctor. "I thought our tempers were getting a little frayed. They do, you know, two men all alone. I've been filling up time in your absence by conferring on the inhabitants down Malua way the blessings of vaccination."

"Did you get them all?"

"Well, by the exercise of considerable ingenuity, I think about fifteen managed to escape. The rest of them I trust are suffering from sore arms by now."

"There's no doubt about it," went on Cunningham thoughtfully. "Dalaga's the keystone of the Falabi country. Hold Dalaga and you hold all the country as far back as the French border in the hollow of your

hand. If I were the Government I'd put a Provincial Commissioner and at least a company of soldiers here."

Pearce smiled. This man was getting interested after all.

"I see the beginnings of the future Provincial Commissioner," he said.

"Oh, good heavens! Not much chance of that. By the way, down Addudimi they distinctly prevented me going down a certain path. I wonder if Rewah's on the go again. Will you come with me to-morrow and investigate?"

"I thought we'd pretty well crushed it out."

"Well, why did they stop me then?"

"The Lord only knows the meanderings of the negro mind. All right, I'll come. Let's start early, and we won't say anything to anyone."

It did not seem a matter of pressing importance, but having nothing else to do they started at dawn next morning, and when they reached the village they were, of course, received as honoured guests. The chief, who had taken Kudjo Mensa's place, and the elders met them and conducted them to the village tree.

"Oh, I say," groaned Cunningham, "I've had enough of ths blessed tree. I sat under it for two solid hours yesterday."

"Where's your path?"

"There, that little one to the right there."

"Let's start at once."

Cunningham turned to the chief, and through his interpreter explained that presently he would return and listen to them, but that now he must go on, and he and the doctor turned to the path. Immediately, it seemed, pleaders for aid and for justice rose up on either

side. This woman had lost her husband, this man had a toothache, this child was like to die, and there was a dispute between these two men as to the borders of their farms, and only the white man could settle it. But the two white men waved them aside.

"Presently; we will return presently," and the villagers dropped away and let the white men work their own wicked will.

The path was very narrow and very overgrown, plainly but few people had been down here of late. It was rapidly reverting to forest; and yet on either side there had been plaintain and cocoa plantations, abandoned now, and the umbrella-tree and the papaw were growing up on them.

"What have they left this place for?" asked the doctor curiously.

"Worked out," said Cunningham.

"No. What—the devil!" He stopped still and stood looking down at his feet. There was not room for two of them abreast but Cunningham looked over his shoulder. At their feet, right along the path, with the weeds and grass growing up between the ribs, was the skeleton of a man.

"What?" asked the commissioner.

The doctor peered carefully.

"Cunningham," he said, "I don't believe that man came here of his own free will."

"A dead slave?" queried Cunningham.

Pearce shook his head.

"Of course there's absolutely nothing to show he isn't a dead slave, whose bones the ants have picked clean, but it looks to me as if he'd been fastened there. There's been tie tie round that tree and—yes—and round that. You see—two on each side."

Cunningham, horrified, verified it.

" Bound here ! Alive, do you think ? "

Pearce nodded. " For the ants to pick his bones."

" Oh, my God ! What fiends ! "

" They can be fiends. Cold-blooded fiends some-imes." And he stooped forward and out of the grass ›icked a green glass bangle.

" Do you recognise that ? "

" No. They're common enough."

" Yes. But the informer who split on Kudjo Mensa vore one."

" So he did."

The two men looked at one another and the doctor ut the bangle in his pocket.

" I don't see how we're to prove a murder has been one," said Cunningham slowly.

" And if we can't prove it there's no good in saying nything."

" But I can ask for the informer."

" You'll hear he's gone to visit a cousin in Monrovia nd no one has heard anything of him for a long time."

" Why didn't they clear the bones away ? "

" Rewah. They are left for a warning."

They turned and went back to the village, and back their bungalow ; but that night, as they sat at cquet, Cunningham, who had not got over the horror the thing, laid down his cards and said, " Do you think hn Trotter had a hand in it, and that is why you took m so easily ? "

" More than probable. A nice person to be at ge."

" I remember noticing what looked like a stain of ood on his robe. Perhaps he was merciful and killed m."

"Gashed his arms or his face, more likely, to make the blood flow and attract the ants."

"Oh, my God!" cried Cunningham, "what a ghastly country!"

The doctor walked to the edge of the verandah, and looked over into the gloom of the forest.

"Death, you know, is the penalty for the very slightest offence. They would make it a bitter death for the traitor. I shouldn't wonder if we have trouble over Rewah yet."

CHAPTER XII

DAY BY DAY

" Fear not, O land ; be glad and rejoice : for the Lord will do great things. Be not afraid, ye beasts of the fields : for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength. . . . For he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain and the latter rain in the first month. And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil."

" You want to vote me a nuisance. I see it on the tip of your tongue, but it's so good for you, Anne, to be taken out of yourself occasionally."

" One moment," said Anne, " take the paper till I've finished this. Laura, where are the cigarettes ? "

The discreet little maid had already produced them. " Shall I bring tea, ma'am ? "

" Yes, in a quarter of an hour."

" Laura understands my simple vices," said Kitty, sinking back indolently into a chair in the window ; but she did not read the paper. She watched Anne thoughtfully for a moment, and then she turned her attention to the street.

A grey sky was resting on the tops of the houses and a wild March wind was blowing dust and scattering drops of rain impartially. A man was scraping a hoarding down the street, and bits of paper, blue and pink and red and yellow, were dancing along, first on one side of the road, and chen on the other, now lifted high to the second storey, now racing along under the noses of the patient horses. A raucous voice was

calling for scissors and knives to grind and another was shouting pot plants.

Anne went on writing for a moment, signed and sealed her letter, and then moved the typewriter and her papers on to a side table.

"Work's done for the day," she said, with a sigh.

Mrs Pearce turned and looked steadily at her cousin. "Anne, you look better than you have done for many a long day. Your eyes are clear and you have done your hair well. Who is the man?"

Anne laughed. "There isn't a man. My last book has done very well, and *The Piccadilly* has ordered a set of stories. Why should you diagnose a man because my hair is well done?"

"An improvement in a woman's looks, my dear, generally means a man, either somewhere in the background or very much to the fore."

Anne moved a little uneasily.

"Kitty, don't you understand," she said, speaking more earnestly, "there cannot be another man in my life? I am not a light woman."

"Surely you're not thinking of Dicky Bullen still. It is more than a year since he left you, very nearly two."

Anne bowed her head.

"And you are nothing to him."

Again Anne assented silently.

"And he is nothing to you? Why, Anne, in your last book you made your deserted woman marry and live happily ever afterwards."

"I must make my books end happily else I can't sell them, but my private opinions remain the same."

"Then you still love Dicky Bullen?"

"Our life together made a bond between us that I

cannot shake off. I should be disgraced in my own sight if I did shake it off. I can't help what he has done. Sometimes I feel that it is all a mistake, and that if I could see him we should love each other as much as ever. Surely, a man can't say so much, and mean so little."

"Oh, most men can do a good deal in that direction," opined Kitty. "You'd much better take my advice and marry somebody else. What about Vincent Brown?"

"Vincent Brown has not done me the honour of asking me," said Anne, and again she felt forlorn and out in the cold, the discarded woman, whose love had been cast aside as a thing of naught.

"But he will if you give him the slightest encouragement. He wants to nest."

Anne lay back in her chair. "I'm afraid he'll have to choose another mate, because I'm nested already," and it hurt her, as she thought that her nest was empty. "Kitty," she added earnestly, "if you don't understand I can't explain. If Dick and I hadn't suited each other I should have thought it right to part, although even then it would have been difficult, but as we did suit each other the parting to me is an impossibility."

"But he didn't feel that way?"

"No," said Anne slowly. "I admit I don't understand a man. As a girl, life seemed so simple to me. My morals for men theoretically were of the laxest order, a man might do as he liked so long as he stuck to his wife in the end. It was afterwards, when I really did know, that my soul revolted and—and——"

"You exalted chastity."

"I don't understand myself."

"What you don't understand is that there are

different temperaments. I expect there is somewhere in the world the man who would appreciate you. I daresay Dicky appreciates you, only you made a mistake with him. You should never want a man so much that you trust him entirely. If you give your all, you have nothing to fall back upon. You must understand that."

And Kitty, well satisfied with herself, lighted another cigarette.

"Still, some men may be trusted. True love exists, I know, though I have failed to find it."

"I don't know that you're not to be envied for your wonderful faith."

Anne laughed a little sadly.

"Have you seen Dicky Bullen?"

Anne shook her head.

"Nor written to him, nor heard from him?"

"No."

"He has not married Maud Somerset. He is not even engaged to anyone as far as I know."

"And he is not promoted," said Anne. "I have watched the promotion list. He expected it last year. It must be a bitter blow to him, poor fellow."

Kitty jumped up and stamped her feet.

"Anne, for heaven's sake don't be so forgiving. A little good hearty hatred would be a most wholesome attitude on your part. Faith and love are all very well, but when a man has treated you as he has treated you—well, upon my word, I don't wonder he threw you over. I expect he found you tame."

The unbidden tears rose to Anne's eyes, but she brushed them away.

"Never mind, Kitty. It's most unprofitable even talking about him. I am thankful to say I am

making my way in the world, and, Kitty, I want a holiday."

"So do I," said Kitty.

"Suppose we go somewhere together."

"Monte Carlo."

"'Oh, to be in England now that April's here.'"

"Browning was a humbug," said Kitty. "He took very good care to admire the English spring from a safe distance. Besides, it isn't April yet."

"Well, will you come next week?"

"Yes," said Kitty, and as the March day made up its mind on the subject of the weather and brought a great splash of rain against the window pane, and the wind rattled the frames and wailed in the chimney, she added with emphasis, "gladly."

CHAPTER XIII

THE WHIRLIGIG OF TIME

"Sad, but not bent with sadness,
Since sorrows die;
Deep in the gleaming glass
She sees all past things pass,
And all sweet life that was lie down and lie."

In the days of our mothers and grandmothers the woman who was deserted had lost everything, and there was for her no possibility of redemption; but nowadays the deserted woman who is wise knows she has lost, not the crown itself, but the best jewel out of it, and, great and grievous as this loss is, it is at least one that may be hidden from the world. Anne had felt this strongly. She must not go about a woman with a sorrow. She must present a smiling face, and she must be successful. For the moment she had been inclined to value herself very low indeed, but then came the thought that after all she need not proclaim herself cheap whatever she might have been made to feel, for true it is that the world takes us at our own valuation. To do nothing is to proclaim oneself cheap, but at first when Dicky Bullen had gone out of her life he seemed to have taken with him her power to work. Luckily, however, no human being can sit down and mourn from dawn to dark, especially when there is a crying necessity for daily bread, and Anne had turned to her writing again.

At first it had been forced labour. He had so filled

her life that she had done nothing without the thought of his approval, then gradually—very gradually—because all things are done step by step—the work itself had proved an anodyne, and before the year was out the old delight returned, and with it a feeling of power. Her ideals had been shattered, and she had gone down into the depths, but as she climbed slowly out she knew she had gained experience, and her outlook had become wider. Because of her own pain she could look with an infinite pity on the suffering around her, could rejoice almost without envy in the happiness that came to others. As the months passed she regained her old ideals. She had not forgotten, she did not love less, but she had faced her trouble, acknowledged to herself her mistake, and, though she never expected to be happy again, did not doubt for a moment that the world was a clean, fresh, wholesome place ; that there was happiness in it ; that there was that goodly thing called love, and that some fortunate women found it. She had lost it, that was all, there was nothing to be gained by blaming the man who had deserted her ; it just behoved her to make the best of life.

" You're a sensible woman in your own way, Anne." said Kitty to her, as they sat at dinner one night at Monte Carlo, in the big dining-room of the Hotel du Littoral, looking out of the open window over the moonlit Mediterranean.

" Isn't my way your way ? "

" The result is the same, but we come to it by different paths. I am serene because I know no man's worth worrying about, and you have arrived at serenity even though you think—no, you can't think Dicky Bullen's worth worrying about."

" I do," said Anne, and she looked out of the window ;

but she knew she could speak of her lost lover now without a wild beating of her heart. That was something she had gained.

"You only think you do. It's surprising how we deceive ourselves."

"I deceive myself then; but the result is the same."

"Anne, don't tell me you haven't worked better this last year."

"You mean I've succeeded better."

"No, your work is better."

Anne thought a moment. "I suppose I am freer. I expect I'm a woman of one idea, and when I was giving my best to Dicky Bullen I couldn't put it into my work. No, it isn't exactly that either. You only show your best to one person, you would be ashamed to display it to the world, but when that one person is not there, some of your innermost thoughts creep into your writing, and I suppose that makes for better work."

"Long may it continue. There mustn't be a better man till you have reached the top of the tree."

"I wonder how often I am to tell you there will never be another man. It would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle——"

"And yet," interrupted Kitty, "I have not the slightest doubt there are a few rich men on the face of this globe who have some hopes of eternal bliss and yet expect to lie softly in this world. Shall we go down to the Casino to-night?"

"Such a perfect night! It seems a pity to spend it in stuffy rooms."

"If we make our fortunes, we may always have perfect nights."

"Oh, may we? Then by all means let us go, but I am by no means sure that I can afford to lose."

"I won ten pounds the other night, so I've something to go on, but you can do as you please. I should have thought you had more of the gambler's spirit. You did such a big gamble with your life."

"And lost, remember. Probably it had a sobering effect."

The rooms at the Casino were gay with brilliant lights, gorgeous dresses and sparkling jewels. Anne had read much about those rooms, and had looked forward to seeing them, but they had not had the effect she expected. The haunts of vice, she had heard them called, and people were delighted or horrified according to their temperaments, but she only saw large halls crowded with men and women for the most part exceedingly well dressed, such as she might have met at any At Home in London. They stood round the tables, and staked five-franc pieces or golden louis, and won or lost with the calm indifference of those who are too well bred, too much men or women of the world, to show their feelings of joy or sorrow to all and sundry. There were faces tired, faces weary, faces lined with dissipation, or sorrow, or sickness; there were joyous laughing faces, but every one of them wore the mask we all wear among our fellows.

"Faites votre jeu, messieurs, faites votre jeu," cried the croupiers monotonously. "Le jeu est fait. Rien ne va plus," and then out went the little rakes raking in the gold and silver and here and there pushing little piles of money to the fortunate who had won.

The two women stood watching for a moment. "I've brought five pounds to lose," said Kitty, fingering her silver chain purse. "Now shall I stake a louis at a time or try five-franc pieces?"

"I wouldn't," began Anne, and then she stopped,

amazed, and for a moment her heart stood still and she knew she was not so nearly cured as she had thought herself. "Kitty, isn't that — isn't that Captain Cunningham?" She had not seen Cunningham, had not even heard of him, since the days when his messmate and chum had been all in all to her.

"Why so it is!" said Kitty, amazed. There was a murmur of voices, English, French, German, and other tongues she did not recognise around her. Then she recovered herself. "I declare I shall watch what he does and do the same. Such phenomenal bad luck as he had ought to be turning now."

He waited a moment, and then placed a louis on nineteen, and Kitty pushed one across beside it. "Nineteen, why has he chosen nineteen?" she wondered aloud. "Oh, of course, on the 19th of June he came to grief. That's a very good idea."

"Le jeu est fait. Rien ne va plus," said the coupier, and round spun the great teetotum, with the little marble dancing and bobbing in and out of the spaces.

"Dix neuf, rouge," said the impassive croupier, pushing over two little piles of gold, one to Kitty and the other to the bronzed man on the other side of the table. Kitty looked at her cousin, her eyes dancing.

"Now come along, and let us thank him. I don't believe he has seen us."

"Perhaps he'd rather——"

"Oh, nonsense; of course he'd like to speak to me once he gets over the first awkwardness. We can slip back quite comfortably into the old relations. Fred says he's no end of a good pal."

Presently Cunningham felt a hand on his sleeve. "Captain Cunningham."

He started violently when he recognised Kitty, and

she saw the painful blood creep right up to his forehead, and then and there she doubted whether this man would ever slip back into the old relations.

" Mrs Pearce," he said, but his voice sounded cold.

" You've just won me thirty-five louis, and I'm so deeply obliged to you I have to speak to you, although I must say you might look a little more pleased to see me."

He was not pleased, and he could not pretend to be. This woman represented an episode in his life of which he was ashamed, and moreover one that had ruined him. Still, he could not exactly run away, though his manner said he would escape the moment he had the chance. Kitty led the way to one of the seats against the wall. She was a wise woman, and she gauged his attitude and adapted herself at once. " I've heard so much about you from Fred. There never was such a chum according to him. You surely haven't forgotten my cousin, Miss Lovat."

He turned to Anne, and his manner to her was much more cordial; she was a good-looking woman, and she did not remind him of disagreeable episodes and days when he had made an ass of himself.

" Of course I have not forgotten Miss Lovat; we read her books even out in Africa, but I never thought of such luck as meeting her here."

Kitty accepted the situation. She was good-natured, and she was kindly, she was also keen-witted. Here was a man who was actually not inclined to forget, but she had just won money, and was at peace with her world.

" Oh, I must stake just once more, Anne. If we miss, remember we'll meet in the outer hall at ten, and if we miss there you know your way to the hotel. I'll see you again, Captain Cunningham," and she strolled towards the table she had just left.

"I am not Captain Cunningham now," said Cunningham, with a sharp feeling that this was a place of shams, and that he would not have his companion think he was claiming anything that was not his.

"The next will be his Excellency the Governor of the Mahogany Coast, I hope," said Anne, with a friendly smile. If she had had to climb out of the Valley of Humiliation so had he.

"No such luck," he sighed, but it was pleasant that this good-looking woman should even suppose such a thing was possible. "Are you enjoying yourself? Are you winning money?"

"Are those terms synonymous? I haven't staked anything. I don't know if I can afford to, but we are going to be here a fortnight so there is no knowing what may happen. I'm interested in looking at the people."

"I've looked at them for two nights, and I'm dead sick of them. How the dickens is one to kill time?"

"Well, it must be very pleasant on the terrace," said Anne, "if you don't like these rooms."

"Not by myself. Will you come with me?"

Anne looked across at Kitty's back. Kitty was talking in friendly fashion to the man beside her.

"She has found a friend, and you know where to meet her at ten o'clock."

On the terrace the air was soft and balmy, the distant sky of the Riviera was above their heads and the calm moonlit sea at their feet. The scent of narcissus and violets was in the air, and if the Casino behind them was artificial at least sky and sea were Nature's own.

The sight of Cunningham, calling up old associations, had shaken Anne a little, and the cool soft air on her face was a relief. She leaned her arms on the balustrade and he looked at her as she stood beside him, a tall

woman, in a large black hat and clinging white gown. The moonlight just showed him her dark eyes and they looked soft and kindly.

" I wonder why you come here if you don't like it ? " she said. "I suppose after the heat of Africa you thought the cold of England would be too great."

" No, I'm hardly such a fragile flower as that," said Cunningham. " I stayed out as long as I could, eighteen months instead of a year, but I had to come back at last."

" Yes," and suddenly she understood, and he in his turn felt her unspoken sympathy and opened his heart.

" Can't you understand," he said in a low tone, " what it would be like to go back to England ? My brothers and sisters are all married, but they welcomed me as a rising naval officer, now they will take me in as a man to be pitied, and I'm hanged if I can stand pity, and then my club—being hoisted out of the Navy hoisted me out of my club. You can't think what a forlorn waif I shall feel in London, but I suppose I shall have to go there. I came here because everyone seems to want to come here, but I don't know if it isn't duller than Dalaga. At least it was till you came."

Anne smiled at him, and the thought came to her that she had not talked intimately to any man since Dicky Bullen left her.

" That is very nice of you. I have heard something about you, because Fred Pearce's letters were full of you and your doings, and Kitty always read them out to me. To meet you is like meeting an old friend. Besides—besides," she hesitated, and looked out over the sea, and then made up her mind. There was something in this man's face that attracted her, something

that set him apart in her mind from other men. "I was in Kitty's confidence and I know—I mean——" She hesitated.

"Do you mean," he said, "that you know why I was put ashore?"

"Yes," and she flushed violently, as he could see even in the moonlight. "Oh, don't imagine I think any wrong either of you or Kitty. I know—Kitty likes to amuse herself and you—and you—they ought to have made you an admiral."

"Thank you," he said simply. "I'm afraid I cut a very poor figure. Pearce tried to lick me into shape, as long as we were together, and since then I've been holding my own end up because I'm too proud to go under. A very poor reason, I suppose."

"It seems to me an excellent reason. You can't make all things right in a day," she said, speaking out of her own dearly bought experience. "Comfort comes silently, and when it has come we've ungratefully forgotten we want it."

They stood without speaking for some moments, and there is no greater test than that of silence. If a man and woman, though they have known each other but an hour, can stand silently side by side without feeling awkward they have advanced long strides on the way towards intimacy.

At last Cunningham said, speaking the simple truth as a lonely isolated life teaches a man to do, "If you and Mrs Pearce are going to stay on a little I think I shall stay too. And I hope you won't think," he added, "that I want to renew that serious flirtation. It is dead."

"With yesterday's seven thousand years," she quoted, and she wondered how Kitty would take it.

CHAPTER XIV

KITTY'S ATONEMENT

"Let us go hence, my songs; she will not hear.
Let us go hence together without fear;
Keep silence now, for singing time is over,
And over all old things and all things dear.
She loves not you or me as all we love her.
Yea, though we sang as angels in her ear,
She would not hear."

"ANNE, you have cut me out," Kitty was looking at her with mischievous eyes, "do you expect me to like it?"

They were having tea at a little table under the awning of the Café de Paris just outside the Casino. Opposite was a motor car put up to be raffled, and Cunningham had strolled over to find out the name of the maker, which Anne had expressed a wish to know.

Cunningham had devoted himself to them since that first evening, but Kitty would not have been the wise woman she was if she had not seen that not herself but Anne was the attraction. She was not jealous, although she pretended to be, for she had found other men who were pleased enough to talk to her, and this was the first time she had alluded to the matter openly.

Anne flushed painfully. They had been good friends, he had made her stay in Monte Carlo very pleasant, and she was loth to put a more serious construction upon his attentions, very loth indeed that even Kitty should connect his name with hers.

"Don't, Kitty, it is nothing; he is lonely, that is all."

Cunningham was coming back.

"Lonely! It's far more serious than the Vincent Brown affair."

"It is a Daimler," said Cunningham. He had taken tickets for them both long ago. "So if you win, Miss Lovat, I hope you'll give me a seat back to London. What was that, Mrs Pearce," remembering he was paying but scant attention to that little lady. "Vincent Brown, did you say?"

"Vincent Brown," said Kitty solemnly, "is a gentleman who wants to marry Anne."

"She means," said Anne, "he wants to marry somebody. I think he would prefer Kitty only she's unfortunately appropriated."

"You are both going to dine with me to-night, aren't you?" said Cunningham. "I asked Carter to make a fourth, and I thought we might dine at Ciro's if you don't mind."

"Don't mind?" said Kitty; "of course we shall love it. But I'm not sure if it's right to let you spend quite so much money over a dinner."

"I can't spend money in West Africa, so you might as well let me have a good time while I'm here."

"It is you who are giving him the good time, Anne," said Kitty, when she came into Anne's room to see if she were ready for dinner.

"No," said Anne, "no, no." She was beginning to be afraid lest Cunningham should disturb their present relations.

These ten days at Monte Carlo had been very pleasant; looking back she acknowledged to herself that never since the days when Dicky Bullen had come wooing her and she had listened for his footstep and felt her heart beat at his hand pressure, had she been so happy and

free from care. Cunningham had been interested in her work, she had found a friend and companion, and she did not want to lose him. She would be ashamed if he wanted anything more. True, he had weaned her thoughts from Dicky Bullen to a certain extent, but all it meant to her was the comfort stealing to her heart of which she had herself spoken. She could not be so light a thing as to love another man. She belonged to Dicky Bullen.

Kitty, however, was right. Monte Carlo in the season is rather a difficult place in which to find a lonely spot, but when they had finished dinner Cunningham suggested that they should stroll down to the Casino, and, Kitty abetting him, Anne found herself presently alone in the gardens with Cunningham, and he in faltering tones was proposing to her.

"I know I'm not worthy," he said, and his voice shook a little, "but if you could only take me, in spite of everything I would—I would——"

Anne put out her hand, and there was a sob in her voice.

"Please, please, oh, Mr Cunningham, don't. You don't know how much I think of you, indeed you don't, but don't talk to me like that. Please."

"But I love you," he burst out.

"No, no, oh, what are you saying? Indeed you don't." Anne was trembling and shaking, and if he had not been absorbed in his own bitter disappointment he would have noticed her agitation. "You will find somebody much better than I."

"But you are the one I want, there couldn't be anyone better than you," he said. "If I wait a little? Don't send me back without some hope."

It had rained slightly during dinner, and the smell

of the warm, wet earth came to her nostrils ; the dark branches of a Moreton bay fig-tree shut them out from the rest of the people in the gardens, through the feathery foliage of a casuarina she could see the lights of the Casino, and hear the strains of the band playing the seductive waltz from *The Merry Widow.* The whole night called, it was an ideal moment for love-making. He put out his hands, but Anne pushed them away. " No, no, I can't. I am more sorry than I can say. Oh, forgive me, I never dreamt that you would care. It is only a passing fancy, you know it is."

He drew himself up.

" Because I once fooled with a woman, and you got to know it——"

" That," she said hastily. " I am no child. I know no one could have behaved better than you did. You have done me a great honour. You mustn't think I don't appreciate it, but it is impossible."

" In time," he said, and there was the yearning of all the months of loneliness in his voice.

" Never," she said.

" Shall I take you to the Casino ? " he asked coldly.

" No, I must go back to the hotel," she said hurriedly, wondering if there were anything else she could say to him to show how much she thought of him, and honoured and admired him. He had asked for bread, and she had given him a stone, but there was nothing she could say unless she explained her position, and that she felt was beyond her.

An hour later Kitty found her lying on her bed staring up at the ceiling.

" So you said ' No ' to him ? "

Anne had no desire to betray him. " I came home because I had a headache," she said.

"Nonsense. Captain Carter and I saw 'will you' on his lips all dinner-time, and, Anne, you're fond of him."

"I am not fond of him," said Anne angrily. "How I hate this way of talking. A man can't pay a woman a little attention but you must immediately think of love and marriage. It is such bad form."

Kitty standing under the electric light before the looking glass was carefully arranging the hair on her forehead with a hairpin. "The least little suspicion of a soft curl suits me. Yes, the light in your room is much better than in mine. Bad form—oh, don't talk nonsense. Sometimes we come down to the elemental facts of life, and one of them is that once upon a time Joe Cunningham was immensely attracted by my pretty face, and when that brought him to disaster he went away where he couldn't even see a woman, and so when you came on the scene it was at a crucial moment, and he went down before you. Anne, he's had a hard time, and he is such a good fellow, don't spoil his life a second time."

Anne turned her face to the pillow. Kitty was a kindly woman, for all her flirting ways and her want of depth. She added to the gaiety of the world in a way in which Anne, with her intense earnestness, knew she could never do. God makes all sorts.

Kitty dropped the hairpin and stood looking at her. "Anne, why don't you marry him?"

"You know as well as I do," said Anne desperately.

"Not because you were engaged to Dicky Bullen? He's just promoted, so Captain Carter tells me."

At the back of her mind Anne wondered; she had actually forgotten to look at the Naval and Military Intelligence for the first time for many a long day, but she answered Kitty's question deliberately.

"It is ridiculous to call it an engagement. You know it was more than that."

"D—" began Kitty slowly, "I'm putting it in capital letters, and if I knew anything stronger to say I'd say it, because the occasion demands strong language—A—M—N Dicky Bullen. He has gone out of your life. You are nothing to him."

Anne sat up gravely. Once she would have wept passionately, but the day for tears was past. "I know I am nothing to him," she said simply, "but two wrongs do not make a right, and he is something to me. You can't undo the past."

"You know you'd have married Joe Cunningham if it hadn't been for Dicky, and, Anne, you know you're lonely. How can you condemn yourself to a miserable life for the sake of a man you will never see again?"

A dull dreary hopeless feeling stole over Anne, the years stretched away before her lonely, loveless; all companionship, all comradeship, all the joy of children and of mutual love, was denied her, but she had not faced life these last months in vain. She got up and put her hands on Kitty's shoulders.

"I know what I must do," she said, "but I must be alone now," and she pushed her cousin very gently but very firmly out of the room, and that little lady, much to her surprise, heard the door locked behind her.

"Well, of all the——" she began ruefully, twisting the rings on her fingers, and then she went downstairs, and writing a note sent it off to Cunningham's hotel to ask him to come and see her before he went to bed that night.

Cunningham received it as he was packing for a hasty departure. His thoughts were bitter, and as he read the little note he remembered how he had sworn

never to have anything to do with Kitty Pearce again. Had Anne Lovat confided in her? How like a woman! His humiliation was complete. He thought at first of leaving it unanswered, and then he looked at it again.

"I want to see you most particularly," she had written, "and before you think of refusing remember I owe you so much I can never repay that I should be the last person to write this to you unless I thought I could do you a real service," and it was signed, "Yours more gratefully than you will ever realise, Katharine Pearce."

She would be a brute if she were playing with him now, and before him too stretched lonely, uncompanioned years, so he went to the Hotel du Littoral and asked for Mrs Pearce.

She took him into the little reading-room, which was only tenanted by a fat German, whom she knew understood no English.

"It was nice of you to come," said Kitty, frankly suppressing all desire to make herself attractive, "but what have you been doing to Anne? I suppose I'm giving her away horribly, but when I came back from the Casino I found her in her room crying her eyes out." Kitty felt she ought to have cried.

She saw the light come into his sombre face. He put his hand up to his mouth and looked away from her.

"What did you do to her? She is such a dear. And you know, forgive me, Joe," she had not called him Joe since the old days in the garden at Lettingbourne, "but I did think it was a case with you two."

"It was with me," said Cunningham slowly, "but she won't have anything to do with me."

"Not have anything to do with you?" said Mrs

Pearce, as if she were the most surprised person in the world, " you're not telling me you proposed to her and she refused you ? "

" I'm afraid she did," said Cunningham, and he wondered if any man had ever felt a bigger ass than he did.

" But women don't cry their eyes out because they have refused a man they are not in love with."

" Did she do that ? " asked Cunningham, looking anxiously at the somnolent German, but a faint hope crept into his heart again.

" She did more, she took her dearest friend by the shoulders, turned her out of the room and locked the door upon her, because that friend ventured to ask what was the matter," which only shows how very difficult it is to tell the exact truth.

" If she won't have me I can't do anything more," said Cunningham, but the hopeless look was gone.

" I know what it is," she said, as if she were puzzling out a thing she had not quite grasped, " she's worrying over that silly engagement with Dicky Bullen."

" Dicky Bullen ? " asked Cunningham, in surprised tones, " but what has he to do with Anne Lovat ? "

" Oh, didn't you know she was engaged to him for nearly two years. How indiscreet I am ! But after all what does it matter ? Anne came back from Sicily a couple of years ago, just about the time when I brought you to grief, to my eternal shame," he did not even make a dissenting movement, he was so interested, " and instead of an ardent lover looking forward to matrimony she was met by a letter breaking the engagement. Anne was so hurt and ashamed that—oh, I expect that's what is stopping her. She doesn't like

to tell you about it and she won't marry you without."

"But—but," he looked at the woman at his side, and the German, waking up, thought he was intruding on a love scene, and made a hasty departure. "After all I made love to you."

"You did," Kitty laughed wholeheartedly, he was evidently not thinking of her, but weighing his own conduct and Anne's in the balance, "and Anne knows all there is to know about that." There was a flush on his cheek, but she went boldly on; she was as cool as a cucumber, none of her past offences troubled Kitty. "But she thinks a woman is different. Now I am pretty sure if she thought you knew about Dicky Bullen and would not refer to it, but want her just the same, she would be the happiest woman in the Principality, no, in all the United Kingdom."

"Dicky Bullen," repeated Cunningham, "Dicky Bullen! Such a good fellow as he is!"

"Such a blithering idiot, you mean," said Kitty sharply. "Dicky didn't know what was good for him. But I am ashamed of myself. I have given away my friend's carefully guarded secret. How could I?" and more than half in earnest she rose up, stamped her feet and made for the door.

Cunningham did not like to think that Anne had been engaged to Dicky Bullen for two long years, and all that that meant, and yet the sight of the little lady making swiftly for the door reminded him that he wanted Anne, and that Kitty was a link with her.

"Oh, stay," he said, "stay a moment," and no young lover could have spoken more ardently.

Kitty hesitated. "What's the good? I've said too much already. I don't know why I'm so foolish as to

mix myself up in other people's affairs. It was only that I felt I owed you something and——"

"I'm most grateful," said Cunningham hastily. "Tell me, if I let Miss Lovat know——"

"Oh, I don't know," said Kitty angrily. "You and she must manage your own affairs. I wish I hadn't interfered. She doesn't like to tell you she was engaged to Dicky Bullen, and she's crying her eyes out because she won't marry you unless she does. That's the way I read the case, but of course I may be all wrong. It wouldn't be the first time. Good-night, Mr Cunningham. I'm sorry I couldn't help you, but you know I meant well," and she swept herself out of the room and up to the lift, as if she were sick of the whole business, but in her own room she looked in the glass and laughed.

"Katharine Pearce, I congratulate you. My dear, you're a clever woman. I bet they marry and he never discovers the truth."

Cunningham, walking slowly back to his hotel in the glowing southern night, was making up his mind what he should say to Anne Lovat on the morrow.

CHAPTER XV

DUST AND SAND

> "But who now on earth need care how I live?
> Have the high gods anything left to give,
> Save dust and laurels and gold and sand?
> Which gifts are goodly but I will none."

THUS it happened that Anne, strolling next morning down towards the Casino between the stiff palms and the fresh green Australian poplars, found herself overtaken by Cunningham. He joined her and walked beside her. She grew red and white in turns and he looked awkward and uncomfortable.

"How wonderfully they keep these gardens," said Anne, striving for a safe subject. "Look at these beds of pansies, aren't they lovely?"

"Heart's-ease," said Cunningham. It was easy to be sentimental with Anne beside him. "Let us sit down a little while on the seat here."

She sat down. Some smartly dressed little French girls raced up and down, and an arrogant small American boy, after the Buster Brown order, constituted himself lord of all. Anne felt fairly safe. She was very anxious to get back to the old frank comradeship, and Cunningham could say nothing with those children within hearing.

"Poppa," said the small American, standing opposite them with his legs very wide apart and flicking a whip, "has gone down to the motor boats. I guess he's got

something on, and momma's in the Casino with Count—Count——"

"Never mind who the Count is," said Cunningham irritably, his nerves on the rack. "You run away and play, sonny."

"Wal, I guess these kids are just fools at it," said the confident young gentleman, looking with scorn at the very correct little French girls, "and Miss Knight there ain't no great shakes," pointing contemptuously to his governess hovering uncomfortably in the distance.

"Poor little boy, it must be dull for him," said Anne, who was hailing his presence as a godsend. He was breaking the ice for them and bringing the conversation into comfortably safe channels.

"Bless you," said the young gentleman, "don't go getting natchety about me. I guess I can take care of myself."

"I guess you can," said Cunningham. He did not like to ask Anne to come away to a more retired spot; besides, if the small American had taken a fancy to them it was on the cards he would volunteer his company. "I'll bet you sixpence you can't race round these gardens."

The young man did not stir, but settled his big sailor hat a little farther back on his head and looked at them out of a couple of keen blue eyes. "What's the good of sixpence here? I guess you're courting, ain't you?" said he.

Anne was less sure that she did welcome the little American, and many unexpressed views on the bringing up of children passed through her mind, but she could think of nothing to say and he went calmly on:

"Momma said you would make an elegant couple."

"Do you like ices?" asked Cunningham hastily, producing a two-franc piece.

"You can bet," said the young gentleman laconically.

"Suppose you were to take Miss Knight to the Café de Paris and treat her," suggested Cunningham.

"My! That's something like. You are a brick. I'll see you again presently," and he seized the silver and went bounding off to the unfortunate Miss Knight.

Cunningham looked a little uncomfortably at Anne, and thought how becoming a flush was on her pale cheeks. Her lips were red, but there were dark lines under her eyes, and he quite believed Kitty Pearce's story that she had been crying her eyes out the night before. Was it for him she was crying? The thought quickened the lonely man's pulses.

"Come away before he comes back," he said hastily, assuming she would want to be with him as much as he wished to be with her. "There's a clump of bananas in the gardens across the road. You know I promised to show you bananas. They're rather ragged, but bananas always are."

It sounded reassuringly commonplace after that terrible child's remarks, and Anne rose at once. He looked at her with an air of proprietorship. She was tall and slight, her white embroidered muslin was well and simply made, he thought such a dress would be suitable even for Africa, and her dark hair showing under her shady hat made a frame for her face.

"American children are terrible," she said, "poor Miss Knight. I hope she will enjoy her ice."

"Here's a comfortable seat, let us sit here," said Cunningham. The well-kept shrubs and trees planted together made a shut-in nook and a weeping elm shaded the seat from the sun, which was getting hot.

"The bananas," murmured Anne, with a little fear in her heart.

Cunningham dusted the seat with his pocket-handkerchief.

"We mustn't soil your pretty dress. There, I'm sure that's all right. Yes, I'll show you the bananas presently. I want to recover from that brat."

She did too, but what would she not have given to have blotted out last night. She liked this man so much, and they were worlds apart. If he were lonely so was she, but his loneliness might be cured, while hers was past mending.

"I want to speak to you," he said, after they had sat a moment or two in silence, "and I don't know how to begin."

"Then don't," she said. "Look at the sunshine making patterns on the path where it shines through the leaves. Isn't it delicious here?"

But a man is not to be turned from his purpose so easily.

"Anne," he said, and the use of her Christian name made her flush uncomfortably. "It is awfully presumptuous of me to speak to you again after last night. It is presumptuous of me to speak to you at all, because I know how little I have to offer, but I love you so."

"Oh, please," she pleaded, "if you only knew, it isn't presumptuous at all. I am honoured," and indeed she was, for she had been humbled to the dust and this man was restoring her self-respect, "but don't love me. We have been such good friends, and your friendship has been so much to me. Please don't spoil it," and, unwise woman that she was, because his calmness deceived her, she laid her hand for a moment on his arm.

It made his heart beat. "But I told you last night," he said, "that I am not satisfied with friendship. No—" for she moved a little, "listen to me, Anne, I won't ask much. When I compare my life and yours I know I have nothing to offer in comparison with what I am asking you to give up. But I am not asking yet. Let me try and win you. I will work, God, how I will work, and perhaps if I do, well, there will be no need to stay in Africa. I have a little interest and—and—if I could redeem the mess I made of things, and you would only say you would wait a little and give me a chance."

"Oh, don't," she pleaded. "If you knew how much I think of you and how I hate to hurt you. We have been such good friends."

"Don't you think," he said, "that friendship is a very good foundation for love? You say you like me, if I could make you honour and respect me——"

"But I do," she said eagerly.

"Then," he said, and a little eagerness crept into his carefully restrained voice, "don't you think that love might come? Don't answer me yet. We get on together capitally, you like talking to me about your books, your thoughts, your ideals, your plans for the future——"

"But that isn't love. Kitty has always been dinning into me that a man doesn't want companionship in a woman. You will find you don't. Love is different."

"Perfect love," he said, "is the finding of one's complement, mental and physical. I know you think I have no right to presume——"

She put out her hand, and there were tears in her voice.

"Don't be so humble. You are worth a far better woman than I, and you will find her."

"Never. I only want you. All my life I shall only want you. If only I had not made an ass of myself—spoiled my career. Anne, give me a spark of hope. I will wait years."

It was almost too much for Anne. How much she liked him! That reasoning side of our mind, which looks on and judges, told her that this was the man she ought to have loved, a man whose mind matched her own. She had been content to amuse Dicky Bullen, to shut off her intellectual side, to let it be a world apart into which the man she loved could never enter, but this man might have shared in it, together they would have walked hand in hand, climbed to heights that neither would have dared alone, but alas it could not be. She loved another man; her reason told her it was foolish and hopeless, but one does not get over such love as a woman like Anne gives in a year and a day. Sitting there she felt she would never get over it, and a great pity welled up in her heart for the man beside her, a great desire to help him if she could, even to her own hurt. He had suffered so much, would she let him suffer more, but to help him meant to brand herself. Could she do that? The colour rushed to her face and then ebbed away, leaving her cheeks whiter than her dress, and Cunningham thought she was going to yield. The sunlight coming through the flickering leaves made a pattern like lacework on her white embroidered skirt. He leaned over and laid a pleading hand on her knee.

"Anne, dearest, best."

A motor car was racing down the street, there was a shrill sound of children's voices, and the deep lower sound of men in conversation, and permeating all was the soft cooing of the pigeons eternally love-making on the eaves of the Casino.

She had held her head so high in the world. Could he sacrifice everything, even his friendship, to give the man she called her friend peace of mind?

It was the price she must pay for her love.

"Anne, I am not asking too much, am I?"

She put out her hands helplessly and he caught them.

"My dearest!"

For one brief moment a temptation came to Anne. She could not love this man, but she admired and liked him immensely, one half of her he satisfied entirely, and there came to her, as it must come to every lonely woman, the thought of the intense comfort of being loved and cared for by a man she could trust. Why not give herself to him and make the best of what cruel fate had left her? Dicky Bullen was nothing, he never would be anything to her. He had wanted to marry another woman. If he were free why should she not take the same freedom. For one moment she breathed quickly, and Cunningham leaned forward to draw her towards him, triumph and gladness in his heart, for she was surely yielding.

Then came thought for the man. The world judges man and woman differently: Dicky Bullen might marry and no questions would be asked about his past, but if Joseph Cunningham asked her to be his wife it was because he thought her above reproach. Dicky Bullen had done worse than desert her and leave her desolate, but how could she go to another man with the remembrance of the bond there had been between them. The thing was unthinkable. But need she tell him? Must she lower herself in his eyes and lose his friendship? Cunningham saw her features grow pinched and drawn, he drew her hands away and covered her face. Then he

lost hope and tried to stop the words he thought were coming.

"Don't say anything now. For pity's sake don't say 'no.' If you knew all it means to me."

She took her courage in both hands. He should not suffer if she could help it. Never mind the cost to herself. After all right is right.

"Listen," she said, looking away from him down the sunny garden, where all the spring flowers were rejoicing in the sunshine, "I must tell you the truth. What you will think of me God only knows, but I owe you the truth."

"Don't do anything that hurts you," he heard himself praying.

"I must. You would not take my answer last night."

"Because——"

But she hushed him with her outstretched hand.

"Did you ever hear my name connected with a man's?"

"No—yes—I heard you were engaged to someone once—what does it matter?"

She paid no heed.

"This was the cost I didn't count," she said barely above her breath, "but I must tell you now. An engagement you called it, and so did he. It was more than an engagement."

"You did not marry him," he said.

"Marry him? No, he wrote and told me he wanted to marry someone else. Oh, don't you understand? Must I put it into words?" She covered her face, and then clasping her hands in her lap looked straight before her and spoke low and distinct. "I have always said, you know, that people should be married on trial, and if they did not suit each other, they might part, and we—I—we——"

Anne! Anne Lovat! If anyone had dared whisper such a thing of Anne Lovat! His passion died as all the teaching of his youth rose up in judgment against her. For the moment he did not remember that she was sacrificing her self-respect for his sake. He was shocked beyond measure. The pigeons cooed on seductively.

"And you did not suit each other?" he heard a voice saying, and wondered if it could be his own.

"We did," she whispered, "at least I thought we did for two years; but we could not marry till he was in a better position. He—we were afraid of sordid poverty but—but—" she would spare herself nothing—"I was content to wait, I thought I should succeed, and then he wrote, and told me he wanted to be free because he wanted to marry another woman."

It was *his* mouth that was dry; *he* who seemed to have a difficulty in speaking. Another man——

For a moment there was silence, and Anne knew she had cured his hurt to her own undoing. If she had felt desolate before she felt doubly desolate now; she could not marry him, but it had been sweet to be wanted.

"I have told you," she said hesitatingly, as he did not speak, and his silence was hard to bear, "because—it isn't Church or State that makes the bond. He has thrown me away like an old glove, but I couldn't put another man in his place."

"You can't love a man who has treated you like that," he said fiercely, glad to be angry. "He is a blackguard."

She put her hands out helplessly. "You understand, don't you, and you will be my friend still."

"Don't," he said, "don't."

It seemed to him he had been hurt unspeakably.

Anne Lovat, whom he had thought above all other women! What was he to say to her?

She half rose, but he put his hand on her knee. "Sit still a minute."

Round the corner of the shrubs came Buster Brown. "My! here you are. I guessed you'd like to know that ice just touched the spot. Yes, sir, Miss Knight, she ain't no style, she didn't want me to thank you. My! Have you been making her turn on the water-works! I guess momma——"

But Cunningham had had about as much as he could stand. He rose up and, seizing the astonished youth by the shoulders, raced him down the garden till he found the troubled governess.

Into her limp hand he thrust a five-franc piece. "Take this child, and give him another ice, twenty ices, forty ices, only for God's sake keep him away from me if you value his life."

Then he turned back, and found Anne just rising from her seat.

"I—I have had as much as I can stand," she said pitifully, and Cunningham felt an ache in his heart at sight of her white, tired face. Life was a weary burden. He might have known there was no happiness in it for him.

"Come back to the hotel," he said gently.

At the door they met Kitty. She looked at them curiously.

"I must go and lie down," said Anne, and held out her hand to Cunningham. He took it, held it for a moment, then gravely stooped and kissed it. Even Kitty looking on could see nothing but respect in that kiss. When Anne was gone she turned to him a little uneasily.

"Well," she said, "did you take my advice?"

He looked over her shoulder into the sunlit street.

"She will not have me," he said in a level tone which Kitty could not fathom. "I'm going to America for the rest of my leave. At any rate there are no old associations there."

"In time," said Kitty, "in time. Shall I bring her out to Africa?"

There rose before his mind's eye the steaming tropical forest, the bungalow, with the wide verandah, and the empty rooms, and in those rooms the fair woman, as she was yesterday, before he had asked her to marry him, and opened the secret door in her heart. If they could only go back to yesterday! But we can never go back to yesterday; it is not possible.

"Do," he said mechanically.

"I will," said Kitty, "in reparation," and it never occurred to him that Kitty had any idea of the story that Anne Lovat had just told him.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SOUNDLESS YEARS

"Are not the years more wise,
More sad than keenest eyes,
The years with soundless feet and sounding wings?
Passing we hear them not, but past
The clamour of them thrills us."

How shall we count the passing of the years and the changes they bring? There are the moments when joy is so intense it is almost pain, but before we quite realise it, it has passed and become but a remembrance. There are the moments that are almost too terrible to be lived through, that sting even in remembrance, but before we have left off bracing ourselves to bear the pain it has passed into a dull throbbing, it lies behind us, and other interests needs must crowd it into the background.

This was what Anne found. Dicky Bullen had humiliated her and Joseph Cunningham had crushed her to the ground. The shame of that confession to him, it seemed, would never leave her; but a friendly, almost humble, letter from Cunningham, begging her to write to him occasionally, salved her hurt a little. Then, too, there was the stern necessity for hard work. Blessed be drudgery that leaves so little time for useless brooding, blessed be those small successes that raise us one step on the ladder, that give even the most lonely woman courage to go on.

The years passed for Anne. Analysing them she

would have said she had spent them in hard work, taking only the pleasures that came so directly in her path that she would have been courting martrydom to refuse them ; and the years improved her position, as intelligent work generally, thank God, does improve our position, and peace came to her long before she realised she had found it.

Kitty came into her flat one afternoon, and was greeted with delight.

"Oh, Kitty! I am glad to see you. The very person I wanted."

"Well, it isn't often we get exactly the person we want, is it," said Kitty, sitting down. "Hot scones, too. I was always fond of you, Anne, but it seems to bring out my appreciation when I find you have hot scones for tea. How idle and luxurious you look."

"Do hot scones stand for idleness or luxury," said Anne, pouring out tea, "because in my case, you know, idleness and luxury cannot go together."

"Then I suppose they stand for luxury. But you are idle at the present moment."

Anne nodded towards the typewriter and a pile of papers on the table at the other side of the fireplace.

"Five minutes ago you would have found me there, and there I have been, with the exception of a short interval for luncheon, since ten o'clock this morning."

"Not a minute off ?"

"Well, I played patience ten minutes after luncheon to get myself into the place where my thoughts were."

Kitty laughed. "I hope you found plenty of thoughts when you got there."

"I didn't," said Anne, with a little sigh. "Look at that waste-paper basket."

"Our rejected addresses," said Kitty.

"Alas, yes. Kitty, do you know anyone who knows anything about Tibet?"

Kitty put a little more cream in her tea, and ate a hot scone thoughtfully.

"Vincent Brown has just come back from Spitzbergen."

"Bother Vincent Brown! I hope he's engaged."

"He is. You missed your chance. He'll make a good husband."

"He was kind enough to tell me once," said Anne, "that a man wanted a wife for his hours of relaxation. He didn't want to be bothered at other times. I trust the lady knows her place and does not expect companionship."

"The majority of women are not as foolish as you, Anne," said Kitty severely.

"Never mind. You'd rather talk to me, you know you would."

"Oh, I would rather, of course, but I'm thinking about men."

"Well, I'm not generally neglected," said Anne, with a little smile. "Possibly I only meet men in their hours of relaxation. I know I only meet them in mine. It would be nice——" And she stopped suddenly. "Oh, Kitty, I wish you knew something about Tibet. These stories are not turning out right at all."

"What's the matter?" asked Kitty sympathetically.

"The matter at the present moment is, that I have three men in a sangar on a hillside in Tibet. The natives, I don't know whether they're Ladk, or Baltis, or Tibetans, and I'm awfully afraid they're not even bloodthirsty, but anyhow they have surrounded the sangar, one of the men is lame and the pass at the end

of the road is guarded. Will you tell me how they are to get out ? "

Kitty shook her head. " I can't imagine."

" Neither can I," said Anne, " and it is serious when I get into that condition. What do you think of an ascetic in a yellow robe that the keen wind outlines against his emaciated figure, held up between two great rocks, holding even in death a blue turquoise rosary between his long thin fingers.

" I like that," said Kitty, drawing a little closer to the glowing grate. " The colouring is good. Go on, what happened next ? "

" That's exactly what I want to know," said Anne, ringing for some more hot scones. " What did happen ? What could happen ? Picture to yourself a man lost on the tablelands or plateaux or whatever they are of Tibet and coming across a thing like that, what then ? "

" Yes, what then ? "

" Do you remember," said Anne, " how Jerome K. Jerome once wrote ' Novel Notes,' a series of the most lovely situations that he never worked out. I wish I had standing enough to do that. I could go on for two hundred thousand words, but, alas ! my public demands a story."

" Write about things you know."

" I've written about the young woman who set out to earn her own living, and who took to typewriting and dressmaking and cooking and lived in London. I've written about the charming farmer's daughter, who made butter in Somerset, and the rich young person who goes deerstalking in Scotland——"

" Which do you know best, deerstalking or Scotland ? "

"Kitty, which story do you think I made the most money out of?"

"I'm sure I don't know. A long story or a short one?"

"Oh, taking the amount per thousand words. Do you remember that short story of four thousand words I wrote about the Gobi desert?"

"Yes; Major Mitchell loved it. He said there wasn't a fact right in it, and it was as much like Labrador as the Gobi."

"I must meet Major Mitchell," said Anne thoughtfully. "I should like to know where it was wrong, because America gave me one hundred dollars for it and *Audrey's Magazine* gave me ten guineas, and here comes a note from *The New Idea* in Australia saying they'll give me three guineas for the Australian serial rights, so it seems I can afford to write about things I don't know, only I don't like doing so. Adventure stories are not in my line. I wish the editor of *The Piccadilly* didn't prefer them. My soul yearns for character studies, but the public will have a story."

"Which shows the public's sense," said Kitty. "However good a character study may be it is all the better for having an exciting story behind it. If you must write adventure stories why don't you go where adventures are to be found?"

"And where may that be, pray? Remember my purse is painfully limited."

"Come out with me to the Coast and stay with Fred."

"Kitty! Are you thinking of becoming a devoted wife?"

"I am a devoted wife in my own way. I'm sure Fred would tell you he was perfectly satisfied with me."

"I'm sure he would," agreed Anne, "but whether it would be the truth is quite another question."

Kitty screwed up her eyes and looked keenly at her cousin.

"There we reach my limitations. You think I'm nice and kind and thoughtful and sympathetic until Fred comes on the scene and then you take a very different view of me."

Anne considered a moment. "Kitty dear, you have been the best of friends to me, so it does seem horrid to say I do not think you are exactly the best of wives. I wonder why it is."

"I have a faithful husband," said Kitty, "I know that. And you—with all your grand theories—haven't a husband at all."

It was cold outside, the first nip of winter was in the air, and Anne stooping forward piled more coal on the fire. "Don't remind me of my disabilities; but it does seem a pity that a perfect husband shouldn't have a wife who goes hand in hand with him."

"We suit each other perfectly," said Kitty placidly. "A man who yearned over me would simply be a nuisance; and I can be a proper sort of wife quite as often as is good for him. If you want to be yearned over, you ought to marry Joe Cunningham."

"It is manners," suggested Anne, "to wait until you are asked."

"Anne! That little fiction! Isn't that a letter from him I see on the mantelpiece?"

"It is," said Anne, "would you like to read it? It is a very nice, interesting letter, and I am glad he writes to me occasionally, but the contents might be shouted from the housetops."

"He's making a great success of things out there,

Fred says. The powers that be have actually sent him back to Dalaga three times running because he understands the people so well and they trust him. He put down a little rising on the Ashanti border, and though he is a civilian they gave him a medal. Anne, you can't think how thankful I am for his success, though you do think me heartless."

"I should be ungrateful if I thought you heartless," said Anne. "What should I have done without you?"

"Well, I do think I'm unique," said Kitty, with a little air of satisfaction. "I'm not only friends with Joe Cunningham, but I actually want to see him married to you. You would suit each other beautifully. You're both a little cracked on the subject of ideals. Joe recovered from me quite easily, but you——"

"Never mind about me," said Anne, and she gathered the tea-things together and put them on the tray. There had been a time when she wanted to talk about Dicky Bullen, when she sought Kitty because she was the only person with whom she could talk about him, but those days had passed. Sometimes the futility of our desires comes forcibly home to us. Why speculate, why wonder, why long? Dicky Bullen had gone out of her life. He had not married, as she knew, and she wondered at it; certainly it was not love of her that kept him single, for he had never sought her again, nor given her the least hint that he had not forgotten her utterly. In the four years that had passed since he had left her she had grown to be bitterly ashamed of the love she had poured out for him so unstintingly, and she hid it away in her heart even from Kitty. He had evidently meant what he said when he wrote that he wanted to be free, and she could

not go on loving a man who cared absolutely nothing for her, who had dragged her down to the lowest depths and left her there. Even now she thought she had a hurt that would last her to her dying day, and asked herself sometimes despairingly if the pain would never cease. Had she not paid to the uttermost farthing for her lapse, and yet when Kitty asked : " You don't care for Dicky Bullen still ? " she could not answer " No."

" Anne, you simply can't care still."

" Oh, Kitty, don't talk about him."

Kitty looked at her curiously. " You have forgotten my kisses and I have forgotten your name."

" I have not forgotten his kisses," said Anne slowly.

" And Joe Cunningham would——"

" Kitty, you must not couple my name with Mr Cunningham's. Last time he came home we grew to be the best of friends. I never had a friend before who was so thoroughly interested in my work and gave me such pleasant times. One of the few pleasures in my life is the thought of Joe Cunningham, for pity's sake don't spoil it, for a friend is not to be picked up every day. There is hardly anything I could not talk to him about."

" He spent his last day at home with you, didn't he ? " said Kitty.

" Well, why not ? " said Anne.

It was on the tip of Kitty's tongue to say that when a man and woman can spend seven hours in each other's company without getting weary the friendship is becoming a little desperate, but she was a wise woman and she refrained from showing her wisdom.

" Certainly you are free to do as you please," she said. " Your friendship seems quite a good sort of thing, a great deal better than many a woman's love. But why don't you make a husband of your friend ? "

"I have told you before, Kitty," said Anne, "I can never marry anyone because of the old bond."

"You don't count it a bond still?"

"Of course I do. Time makes no difference."

Kitty threw up her hands.

"Well, I prescribe change of scene. You haven't had a holiday this year, come out with me and stay with Fred."

Anne hesitated.

"We might see Joe Cunningham."

"The expense," said Anne.

"The expense won't be very heavy. Two together would make it cheaper."

"I might write a real adventure story," said Anne.

"Of course you might. Entirely new scenes would be good for you."

"Well," said Anne, "Mr Cunningham said there was plenty of material for stories, and perhaps I could do a good book of travel. Travel books are always written as they should not be. I think I'll go."

"Nothing like having a good opinion of yourself," mocked Kitty good humouredly, but privately she thought Anne was making a mistake with regard to her feelings for Dicky Bullen.

CHAPTER XVII

"THIS NEW WORLD THAT IS THE OLD"

"She sees old loves that drifted,
She knew not why,
Old loves and faded fears
Float down a stream that hears
The flowing of all men's tears beneath the sky."

'I CAN'T wake up," said Kitty sleepily, burying her 'ace in the pillows as if she would shut out the garish ight.

Anne drummed her fingers against the wire of the neat safe in which Kitty's bed was, but it was bolted on the inside and she could not reach her cousin. The not sun of Africa poured through the five windows of the great empty room, there was a low humming of nsects in the air and the noise of negro chatter from the servants' quarters came to their ears in a subdued murmur.

"But Kitty, it is nearly tea-time, and Captain Connor has sent his orderly to say he is expecting another guest."

Kitty roused herself enough to open the door of the neat safe and Anne came in and seated herself on the bed.

"Who is the guest? A man, of course?"

"Of course. As far as I could make out from Benjamin he has arrived unexpectedly on the little cargo steamer that is just come in and Benjamin says he's going up to Mr Cunningham. If so——"

Then Kitty sat up.

"How fortunate! A friend of Joe Cunningham's! Then he's bound to be nice, and it will be so much better to have a white man with us. I wasn't quite happy about being turned over to the tender mercies of an orderly. Anne," looking at her, "you have put on your best Shantung silk."

Anne looked down a little consciously. "It seems half the place is coming to tea. I thought——"

Kitty drew back a little and looked critically at her cousin. "My dear, it's most becoming. You can go down to tea with a quiet mind. They will certainly say you are a good-looking woman. I'm telling you now because it's so much more satisfactory for you than if I waited till afterwards. I like to know when I look pretty."

"So do I," said Anne.

"Well, you look pretty now. Quite as if Africa agreed with you."

"Do get your things on. You've been asleep since luncheon."

"I have a vague idea," said Kitty, "that the valuable Jonas came in and asked me some question about my clothes, but I'm sure he did not get much satisfaction out of me."

"What are you going to put on?"

"Pale blue, I think. It is the most suitable for a fair woman, and it looks cool, whatever it may feel, but nothing feels cool."

Anne smiled lazily as Kitty made for the curtains behind which her dresses had been hung. "It is hot, I suppose, but, Kitty, I'm enjoying myself."

"Of course you are. You have never been of so much importance in your life before. The Government

does not encourage women here, so when one does come along she has the time of her life. Oh! what has that imp of darkness done with my dresses?"

Kitty had drawn back the curtains, only to reveal the plaster of the wall, with the distemper coming off in patches, and a row of empty hooks.

"Look in your boxes," suggested Anne, pointing to the modest uniform trunks in which Kitty had stowed her wardrobe for land travel; but the boxes were empty save for a few pocket-handkerchiefs, and the two women looked at one another in dismay. Kitty had on a rather attractive blue *crêpe* kimono with black and gold butterflies all over it, and she looked down at her small self doubtfully.

"I can return your compliment truthfully," said Anne, "and I feel sure the man from the cargo boat out in the surf there will be duly impressed, but we'd better find out what has become of your clothes." She looked round but there was no bell, and she went outside and put her head over the banisters—Fort Alim had been settled many hundred years and all the houses, even the native ones, had two storeys—and called "Jonas, Jonas." A small boy of twelve, as black as her boots, popped upstairs. "Yes, ma."

"Jonas," said Kitty severely, "where are my clothes?"

Jonas dropped out of the window without another word, as if in a moment of agonised repentance he had chosen that way of committing suicide; then they looked out too, and saw he had only dropped on to a roof a foot or two lower down, but on the corrugated iron of that roof, and on pieces of string stretched from nails in one wall to nails in another, at right angles, displayed fully to the public gaze, with

nothing left to the imagination, was Kitty's entire wardrobe.

"Oh!" gasped the owner, as her eyes fell on a row of her shoes tilted up in such fashion that they presented their soles to the admiring gaze of anyone in the roadway below. She drew back hastily, for she caught sight of two distinctly European forms coming towards the old fort. "Oh, you villain!"

"That be proper palaver," said Jonas aggrievedly, peering up from under a row of fluttering nightgowns.

"Oh, take those skirts from him, Anne," said Kitty resignedly. "I shall never be able to face those men. I believe it was Captain Connor himself and the new man who's going up with us. Well, none of my clothes will be new to them."

"They'll look different with you in them," consoled Anne. "There, run away, Jonas, I'll help missus to dress. She no savvy dis country fashion."

Jonas departed, and presently the two women came down the stair which opened into the great sitting-room. A table was laid close to the broad low window, that, wide open, barely separated the room from the verandah, two or three basket chairs with cushions in them were placed round it, and from them rose up several men. There was Captain Connor, the commissioner, an old naval man; Mr Hoskins, a lieutenant commanding the portion of the Mahogany Coast Regiment quartered at Fort Alim; a couple of doctors, whom they had met at luncheon; the commissioner from Lesondi, and—Anne felt her heart stand still and her feet and hands grow icy cold though it was six degrees north of the equator for there, standing beside Captain Connor, in a tweed shooting suit, his bronzed face looking faintly troubled was the man she had thought of perhaps every day for

the last four years, and only given up hope of seeing when she was safely out of England—Commander Richard Bullen. There was no mistaking him, his clean-cut features, his slight, strong figure, his brown hands, the way he had of taking his lower lip between his teeth when he was agitated or troubled. Dicky, come from the ends of the earth to disturb her, just when she thought she had found peace.

Captain Connor turned towards them smiling.

"Ah, here you are. You know Mr Powell from Apeofouti? Yes, you came down in the steamer with him and these others," he indicated them with his hands. "And Captain Bullen——"

For once Kitty was not ready. She stole a swift glance at Anne, but Anne, though her face was white, had pulled herself together. How should a woman meet the man who has thrown her away as if she were so much waste goods, no longer needed, and left her a thing despised and forlorn? The question rushed through her mind, but there was only one thing to be done, and she did it.

"Oh, we both know Captain Bullen," she said, wondering if her voice sounded natural. "I do not think he can quite have forgotten me, although it is years since we met."

"Dicky!" said Kitty, recovering herself, "fancy, meeting you here, of all places in the world; what brings you here?"

"What on earth brings you?" Dicky found a surprised voice that made the other men laugh.

"Miss Lovat and I," said Kitty, "have come out to stay with Fred. She knew I'd never dare face Africa alone, so like a dear she came with me. He's my cousin, my long-lost cousin, Captain Connor, and he hasn't

been to see me for over four years. Don't you think he ought to be ashamed of himself ? "

" People have an aggravating way of turning up in the most unexpected places," said Mr Hoskins, very pleased with himself, " the long arm of coincidence——"

" It is a bit of good luck," said Connor, moving up a chair for Anne, and mutely asking Kitty to pour out tea, " for Bullen is going up to Cunningham, and he'll be able to see you right to your husband's door. I didn't like the idea of your travelling with only an orderly, and this settles it very nicely."

" Oh, very nicely indeed," said Kitty, with a ring of sarcasm in her voice that possibly only Anne and Bullen caught. " Now here I take all you gentlemen into my confidence. I'm going to make Dick suffer severely for having neglected me so long."

" You can't treat me worse than I deserve," Bullen said courteously, " but you must make excuses for a poor, penniless naval officer," and he looked at Anne.

Oh yes, she would make excuses, as she had done all these years. Perhaps no one had ever sympathised more deeply with him than the woman he had deserted. She did not think he had done it lightly. He had suffered too, but the difference between them was that she would have faced any pain, even the suffering and sacrifice entailed by an illicit love, rather than hurt him, while he had had no hesitation in flinging her off when the tie pressed a little heavily. Anne seemed to be going over the long waiting again, the hopes and the fears and the longing, while she turned and talked lightly to Dr Sladen and young Hoskins, and the long wash of the African surf beat heavily against the beach. " He is come, he is come," cried the waves, as they thundered in. " At last, at last," they sighed, as the backwash

ebbed out. "And your hopes are dead, dead, dead," cried the next great roller that broke.

"No, you mustn't say you like Africa, oh, fie! Miss Lovat, fie! Think of us poor fellows condemned to stay here. It is all very well for you to come on a visit; but how would you like it if in four years you had not had a year of your wife's society, and the children stood away, and looked upon you as a stranger."

"Ah, yes, it is hard, I know," said Anne sympathetically, "all lives have their own hardships." The surf was echoing her words and her eyes wandered up and down Dick Bullen's figure. Just the very same as when he had sat in her chair, and had taken his tea from her, the turn of his strong hand, as he handed the plate of dessert biscuits to Kitty, his very attitude, as he crossed his legs and settled himself back against the cushions, were familiar to her. She knew he was not quite at his ease as he put a hand first in one pocket, then in the other, and ran his fingers through his hair.

"And what brings you here, Dick?" asked Kitty, "if a poor forlorn cousin may venture to ask a simple question."

"I'm on leave," he said absently, "half pay, worse luck; no chance of a ship this side of six months, so I'm putting in time doing a little shooting, and I'm on my way to stop with old Potiphar——" He stopped, and Kitty knew he was remembering that old flirtation of hers.

"You mustn't call Mr Cunningham by that silly name here," she said, smiling. "It doesn't sound well in a land of dusky beauties. Now there's a man who has done well for himself. Provincial Commissioner already, and the most trusted Government official in the Eastern Territories of the Mahogany Coast—they're

called eastern, I understand, because they're west; most things are topsy turvy in Africa. He's got a medal: he was showing it to Anne and me last time we met him, and they whisper he may be the next Governor of Gambia. I believe it is on the cards. Fred is going to take us to stay with him."

"Which of the three D.'s brought him out here, I wonder," said Dr Sladen.

That roused Dicky, and he wheeled round indignantly.

"Joe Cunningham is the best chap in the world. There isn't a suspicion of drink, debt or divorce about him, you can bet. He was shied out of the Navy because he struck that beast O'Flaherty, and O'Flaherty, thank God, Who is sometimes just, is an admiral on half pay now, with about as much chance of hoisting his flag as I have of getting into heaven."

"Bravo, Dicky," said Kitty. "I believe I'm going to forgive you your sins of omission and commission against me."

"I hope you will," said Connor, "because it'll take you all of thirty-five days to reach Obusadi, and if you're going to keep Bullen in a chastened frame of mind all the way there it'll be rough on him, won't it, Miss Lovat?"

"I think," she said, and her face felt stiff, "we must contrive to forget past offences and take up life just after the fashion it is presented to us in Africa."

"Vantage to the ladies," said Hoskins.

"For once in a way," said Kitty quickly, looking at Dicky Bullen, "but we live most of our time in England, so the advantage will be with you in the end. Captain Connor, impress on your henchman we want a little more hot water."

The tea grew strong while they waited, and Captain Connor hailed over the back verandah angrily. Then it came—in a washhand jug with a broken spout, and Anne relieved the tension on her nerves by going off into a peal of laughter.

"Oh, don't be cross, Captain Connor. It is delicious. We want something different from England."

"I declare," said Connor, "you never know where you have these coloured people."

When they went upstairs to dress for dinner Kitty followed Anne into her room.

"Anne?" she said questioningly.

Anne put her hands on her shoulders. Kitty had been a good friend to her. "Oh, Kitty," she said. "How thankful I am you made me work. At least I have a place of my own in the world."

"There speaks the twentieth century," said Kitty soberly.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

"The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

"Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new, it hath been already of old time, which was before us.

"There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after."

KITTY PEARCE was right, more right than she herself knew. The twentieth century has brought a change in the status of women, of which the rampant desire for a vote is only one simple manifestation.

In the olden days, when we baked and brewed and spun and wove at home, the woman who directed and those who carried out her directions were part of a community which could not do without them, and the feeling that they were essential to the well-being of those around them lent to womanhood a dignity which the rapid advance of machinery in the early Victorian days threatened to undermine.

Thoughtful minds had foreseen this, and desperate efforts were made to maintain the same position; but old conditions pass, and the woman who insisted on doing at home things that could be done much better elsewhere placed herself at once in the category of unwanted workers. A fatal action which for some considerable time had a curious effect on the progress of the nation. The weeping, fainting heroines of Dickens and Thackeray were an outcome of it. To work was to be

an object of pity, the pity that borders very closely on contempt. "The dignity of motherhood for women," cried the feminine party, forgetting, as they do still, that there is a flaw in their reasoning, for they only mean legalised motherhood, and they cannot teach a girl to desire and fill her life with that for which she may not even ask. It has been left to the twentieth century to show that the ideal mother is the capable woman, strong, tender, patient, the working woman, the woman of the world with the knowledge gained from taking her place in that world, from going down into the arena to strive.

As a matter of fact, in spite of the cruel ban of public opinion, of the pity—more potent than ridicule—that was the lot of the woman who sought to make a place for herself, even in the early days, there were many capable women who fought an uphill fight against the theory that a make-believe work was all that was required of a woman, that idle feminine hands, idle feminine lives, were the ideal; and with the new century the change has come.

The unfortunate women—and there are thousands of them in England—who lead careful, guarded home lives are being left to die in lonely, grey, unwanted maidenhood. The prophet of old was wrong—there is a new thing under the sun. It is the women who go out and work, and add to the wealth of the community, who marry and bear children.

Even if they do not marry, their gain is great. Anne felt this now. True she had gambled with her life as she would never have dared to gamble under the old *régime*, and she had lost. Love was so much that the world was grey and cold without it, but she had her work, and her work had given her power, and power is by no

means to be despised. Honour to the twentieth century!

"You'll want to speak to Dicky," Kitty had said.

"No," said Anne, with a sudden shrinking, "no, no." For a year, for two years she had longed intolerably, then she had desired, then she had thought she would like to speak to him face to face, to have matters explained, and now that the opportunity had come she knew, with a sudden surprised feeling she could not explain to herself, that she shrank from it. The past was dead, let them bury it decently. She was ashamed it should be dead, after all her bitter sorrow, her passionate vows—yet it was dead. The man himself had killed it. The old feeling might return, she half hoped it would, but he must not touch on it yet, not yet.

Next day they took train to Lesondi, Dicky Bullen, his servant, and the two women, attended by the small and faithful Jonas, and the entire population of Fort Alim, at least the part that counted, came to see them off.

"It isn't often we get a glimpse of sunshine," said Connor sentimentally, as he hung over the carriage door and looked at Kitty.

"I thought," she said, "you suffered from too much of it."

"Real sunshine," he said, mopping his damp forehead. "Thank goodness you'll have to come through here on your way back. Bullen, you've got to take great care of them. You are a lucky dog."

Bullen assented, but he was not quite sure in his own mind that he was. Anne was charming, he had never denied that, but he felt awkward when he thought of the explanatory half-hour that was yet to come. He supposed it would come at Lesondi. It would be unpleasant,

but since Fate had so ordained he felt he had to put up with it.

It did not come at Lesondi. On the way up they were always three, very often four or five, for men got in and travelled a little way up the line, just to meet the women and ask them what they thought of Africa, and at Lesondi there were many to welcome them, and speed them on their journey north-west. At last, however, they were fairly out in the bush, a long line of carriers with baggage and camp equipment on their heads and three hammocks for the white people.

"I won't be left alone with him," declared Anne in the privacy of their tent that first night. "Kitty, it will be so easy. Don't leave me alone with him. Be kind, Kitty, be kind."

"And do you remember how desperate you were, Anne, and how you used to say you'd give all you possessed just to see him."

"He did not come, and that was yesterday—a hundred years ago. Now we will each go our own way."

A long wailing cry came through the tree tops and Kitty jumped up horrified, and clutched Anne. "Oh, Anne, Anne, somebody is being killed. Anne, Anne, I knew I should hate the bush. Oh, what shall we do!"

It came again, and then a cheery voice called out: "Kitty, Miss Lovat, don't be afraid. It's only a sloth. He relieves his feelings that way when the world gets too much for him."

"Miss Lovat." It would have gone to her heart once that he should call her Miss Lovat, but that, as she had said, was yesterday, and another feeling had taken the place of longing, a feeling of shame that she cared no longer; she had given so much, and now she did not care.

This feeling of shame grew upon her as they advanced. The days were wonderfully alike. They rose at dawn in the grey damp mist of an African morning and dressed and came out, and had their breakfast in the open with the golden sun tearing away the wreaths of vapour that hung about the tree tops. It seemed to take the entire community to furnish their breakfast, including various visitors from the nearest village.

"I declare," said Kitty, "it takes at least thirty people to make every piece of toast I put in my mouth."

"I decided I had better not look," said Anne.

"Oh, it's all right," said Bullen. "I see the kitchen table scrubbed down every morning, so I know it's clean."

"I'm of an inquiring turn of mind," said Kitty. "I must see everything. Do I like it or don't I, I wonder?"

But Anne had no doubt on the subject, she knew she liked it very much. In time possibly it may pall, but for the novice there is great delight in a hammock journey in the tropics. There is the coolness and the freshness of the early morning, and if it is stifling hot by the midday halt there is always the wonder and mystery of the dense-growing forest and the easy motion gives that comfortable sensation of getting on without undue exertion that is exactly suited to tropical Africa. Bullen often got out of his hammock and walked. At first he forged resolutely ahead, asking the other two cheerily if they were all right as he passed, but at length the moment came when Anne found he had dropped back and was walking beside her hammock.

The carriers understood very little English, and the white people regarded them as so many machines. The women had had their hammocks made sitting fashion,

like arm-chairs, and Anne's head as she was carried was not much below the level of the man beside her.

She drew a long breath, but her heart was not beating unduly, not as it had done for so many months and years at the very thought of such a meeting; and she was sorry. Why had he not come when she wanted him so intensely, when the very thought of the touch of his hand, of the sound of his voice, had sent the blood careering madly through her veins? Why had he let the days and the weeks and the months and the years work their wicked will? It would have been better to have loved him still, and as he walked there, swishing at the palm stems with his cane, she wished she had been faithful to her ideal even though he had forgotten. She found herself remembering that he had not understood her work, and that she would never have dreamt of going to him for criticism or praise. Her work—her work—why did she keep thinking of her work now? She had never thought of it before when he was with her, but now as he walked beside her it seemed to come between them. Such things are not vital in the face of real love? Oh, but there is no bond so strong as a community of interests, no love so binding as that which goes hand in hand with the work which each understands; such a bond will hold when all else has failed. For a little while he kept silence and then,

"Anne," he said, "Anne."

"Yes," she said, and her voice sounded faint and far away.

"Anne, are you never going to speak to me?"

"But I have spoken to you."

"You know what I mean."

"But it was you who put me out of your life, Dicky.

I would have been faithful—I would never have thought——"

Then silence fell between them, because, after all, unless they both desired the renewal of their relations, there was nothing to say; and love was dead. Anne had known the first moment she looked at him that Dicky Bullen had long ceased to care for her, and he knew that his draconian treatment had done its work.

"Anne," he said, "I'm sorry."

She did not know whether to laugh or to cry—to have taken the best she had and destroyed it, and then to say feebly, "I'm sorry."

"Shall I say, so am I, or I forgive you, or what?" and she felt she would rather have loved him and been faithful though he cared nothing.

"Say I haven't hurt you much?"

"I will say it if you like," she said slowly. "But surely that is putting a very low valuation on yourself. You have left a scar, but I think—I think the wound has healed."

Dicky drew a long sigh. "I am glad," he said, and Anne felt more humiliated than she had ever done in her life before. She had wasted her love on this man who had not understood what it meant nor what he was throwing away.

"We can be good friends," he said.

She looked at his regular profile, at the gleam of his white teeth between his clean-shaven lips, at the straight nose; at the frank honest eyes; how she had admired his beauty, and rejoiced in his strength; and now these things were nothing to her.

"Suppose we say 'begin to be friends,'" she said slowly, and he seized the olive branch eagerly.

"Thank you," he said, "thank you," and Anne

wondered that he did not understand that friendship between those who have been lovers is impossible. She was not even indifferent yet; she was too humiliated and ashamed.

"Go and talk to Kitty now. I'm tired."

"Well, God bless you, Anne; you are a good and generous woman."

"No, I am not. No woman is generous when she loves or has loved. Her pride might keep her silent, but silence is all you could expect."

He meditated on the subject a moment. "You never answered my letter. Was that because you were proud?"

"Yes."

"And when was it 'has loved'?" he asked a little curiously.

"Not in the first year, and not in the second, but I suppose the seed was sown when you wrote me that letter, and it grew and grew, and I never knew it had blossomed till I met you at Fort Alim."

"Oh!" said Bullen.

"Am I too frank? But you asked, and you would not be pleased if I told you I still loved you."

"Yes—no——"

"Suppose we bury in oblivion a subject we are both bitterly ashamed of," said Anne quickly. "Go and talk to Kitty."

At this moment they turned a sharp corner in the narrow path and Bullen drew a quick breath of relief. "Here's the village," he said, "and we can get our dinner."

CHAPTER XIX

SHADOWS BEFORE

> "This year knows nothing of last year;
> To-morrow has no more to say
> To yesterday."

"So your wife's coming out at last, Pearce?"

Pearce took his pipe out of his mouth and nodded. "Rather a care, you know. After all, it's no place for a woman yet. I'm glad she's bringing Anne Lovat. That young woman has her head screwed on the right way. Of course I shall be awfully glad to have Kitty, but I don't know whether she is exactly suited to West Africa."

"You never can tell," said Cunningham. "It's only a little over four years since they dumped me here first, and did you ever see anybody more unsuited than I was? And yet——" He looked round him with a little laugh.

"Provincial Commissioner at Dalaga after all! Ah, but you had the makings of a good man even when you cussed your fate and got drunk."

"Only once," said Cunningham, "but it's made me merciful to others."

"Which means, I suppose, that you considered that ass, young Cosway, your D.C., had a bad go of fever, when he was verging on D.T., and what excuse did you make for sending the doctor down?"

"Porter was a good chap," laughed Cunningham, "but he'd done fifteen months, and he was sick to see

his wife and the first born. I'd have been a brute to make him wait for his relief. I suppose we can worry along under your tender care till the new man comes up. I expect him along with an old messmate presently. They oughtn't to be more than three weeks now."

"I'm sixty miles away remember," said the doctor, "and I ought to go back to-morrow if you've got all the information you want. Mitchell doesn't much appreciate me when I'm there but he'll wear himself to fiddlestrings in my absence. He's like a big schoolboy. He won't even do for Anne to flirt with, for he's married, not," he added conscientiously, with a sudden remembrance of his wife's confidences on the subject of Joe Cunningham's affections, "that, to do her justice, she is much given to that sort of thing."

Cunningham sat silent for a little.

"When do you expect them?"

"Hanged if I know. My last mail went astray, the Lord knows why, and the telegraph line has been down for the last fortnight. I rather wish, Cunningham, thinking things over, they were not coming."

"The telegraph line can so easily come to grief," said Cunningham. "I don't think much of that. A couple of tornadoes like we had last night would account for it. In fact it has accounted for it in several places. But there is something a little wrong. There have been very few cases coming into court lately; however, I hope I've settled that."

"How do you account for it?"

"There's been some rumour of a hut tax to be imposed by Government. I traced it—by the way, do you remember our old friend Kudjo Mensa?" Pearce nodded, "well, I traced it to him. I cannot lay hands

on the man, but I'm always met by rumours of Kudjo Mensa and his doings. There have been outbreaks of the Rewah Fetich again here and there, Kudjo Mensa; talk of a hut tax, Kudjo Mensa again. Kudjo Mensa all along the line, and never a sign of the gentleman himself. I haven't much liked it and, upon my word, if we could stop your womenfolk coming up I don't know that I wouldn't do so."

"Oh, they may as well come on now," said Pearce, "besides, as I don't know where they are, I can't very well stop them. But the place has been quiet for years. There is really nothing to fear."

"I don't suppose there is," said Cunningham, knocking the ashes out of his pipe against the verandah post. "The only thing that troubled me was so few people coming into court, but really, young Cosway was such an ass, drunk—I mean fever—so often that the natives were out of sympathy. I expect it will be all right now. I've done my best to explain. The people round here seem to be looking upon it as a sort of duel between Kudjo Mensa and myself, the best man to win." He smiled. "One thing is quite certain, we must catch Kudjo Mensa, and make him do the time he missed four years ago, and the little extra he's earned by dodging it."

"A duel between you and Kudjo Mensa, eh?" repeated Pearce thoughtfully. "You remember, Cunningham, you took his favourite girl."

It was evidently a thing the Provincial Commissioner did not care to remember.

"We all have our unregenerate days," he said a little uncomfortably. "I wish I hadn't. But after all that's a thing that can't make a hap'orth of difference

to a negro. Heaps of women must have passed through his hands."

"But I suspect," said Pearce, "it was particularly galling to an educated man like Kudjo Mensa to be cut out by a white man. It would explain any particular bitterness."

"Well, I really don't think there's anything to worry about," said Cunningham, "the Rewah Fetich keeps bursting out spasmodically, and I'm perpetually putting it down, but, bless you, it takes a lot to make the natives rise. We mayn't be the wisest Government in the world, but on the whole we deal fairly by them, and they are quick to recognise the fact."

"I don't like the rumours of a hut tax rising," said Pearce. "Mitchell was complaining there wasn't much doing in his court, but I never set it down to that."

"His court too," said Cunningham uneasily. "Look here, Pearce; at the first sign of anything wrong you'd better come in, you and Mitchell and your womenkind. Don't wait for me to send, come. Not that I think there will be. It's only this hut tax rumour is making unpleasantness, and every day I have a proclamation made that there will be no hut tax, every day I send round to a different village to tell the chiefs that there is no fear of such a thing. I think we're all right."

"I think so too," said Pearce. "Personally, I fancy it's having the wife coming that's making me nervous. A week or two and I'll have settled into the old groove, for Kitty, bless her, isn't the woman to make worries in a household. Everything's smooth where she is."

"Your wife certainly is one of the most charming companions in the world," said Cunningham. He was beginning to realise that he was a successful man, and could even afford to forgive her for sending him out to

Africa. He was Provincial Commissioner at Dalaga, he ruled that portion of the Eastern Provinces that stretched back to the French border, and if he still thought sometimes with regret of his ruined career in the Navy it was to remember that another, and a very fair one, lay glowing before him. At the present moment it seemed to him there was nothing to which he might not attain. He thought of those first days at Dalaga, when he was a broken, hopeless man and Pearce had helped him by his cheery sympathy.

Perhaps Pearce was thinking of them too.

"It wasn't such a bad move after all, that coming into the Colonial Service," he said.

"If it hadn't been for your good advice, Pearce——"

"Nonsense. Advice isn't worth a brass farthing unless a man has the stuff in him, and then he'd find things out for himself in time. The stuff that got you on in the Navy got you on here."

"H'm. I made a mighty bad beginning. I shall always feel it was you who pulled me up in time. I ought to have paid heavily for that beginning."

"Never fear. Everything's paid for. You'll pay in time, or somebody else'll pay for you."

"Well, I hope for their sake it won't be anybody else," said Cunningham, but for all his truly deep gratitude to Pearce, past sins sat on him lightly. The future was very fair, in spite of the rumours of a hut tax and Kudjo Mensa the unregenerate; and he should soon see Anne. It was a strange turn of fate that was sending Bullen here just at this juncture, but after all two or three weeks at the most was all he would be able to spare, and Anne would be here for a good six months. He was not quite sure whether he wanted to

marry Anne or not, but he was very sure that he was looking forward to meeting her.

When he bade good-bye to Pearce next morning it was with a fairly quiet mind.

"I'm glad I sent for you. I don't think there's anything to worry about. If you think there is, come in at once. This place is much easier defended than Obusadi, besides I always said it was the key to the Eastern Provinces; and since I've had the power I've done my best to make it more of a stronghold. But it's all right. What the dickens can the black man do against the white? Men like Kudjo Mensa are always futile, when they're not grotesque and pathetic."

"There's nothing pathetic about Kudjo Mensa, my friend. Take my advice and catch him and make him do that six months' hard he has dodged so long. Well, good luck to you."

"Good luck to you." And the little train started on the narrow path down between the leafy walls of forest, and the solitary white man standing on the verandah watched it out of sight.

CHAPTER XX

A SAILOR-MAN'S WAY

> "Time
> Falls down before them, all men's knees
> Bow, all men's prayers and sorrows climb
> Like incense towards them; yea for these are gods."

DINNER, however, for once, was not the easy thing to arrive at that Dicky Bullen had expected. The villagers would not sell provisions. The little village, set in the midst of the dense forest, with the neighbouring plantations of plantains and cocoa and Indian corn, was exactly like a hundred other little villages they had passed through on their way to Obusadi. A little stream flowed in the hollow below, and the houses on either side of the main road were set irregularly along the beaten track; where they were thickest was an open space in the midst of which a great cotton-wood raised its spreading dome, and among the great buttresses at its feet were two or three seats, the buttresses themselves being worn shiny and smooth by the numberless backs that had leaned against them. There was no one on these seats, no children in the long village street, no women gossiping at the doors as they cooked the evening meal, no men resting after the labours of the day. The orderly and the cook went through the village seeking the elders, or at least the chief, but they found no one to whom to speak. A couple of old women ran away as they approached, and one or two shrieking children were

snatched indoors by unseen mothers. The village was wrapped in silence.

"They no 'gree to sell chicken," said the cook mournfully, looking down at the long knife in his hand.

Bullen and the two women looked at the orderly in surprise. He was dressed in a dark blue and red uniform, a red fez on his head, and though his feet were bare, blue cloth puttees were bound to his knee. He was a soldierly-looking figure, and had an intelligent face, which at present had a puzzled expression.

"What is the matter, Jacob?" asked Bullen.

"I not knowing, sah. This strange palaver. They no dun fit sell chicken and kenki."

"By Jove! I should think it was strange palaver," said the sailor-man, looking at the two women he had in his charge, "what the dickens am I to do if I can't get you any dinner?"

"Tinned meats," murmured Kitty, smiling. She would not have made any fuss if they got no dinner at all. Both Kitty Pearce and Dicky Bullen were comfortable to live with.

"Why this unearthly silence," said Anne, "when generally our ears have been harrowed by the flutterings and the chase of our dinner that was to be."

"I don't know enough about the confounded people to grasp what is the matter," said Bullen. "I wonder if it's the village or we who have the plague."

"Such a nice little place it is too," said Anne, looking down the little river, where the growing shrubs trailed their leafy branches in the water, and the sunlight and the shadows played among the ripples, "listen to the murmur of the water."

Dicky Bullen, however, was in no mood to listen; as a matter of fact he would, even under the most favourable

circumstances, have set such a speech down as one of Anne's romantic remarks that at the bottom of his heart he hoped she would grow out of making ; and now he wanted chicken and yams and kenki for the hungry men. Anne read his thoughts and sympathised at once.

"To talk about murmuring streams when we've a hundred hungry men to cater for," she said, "I suppose is adding to the poignancy of the situation."

"Well, it doesn't interest me," said Dicky, "half as much as the sight of the chief would do," and he turned away.

Anne was glad they had broken the ice ; glad she had not to make the effort to avoid meeting her late lover alone. They had said all that need be said on the subject.

One thing was quite certain, she could not accelerate the coming of the dinner ; that Bullen and the distracted orderly must settle between them.

"I hear bleating of goats and sheep," said Kitty, "it makes me think of Laban and Jacob, and I know I heard the crowing of a cock."

"Let us go down and put our hands in the stream," suggested Anne. "It looks so nice and cool."

"Let me see," said Kitty, as they strolled along, "what are there in African streams, leeches, electric eels——"

"No, they belong to the sea, surely——"

"Well, there are plenty of other unpleasant things, where every prospect pleases and only—no, I can't say man, because he's conspicuous by his absence."

"Is he ?" said Anne, for as they walked a little way along the path by the side of the stream they came across a meditative negro, clad in a long white robe, gazing thoughtfully into the water.

"A decent-looking man," said Anne, "now if we can take him to Captain Bullen or the orderly—I wonder if he understands English."

"Most of them understand a little coast English," said Kitty confidently, and she stepped forward. "You go catch chicken one time for missus."

The man turned round suddenly and looked at her with such blazing angry eyes that she involuntarily stepped back and caught Anne's arm.

"Madam," he said, "I doubt if your party will get any chickens here, and if I had my way you certainly would not get to Obusadi," and he spoke as good English as they did themselves.

"Oh, but why?" gasped Kitty, amazed.

"Why?" asked the man, "why?" and his eyes looked threatening again, "for exactly the same reason that you speak to me in a jargon you would disdain to use to one of your own people, because you look upon us as a despised and subject race, and I hate you."

"Oh no, you don't," said Kitty, recovering herself, "why should you? We have come to your village with a lot of money to spend. You can make quite a good thing out of us if you like. I'm sure we've been a source of wealth all along our route."

He looked at them, and Anne did not like his looks at all. Suddenly it seemed to her she understood the race hatred that exists in all countries where a coloured race is a danger or even a rival. She edged a little back.

"I think, Kitty," she said, "we had better be getting back to camp. Captain Bullen would not like——"

"You to speak to me," put in the black man, with studied, courteous insolence. "You may give him

this message from me. I will let him have food for his men, provided you ladies ask for it."

"But Jacob the orderly," began Kitty. He interrupted:

"Do you know that I am a priest of the Church of England, the Rev. John Trotter, a Master of Arts of Balliol College, Oxford?" he said, some of the bombast of the negro creeping into his cultured tones. "I have not met one of the officials here who has taken so high a degree as I have, many of them have none at all, and yet there is not one who would ask me to his table or meet me on terms of equality."

"'Oh, East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,'" quoted Anne, feeling vainly for something to say that might smooth matters.

"You may say that, but what you mean is that the West is so superior that the white man won't even be bothered to make the black man lick his boots. He wouldn't permit so near a contact."

"Oh, why make life a burden over race differences," said Kitty lightly. "At the present moment, as far as I can see, a hundred men of your own colour are likely to go hungry to bed so that you may show your power. We white people can manage very well without chicken, but the carriers will be very piano without their kenki and plantains, poor fellows."

"The carriers will learn the relative importance of the black and the white in this instance, unless of course——" He stopped, as if he were waiting for one of the women to supply the hiatus.

Kitty understood, and so did Anne. It seemed absurd not to say, "Will you kindly sell food to our carriers?" but something in the man's looks made them hesitate. At that moment they would both of them have voted

for raiding the village rather than asking a favour of this man, who seemed to be its chief.

"It is not for us to decide," said Anne coldly, "we must go back."

"This way." He moved aside, showing them a little winding path among the shrubs and bushes that apparently led directly to the village. It was simply a tunnel through the dense greenery, so narrow that two people could not walk abreast. The night was falling, the swift African night, and presently darkness would be upon the land.

"Thank you," said Anne as courteously as he had spoken, "but we would rather go back the way we came," and she found herself wondering whether they were really out of reach of the village, and if Dicky Bullen, or at least one of their own servants, would come if she called. They were so large a company, and yet she could hear no sound save the murmur of the river and the low beating of a tom-tom somewhere away in the bush.

"One thing you cannot do, and that is go back the way you came," said the black man.

"But why—surely——" and Kitty turned and made as if she would walk resolutely back.

"Because," said the man, "it pleases me that you should not. You will be quite safe, I will not harm you, I give you my word of honour, if you will take the word of honour of a black man; but down by the stream you shall not go if I have to kill you to prevent you." And he put his hand to his side, and Anne wondered if he were about to draw a knife.

What was to be done? It seemed but a minute ago they had been in the midst of their attendants, and now, they were alone with the murmuring stream and a

man of alien race was threatening them. They looked at one another and Kitty drew a little nearer to Anne, slipping her hand through the taller woman's arm.

"You are going my way?" said the man, coming a little closer.

"No," said Anne firmly. The forest path looked gloomy and dark and threatening in the coming night. Where could it lead to? Besides, what harm could possibly come to them since they were within earshot of the camp. Anne felt sure she could bring help with a shout; but it is extraordinary what pressure must be put upon us before we will depart from our everyday customs. They were both of them afraid, but the fear had as yet not grown so extreme as to force them to raise their voices above conversational tones.

"Yes," said the man, and he laid his hand on Anne's arm. They knew little enough about these people, these emotional people easily moved to joy or sorrow, anger or delight; they were the hewers of wood and drawers of water who speeded them on their way, who lent to the journey the charm of novelty; and therefore to see in this man's face something different from the ordinary pleased subserviency they had learned to expect was terrifying. Kitty's self-restraint gave way.

"Oh," she cried, "Dicky, Dicky!" and the cry was a shriek.

The response was prompt. There was a rush of quick footsteps and almost before they had time to think Bullen was beside them. A glance and he had taken in the situation, the next second he had the negro by the scruff of the neck. The man made no resistance. In his native wilds the negro is a man of thews and sinews, else he could not survive, but transplant him to the West,

and the chances are that, if he absorbs the learning, he at the same time succumbs to the seductiveness of a life of ease and is no match in athletics for his rivals in the schools. The Rev. John Trotter was a case in point. He went down before the sinewy sailor, and Bullen shook him as a terrier shakes a rat.

"What's the meaning of this, you unmitigated scamp? What you go for——"

"He speaks perfectly good English," said Anne hastily, why she hardly knew, but her late enemy looked so limp and crestfallen she felt she must spare him the humiliation of being spoken to in the coast jargon.

"Oh, he does, does he? Then what the dickens does he mean by touching you?" And he shook him again.

The man recovered his scattered wits and his equanimity.

"I regret," he said, with the rolling importance of the negro, "that I have frightened these ladies. I assure you nothing was further from my thoughts. I can only apologise. I am the chief of the village, and I desired them to take the path through the bush back to it. This other path is—" he hesitated a moment—"is—pardon my people, they are a simple folk—sacred—what you in the coast jargon call Ju-ju. You profane it."

"Oh, come," said Bullen, his grip still on the man's shoulder.

"I assure you."

The darkness had fallen swiftly. Overhead in the velvety sky the golden stars were coming out one by one, and over a great mahogany-tree, outlining its topmost branches, peeped the golden tip of the crescent moon.

Bullen hesitated a moment. Then he made up his mind.

"My friend," he said, "I know what to do with you. I shall string you up in your own village, and give you two dozen in the market place."

Anne interrupted. She watched in the dim light the man move uneasily, putting one bare foot upon another and twisting his robe with his restless fingers. Pity rose up in her heart for his humiliation.

"Let him go," she said, "and I am sure he will bring us provisions. Won't you, Mr Trotter?"

"Don't call me by that feeble, foolish English name," he cried passionately. "I am Kudjo Mensa among my own people."

"Well, Kudjo Mensa then," she said, overcoming her reluctance to address him at all, "if Captain Bullen lets you go you will see to it that plenty of kenki and plantains come in, won't you?"

"Your men shall certainly have kenki and plantains," he said pompously.

"They certainly shall," said Bullen, shaking him a little to show that he meant what he said, "there's only one way to treat this man, Anne. He shall get what he deserves, and he deserves two dozen, just to show his people what we think of him. Ah, would you?" for Kudjo Mensa put down his head and tried to bite.

Then Bullen wrestled with him in real earnest, and the women raised their voices in a shriek, and before two minutes had passed half-a-dozen carriers and the orderly had overpowered Kudjo Mensa and were dragging him back to his own village.

"Go back to the tents and have dinner," said Bullen to the women. "I'll join you presently."

"Don't do anything rash," said Anne.

"He's a beast, and I'll see he gets his deserts."

"Poor wretch," she begged. "It's bad enough to have known better things and to be here a savage."

But the sailor-man did not understand her pity, it was too subtle for him.

"He's had his chance," he said, "now I shall string him up and give him two dozen, just to teach him not to insult English ladies. No, don't be pitiful, Anne, and try to beg him off. There's only one thing to be done with him. Here you are. Jacob, you got missus tent ready."

Then he left them.

"He called you Anne," said Kitty, with a little laugh.

"He shouldn't thrash that man," said Anne, ignoring Kitty's remark.

Wild shrieks rose on the air, and they shut their ears. Presently there was silence, and Bullen came up. The moon had sunk below the tree tops, but by the light of the lamp they saw his smiling face.

"Settled that gentleman nicely. I never had the chance of administering two dozen to a graduate of Oxford before, but I told Jacob to lay on lightly, in recognition of his degree. However, I reckon he'll remember me."

"It won't get the carriers food," said Anne.

"That's just what it has done. Kenki and plantains pouring in, and the place alive with smiling women. I believe I understand these people."

"What did you do with Kudjo Mensa?" asked Anne.

"Turned him loose to meditate on his evil ways. He scuttled off into the bush with a very sore back."

" And suppose he stirs up the country against us ? " suggested Kitty.

Bullen laughed. " He's disgraced and done for, I should say."

" Still, you've made an enemy of him."

" And you consider it wisdom to keep your enemies under your eye ? I expect you're right. I wonder if I'll ever learn wisdom."

" It's doubtful if you'll have a chance when we're all dead," said Kitty, with a laugh, as she sat down at the dinner-table laid in the open, and proceeded to cut into a big green paw-paw and squeeze limejuice over its orange-red flesh. " Dicky, do you think all the flying ants in Africa meet here ? "

" I expect there's a certain proportion left over to worry poor Connor," said Bullen. He, too, was thoughtful; but he little guessed then what his only act of authority in Africa would cost him.

CHAPTER XXI

FEARS

> "And I hear once more as the swans fly over,
> Their far-off clamour from overhead.
> They are flying west by their instinct guided;
> And for man likewise is his fate decided,
> And griefs apportioned and joys divided,
> By a mighty power with a purpose dread."

'THE REV. JOHN TROTTER! Kudjo Mensa!" Cunningham rose to his feet and stood looking at his old messmate with an expression that the other saw, to his intense surprise, had something of fear in it. 'Where did you say this happened?"

"At Abbafanu, a couple of days' march from Obusadi. I was mighty sorry when Pearce told me all about him that I'd let the beast go. Of course I had no idea he was a man you were hunting. But, God bless my soul, Potiphar, the man's a soft, flabby windbag, he's not even a decent savage."

"He's savage enough," said Cunningham. "When first I came here four years ago he was a priest of the Rewah, the proscribed fetich; a wretched man informed and we caught him. That very night he got away again, but we took him in the morning. What do you think he did with his little interval of freedom?"

Bullen shook his head. "Stuck a knife into that informer."

"You've been two months in the country and don't know more than that. No; your cultivated Oxford

graduate pegged him down across a line of driver ants, and the ants——"

"Oh, don't," said Bullen. "It's impossible."

"Unluckily we couldn't catch him, but there isn't a scrap of doubt. They probably sliced off his eyelids first."

"Good heavens! I wish I'd laid on more heavily."

"I wish to heaven you'd brought him in. He's a very disturbing element in the country just now. Dicky, I don't like the look or feel of things here at all. There are a good many signs of trouble brewing among the natives. The Rewah Fetich seems to have taken a stronger hold than ever, though I thought I had stamped it out. There are no cases in the court, although it's one of the negro's little joys to go to law, and there's not a scrap of food coming in."

"Bad signs?"

"Very bad signs. I've been noticing things wrong for the last month, and had Pearce over three weeks ago to consult, but after all it's very difficult to know exactly. I don't seem able to convince the chiefs there's not going to be a hut tax. Kudjo Mensa's at the bottom of it, and to think you had him in your hands."

"I'm awfully sorry, Potiphar," said Bullen humbly.

"Oh, how could you know? But things are bad. I've just sent off a runner to Lesondi to advise them that the soldiers may be wanted at Dalaga. I'm sending to all the stations round to tell them to be on their guard. It's all got to be done by runners. Not a telegraph station can I call up. Obusadi's gone now, and those two women——" He turned away uneasily, remembering bitterly the relations in which Anne had stood to the man before him. He had asked Anne to marry him and she had refused, giving such reasons

that he had wondered ever since if he still wanted her for his wife ; but he came across few women, and in his heart he never expected to meet one who would suit him as well as she did—she, the discarded mistress of his old friend and messmate ; when he thought of that he wanted to curse God and die. What evil fate had brought Dicky Bullen here at this particular juncture ?

"By Jove ! if we had a scrap," said Dicky with a little of the wistfulness of the fighting man who is out of a job in his tones.

"A scrap !" said Cunningham quickly, and his old friend thought how wonderfully the last four years had changed him. Once he could have sworn exactly what Potiphar would have done under certain circumstances. Now he was not quite sure. "A scrap ? There's no excitement and less honour in bush fighting. We must bring in those women."

"What ! You're not afraid——"

"Afraid ! I'm beginning to think I *am* afraid," said Cunningham. "Do you know what they do with the women who fall into their hands ? Yes, I'll tell you some other time, in detail ; it doesn't get into the papers. Mercifully—no, not mercifully. If the English only understood the sort of people they had to deal with they wouldn't make such an almighty fuss when occasionally we biff the country. I'll send a messenger —no, one of us must go to Obusadi."

"The telegraph seems to be down everywhere," said Bullen, "every station we arrived at was complaining of the telegraph line. Pearce said the trees were always falling."

"That's true. But if there is anything wrong the first thing these devils do is to cut the wires. Dicky, will you go back to Obusadi and take word to Mitchell

to come in with all his policemen and available stores? We'd better concentrate here. There may be nothing in it, but I'd sooner be safe than sorry, and I must admit I do not like the look of things. They get worse every day. Sixty miles. You ought to be back under the week."

He rose and walked up and down uneasily. Outside in the compound, in a great flamboyant tree, a bird was calling; "Ha, ha, ha," it laughed, all on one note, but there was no mirth in the laughter, rather did it sound the embodiment of all weariness and satiety. Bullen looked at his old messmate. What was the matter with him? Where was the careless, cheerful, happy sailor gone? Or for that matter where was the bitter, cynical, unhappy man who had been hoisted out of the Navy? That man at least he was in touch with, but this man was worlds away. Did he care for Kitty Pearce after all?

"I suppose if the women fell into their hands——" he began.

"The women mustn't fall into their hands," said Cunningham sternly. "Good heavens! Dicky, there isn't any danger yet. But if there should be"—he took another turn up the verandah, and fought out a desire to abandon his post and go himself—"remember they are better dead than at the mercy of Kudjo Mensa."

"I can't believe," said Bullen, "that a man who has had the benefit of a decent education could actually go in for the ant business."

"Make no mistake about it," said Cunningham, sitting down and taking a cigar, which he did not light, drumming his fingers instead uneasily on the table. "Education would only whet his appetite for such things. He would take you and cut off your eyelids

and turn your face to the midday sun and your agony would be exquisite pleasure to him."

"Are such things done?" asked the sailor incredulously.

Cunningham brought his clenched fist down on the table. "Believe me, they are done; and if you were pegged down the ants could get at your eyes so much the more easily; the blood would attract them, you know——"

"A-a-ah! How long would such a death take?" asked Bullen, his flesh creeping at the thought of it.

"The little ants are pretty quick," said Cunningham, "but the agony while consciousness lasts must be intolerable. Oh, it's done. Man, I've found skeletons pegged across a path or stuck in anthills. No, I've never sheeted home the crime. If I had——" He tossed away the cigar and resumed his march up and down the verandah.

"I think," said Bullen, and still he was an unbeliever, "that as long as I'm in this country a capsule of cyanide of potassium in the waistcoat pocket might be useful."

Cunningham nodded gravely. "I want you to understand," he said, "the seriousness of the situation if there is anything afoot. We're over a month away from Lesondi. I've only got a handful of Mendi constabulary; the lines are down, and the nearest soldiers are at Fort Alim. We can't get help under six weeks, perhaps not so soon if they don't realise the urgency of the situation. We'd have little enough chance of getting away by ourselves, but with two women——" And again he marched away to the end of the verandah.

"Perhaps there's nothing afoot. Maybe it's all a false alarm," suggested Bullen.

Cunningham came and stood at the table as if weighing his words.

"It may be, but I'm afraid things look black. The natives aren't coming into the courts, that might be mere chance; Rewah keeps breaking out, that might be put down. They refused you food at Abbafanu, that might be set down to the contrariness of some particular chief, even though the white man travelling spells wealth to the villagers. But I don't like the combination at all. I've been here over four years now and I've given my mind to the country, and I've never seen things look so bad. And with the women to complicate matters! Look here, Dicky, you must start to-night. I'll give you a couple of policemen and my orderly, Yamba. He's to be trusted, and he knows the country. It'll take you all of six days there and back—six days." And Bullen knew that the week would be an eternity to the man who was left behind. He understood his anxiety, but why such intense anxiety. Had he cared for Kitty Pearce more than he thought? After all, she was a winsome woman. Once he would have made some remark. Now he knew he dare not. If only Cunningham were a little less tense he would almost have enjoyed the situation. Never for a moment did he doubt the ultimate success of the white man. Cunningham could not doubt it either and the spice of danger would lend a little excitement to a life that of late had been singularly uneventful.

"Any chance of a medal?" he asked.

"In this country? If we held Dalaga for three months against overwhelming odds I don't suppose anybody would think to mention it in England. You've missed your chance, Dicky, if you came looking for glory here."

" I ought to have married Maud Somerset four years ago," said Bullen thoughtfully. " I messed things up a bit, I fancy, paying her a lot of attention and never proposing," and something in Cunningham's face made him add, " I mean I ought to have given her the chance of saying she didn't think much of me."

Cunningham turned away without a word, and when next he spoke to his old messmate it was to tell him briefly that the hammock and the escort were ready waiting, and to press on him with the courtesy due to a total stranger a whisky and soda before starting.

CHAPTER XXII

THE FORT AT DALAGA

> "Gather poppies in thine hands
> And sheaves of brier and many rusted sheaves
> Rain rotten in rank lands,
> Waste marigold and late unhappy leaves
> And grass that fades ere any of it be sown . . .
> . . . . make no sojourn in thy outgoing;
> For haply it may be
> That when thy feet return at evening
> Death shall come in with thee."

"So here we are in the heart of Africa," said Kitty, as the hammock boys stopped at the verandah steps and Cunningham helped her out. "We've been merry enough so far. You ought to have waited till Obusadi palled before bringing us across here, Mr Cunningham. We'd have appreciated you so much more."

There were Kitty and Pearce and Anne and the D.C. from Obusadi, and more than the usual following of police and carriers being hustled along by the distracted Yamba and Mitchell's orderly. Mitchell was a plump, pale-faced young fellow who was eaten up with fever born of distaste for the country, and longing for the wife who feared to join him. He looked in wonder at the interest on Dicky Bullen's face, for Dicky came in a fairly contented man because he felt at last he had something of real importance to do.

"How horrid the place looks," said Kitty, looking round. "Not a scrap of greenery anywhere, and a regular maze of barbed wire."

"Oh, come in, come in and have some tea. It's the best I can do for you," and Cunningham settled first one woman and then the other into easy-chairs on the verandah and began shouting, "Boy, boy, hot water for missus. It's a bachelor establishment. Heaven knows what you'll find wrong, Mrs Pearce," and involuntarily Bullen, hovering in the background neglected and forgotten by all the others, thought of the little dinners Kitty had given Potiphar in his unregenerate days. Cunningham hospitably pressed a whisky and soda on Pearce, and it was evident to the onlooker that the two men were the best of friends; so Potiphar had forgotten he had flirted with Pearce's wife? Kitty, of course, was sure to be equal to the situation. And Anne? Cunningham was making her most cordially welcome, yet Bullen fancied there was a shade of embarrassment in his manner towards her. Bullen himself had not been embarrassed since the day they had arrived at Abbafanu. Since then he had had so much to think of he had entirely forgotten his past relations with Anne, and manlike supposed she had forgotten too, but now it struck him most uncomfortably that the past was not dead for her.

Cunningham was fussing over his guest. "That'll do, boy, that'll do; that be fit. Softly, softly. Now make yourself scarce. Milk, Mrs Pearce, and sugar. My cook isn't at all a bad hand at hot cakes."

"Oh, Mr Cunningham, I know it's all perfect," said Kitty. "We're delighted to be your guests, and it's much better fun to be a crowd, but do tell us your reason for racing us in this fashion, and for spoiling the looks of your pretty bungalow."

The bungalow did look bare. Every tree and every green shrub that could by any possibility afford cover

for many yards round had been cleared away, the garden was gone, and on the bare ground enclosing the two bungalows and some huts for the servants was a perfect network of barbed wire, with here and there a bell hung upon it.

" It's better to be safe than pretty," said Cunningham. " A garden will grow again here in no time. How did you find the people coming through, Bullen ? " And again Dicky was painfully conscious that something he could not explain had come between him and his old friend.

" Pearce," he said, turning to the doctor, " didn't like the look of things at all. Personally I should have thought it was all right. But I don't know the country."

" The people were shy," said the doctor, " ordinarily when the medicine man is known to be within hail they come in with all the tummy aches they've been saving up for weeks past, but I actually saw a woman slipping into the bush with a great gash on her shoulder. It was pretty nearly impossible to get chop. No, I didn't like the look of things at all," and he shook his head. " I'm very glad to be here. The barbed wire looks very pretty to me."

" You never told us these things," said his wife reproachfully.

He smiled at her tolerantly. " You didn't expect me to give myself away and say what a blamed fool I was for encouraging you women to come here, did you ? "

" It's a God-forsaken country, and it's no place for women," said Mitchell the D.C. fretfully.

Kitty laughed.

" We're enjoying the situation. What would you do, Mr Cunningham, if we weren't here ? "

" Exactly what we are doing now. Spread about a

little barbed wire and wait results." Cunningham was so relieved they had all arrived safely that he felt quite hopeful. If only his old friend and messmate Dicky Bullen had not been here to remind him by his presence of what had been, or if Kitty had held her tongue on one momentous occasion and named no names he, too, could almost have enjoyed the situation.

"Suppose the worst comes to the worst," said Anne, trying to be natural and forget everything but the present, "and they fight, I am afraid we women will be a dreadful nuisance to you."

"You'll hamper us horribly," said Mitchell, who, poor man, was calculating his chances of seeing his wife again.

"No, no," said Cunningham hastily. "You deepen our anxiety naturally, but it's a great pleasure to us to have you here. You'll make all the difference between a pleasant time and ghastly monotony. We're bound to hold this place at whatever cost if we're going to keep the flag flying in this part of Africa at all."

"If they cut off the food supplies?" said Kitty.

"You may find yourselves a little hungry, but I believe when the negro makes a siege he always has an eye to the main chance and leaves a loophole for trade."

She laughed. "Anne's always yearning for new experiences. She doesn't seem to have got enough out of life. It would be something for her to write about."

"I don't want to be unkind to Miss Lovat," said Cunningham, "but I do trust it is an experience we sha'n't give her."

Now that they were all safe behind the barbed wire it seemed to him pretty certain that nothing unpleasant would happen.

Yet it did. The carriers had not straggled quite as

much as usual, for Mitchell's police had seen that they kept their places, and a couple of hours after the main body had arrived almost all the company were accounted for. They were rather thick on the ground in the compound, and the sound of their chatter reached the white people on the verandah.

"It'll only be for a day or two, Miss Lovat," said Cunningham, as they all assembled on the verandah just before the sun set, "if nothing happens——"

There was a dull reverberating sound from the bank of greenery beyond the line of barbed wire, and out of the green burst two men running for their lives. They were making for the gap in the barbed wire, and presently those on the verandah saw that the white cloth one of them wore was all stained with blood. For one second the white people stared. Pearce swore softly to himself, Cunningham put his hands on Anne's basket chair and swung it round roughly inside the shelter of the house wall; then, as the men cleared the gap where the sentry stood, his voice thundered out: "Morli, shut the gate."

"My God!" said Pearce, "we were only just in time."

There was a hullabaloo for the moment. All the servants shrieking aloud, and the constabulary joining in with wild shouts of anger and fear, one or two even let off their carbines, firing wildly at the bush, and then came Cunningham's voice again dominating pandemonium.

"Softly, softly," he ran down the steps, and seizing a man in the act of firing at nothing in particular snatched away his rifle, and knocked his head against the verandah post. Bullen behind him caught another and then there came a hush. The master was angry. The master was very angry indeed.

" Nice people they'd be for a rush," he said to his old messmate. " They'd fight like the very devil, I know ; but as for expecting ordinary common-sense—I believe they'd blaze away at that forest till every round of ammunition was exhausted. Sergeant, the men dun fire, you savvy they dun fire till I tell 'em.

" Yes, sah," and the sergeant enforced the order with a heavy hand.

Cunningham turned to the two men who had come in, one of whom was bleeding from a jagged but superficial wound in the arm.

" Now," he was beginning when Pearce came to his side.

" Hallo, that's my scamp of a cook. Now, Artaxerxes, what are you doing here ? "

" Black man shoot me with pot-leg," said Axtaxerxes lugubriously.

" What for you steal away behind hammocks ? " asked the doctor severely, taking the man's arm and looking at the wound. " You catch him when you steal chicken."

But Artaxerxes declared that he had not even looked at a chicken, much less tried to steal one. He was peacefully following in the trail of the carriers, he said, when someone had shot him out of the bush, and he and his mate had run for their lives.

Pearce looked across at Cunningham. " Kudjo Mensa, a little late for the fair," he said, but the other man saw the shrinking horror in his eyes. " Suppose they had caught us in the close jungle path when the hammock men must of necessity have dropped their loads and the women have been at the mercy of a pot-leg fire, that there was no possibility of returning ? " was what those eyes said.

"My God!" said Cunningham, and the three men stood and looked at one another. The worst had happened. Whether the natives meant business or not they were certainly shut up in this place now for, with the women, it would be impossible to dare the bush paths without a stronger escort than they possessed. They must wait there till help came, and when would help come?

"You can trust those black police?" asked Bullen, for he thought he saw something like fear on the faces before him.

"Oh, absolutely," said Cunningham, "as long as we can feed them."

"They'll stand by us a good deal longer than that, I think," said Pearce. "I'd back them to fight their way down to Fort Alim."

"Yes, if it were a question of fighting," said Cunningham, "but, Pearce, man, it's going to be worse than that. It's a question of sitting still and waiting. I sent off messengers to Lesondi before Bullen came in, but God knows if they'll get through, and it'll take some time before the other fellows wake up to our danger, and longer to reach us."

"Chop?" asked Pearce succinctly.

"I've been gathering in all I could lay my hands on. It's no joke feeding a crew like we've go there. Chop hasn't come in as it ought. It's been one of the things that made me anxious, but when you got in, great God! I was so thankful——" He stopped and rubbed his hand across his forehead, and again Bullen felt that the friend of the old service days was gone. There was something between him and his old chum; it was to Pearce Cunningham turned for sympathy. The naval man wondered. This man had gone out from among them

and behold he was absorbed in his new world. Did he still love Kitty ?

Cunningham set the sentries, and then all three men returned to the great sitting-room, where the women were waiting for them. Mitchell sat there too, huddled up in a heap, his head buried in his arms.

" What's the matter ? " asked Cunningham.

The D.C. stirred uneasily and lifted a haggard face. " A temperature and a head like a humming top, but I can fight," and his voice sounded infinitely weary and hopeless.

" No need yet. Bundle off to bed," said Pearce.

" You mustn't be afraid," said Cunningham, turning to the women and putting Anne back in her chair with a quiet movement of his hand. " I am telling you the honest truth, and hiding nothing, when I say the worst we have to fear is a tedious wait. We may be short of chop, but it is possible that even that may not happen to us. A month's wait here. Do you think you can stand it, Mrs Pearce ? " He addressed Kitty, but he looked at Anne, as Bullen saw, and both women answered him.

" Is that all," said Kitty. " We came to sit still in Fred's bungalow, and it will be more amusing to have a little company, as we shall have here."

" If we won't be a burden," said Anne a little wistfully. " If we could help."

" Help," echoed Cunningham, and he laughed. " It is because you are a help you are likely to be a burden."

" ' The burden of fair women,' " quoted Anne. She liked the feeling of quoting Swinburne here in Africa surrounded by bloodthirsty savages. " ' Vain delight,' it goes on, doesn't it?" And then she wished she hadn't. After all, one shouldn't quote Swinburne rashly ; but

Cunningham understood, and in that there lay a charm for Anne she hardly realised.

" ' For life is sweet, but after life is death. This is the end of every man's desire,' " he said with a smile at her, the smile of an intimate friend. " We'll take all the sweetness, and not worry about the inevitable death that is coming to all of us some day in the future."

" Potiphar, good Lord ! old Potiphar quoting poetry, and here ! " said Bullen aside to Pearce.

The elder man smiled tolerantly. He and Bullen had spent an anxious three days on the road in the bush, and each had found a good comrade. It is conducive to confidence.

" It looks as if he had found *the* woman," he said in the same tone, and Bullen from across the room saw Cunningham glancing down almost tenderly at Anne, and the woman looking up with a smile, as at the man she trusts, and understands, and he remembered that she had once looked like that at him, and he told himself he was glad she had found happiness. But Potiphar! Potiphar !

CHAPTER XXIII

DEAD LETTERS

> "In that day
> Thou shalt tell all thy days and hours, and tell
> Thy times and ways and words of love, and say
> How one was dear and one desirable,
> And sweet was life to hear and sweet to smell,
> But now with lights reverse the old hours retire
> And the last hour is shod with fire from hell."

To the average man and woman life in an African bungalow spells unutterable dreariness. It is very hot, it is very damp and there is not much to do. Here at Dalaga the usual drawbacks were intensified. It was very hot, it was very damp and there was hardly anything to do, for the women absolutely nothing. They might eat their meals and walk up and down the verandah for exercise, and they might go to sleep, and the dreary day would be ended and another long hot night begun, and then the night would be ended and the next day begun, and these days and nights began to stretch out interminably, hopelessly. Beneath the bungalows, and in the servants' huts and on the open ground within the guarding barbed wire were camped the constabulary and all the numerous following that the white man congregates around him, helpless people who must be cared for, and worst of all fed. For food was growing scarce.

"Palm-oil chop," said Kitty, as the little company sat down to dinner in the big sitting-room in

Cunningham's bungalow, and the cover was taken off a very meagre, red-looking mess in the centre of a very large dish. "I always like palm-oil chop. I don't know how you manage to keep up the supply."

Cunningham laughed a little ruefully.

"Potiphar thinks you're laughing at him, Kitty," said Bullen, "the supply to-day is so small."

"Mrs Pearce's cheerfulness is a godsend," said Mitchell, who in the course of three weeks had fallen a victim to Kitty's wiles. His fever was better and he did not think so much about the wife away in a country town in England. In fact it is to be feared that Mr Mitchell, if he had only had a little more to eat, would have been a fairly contented man. Pearce looked on, and because he could not stop the flirtation did the next best thing, and pretended not to see it; Cunningham was absorbed in his own anxieties, and in Anne, and Bullen secretly raged. He found the monotony weigh on him heavily. If there had only been something to do. He was indefatigable in going his rounds, helping Cunningham with the men, watching, suggesting, alert, keen in his element, but he was only third man. Pearce was evidently Cunningham's trusted friend, he, Bullen, was the outsider. It was Cunningham and Pearce who kept the key of the store-room, who served out supplies and consulted together when the followers' rations should be reduced, and Bullen saw with a little regret that it was generally at Pearce's suggestion he was called to their councils. As for Mitchell nobody took any notice of him, he had sunk into the position of Kitty's tame cat; but Bullen resented the fact that he was of no account, and he resented it still more when Cunningham tried to behave as if nothing had come between them.

Cunningham tried now. "Well, Dicky," he said,

putting out a minute portion on a plate and handing it to Bullen, "you earn your chop and it seems a shame it should be so little. The very last of the potatoes are in this, so make the most of it. Here, Amo, come along with that champagne."

"It's the last of the champagne too," said Pearce. "I'm saving three bottles to celebrate when the rescue party comes along."

"There's something disappointing in this siege," said Anne, eating very slowly, so as to spin out her dinner. "I thought a siege would mean that we should go in daily terror of our lives, but as it is I take no notice of a little firing beyond the barbed wire; it doesn't seem somehow to concern me, and there's never been an evening yet when we haven't been able to have a game of picquet."

"It's a rum country, Africa," said Pearce. "I suppose I'm getting pretty well seasoned to rum situations. Kudjo Mensa is thirsting for our blood, but he knows too much to do anything. If he had been an ordinary savage chief we'd have had a little fighting every day; as it is the gentleman, having had the benefit of a university education, knows it's no use wasting ammunition, and so we only get a few unruly followers popping off powder when his eye isn't upon them. Hallo, what's that?"

A bell sounded, a little tinkling bell that rang out clear and distinct on the hot still night air above the monotonous sound of a war drum beaten in the distance.

All four white men started to their feet, and Cunningham and Bullen dashed down the verandah steps. In the compound the moonlight made it light as day, but everything looked as usual. The sentries too had heard it, but they one and all had seen nothing.

"No, sah, no, sah, no man come," they said.

"What's that thing on the wire?" asked Bullen, who had a sailor's keenness of vision.

"Where?"

"There," and he stepped forward and took from the barbed wire something white, "oh, it's only a bit of paper. There's another bit over there."

Cunningham picked it off. "Bring the other into my office," he said, and his voice sounded queer.

"Anything wrong?" asked Pearce, looking in through the door.

Cunningham pointed to the two pieces of paper lying on the table, and by the light of the lamp Bullen saw they were letters written in Cunningham's own hand.

Pearce came in, and the two men looked at each other.

"Done," said Cunningham, "done."

"Why?" asked Bullen.

"They are the letters I sent out to try and reach Wallington, the man who I reckon will come up to rescue us."

"You never told me you had sent out anybody," said Bullen, feeling once again that his old friend had left him out in the cold.

"We told as few people as possible," said Cunningham half apologetically. "M'Pranza is the only other place we could hold in this country. There's plenty of water there, just as there is here. Before we were shut up I wrote and told the powers that be that I'd hold Dalaga, but of course I don't know whether the letter fetched up. We must make quite sure of Wallington coming here, so twice I've sent out policemen and——" He pointed to the two letters on the table.

"Kudjo Mensa's little way of letting us know our

plans have gone awry," said Pearce. "Oh, well, we must just hope your first letter fetched."

"Luckily they can only look for us at M'Pranza or here. It's a pity the two places are so far apart."

"Do you think they've killed your policemen?" asked Bullen.

"Not necessarily," said Pearce, "though it looks bad. Possibly they were absorbed into the general population. The negro is a child. Once away from the white man he would readily believe the white man's power was at an end and just chuck up the letters."

"One of us'll have to go," suggested Bullen.

"Out of the question," said Cunningham. "No white man could possibly get through."

"As a forlorn hope."

"It couldn't be a forlorn hope because there wouldn't be any hope about it at all. Come along back, and don't say anything to the women."

"Well," said Kitty, "what was it? We didn't hear you shooting."

"A wandering sheep or goat, I think," said Cunningham. "I wish we had him inside."

"He wouldn't be much among so many. How long do you think the soldiers will be?" Kitty spoke a little wearily. Short commons, even though they were flavoured by a desperate flirtation under her husband's eyes, were beginning to pall; but she was essentially good-tempered, and would not for the world have made things more uncomfortable than she could help for Cunningham.

How long would they be? That was exactly what he asked himself every morning when he looked at the grey veil of vapour rent by the golden beams of the sun, when the sun at his zenith poured his sweltering rays

upon the little compound and the reek of it rose up to heaven, when the darkness fell like a pall, hot and still, and the stench from the crowded camp followers seemed to be intensified. How long? How long? First there were sick, then here and there a child died, then here and there a woman, and then a man, and they were buried in graves that grew shallower and shallower as the days went on. The stalwart negro policemen were looking hollow-eyed and tightened their belts, and the white men were lean and hollow-eyed too, all except Mitchell, who only looked flabby. As for the women they looked at each other ruefully, and laughed, when they spoke of their holiday trip, because sometimes it is simpler to laugh than to do anything else.

"We are the best fed, I know," said Anne, three days later, as they went away for a little to her room after dinner, "and we require it least."

"I suppose they will come before we die of inanition," said Kitty. "It's so unbecoming to poor Mr Mitchell. Nature intended him to be substantial."

"Kitty, why will you flirt even here? It is unfair to Fred."

Kitty considered the matter. "It's all out of consideration for Fred. Neither Joe Cunningham nor Dicky Bullen will condescend to take the least interest in me, and I can't have Fred thinking his wife is neglected."

"But, Kitty, now—now—under these conditions surely you might——"

"Anne, you're the last person to preach, considering the way in which you are carrying on with Joe Cinningham."

Anne looked across at her cousin, and her pale face flushed scarlet, then the colour faded and a deadly pallor took its place.

"Kitty, I never even speak to Mr Cunningham alone. I only talk to him before you all. If we play picquet at night Fred generally sits beside me and advises me."

"If thoughts are facts," said Kitty, irritable for once in her life, for the want of proper food and the long playing of second fiddle was telling upon her, "as some people say they are, the whole place is simply permeated with one thing—namely, the fact that Joe Cunningham is getting more desperately in love with you every day, and that Dicky Bullen is wondering in his own mind whether he ought to be glad, or surprised, or jealous."

Anne covered her face with her hands. "Kitty, if I thought that I'd never speak to Mr Cunningham again. I'm sure—I——"

"Oh, Anne," still irritably, "down on your knees and thank the Fates that they have put you in exactly the position where you can bind Joe Cunningham to you with bands of iron. Will you never have any eyes? He suits you in every way, and under ordinary circumstances you would be desperately in love; as it is Dicky Bullen reminds you of the time when you gave yourself away with fatal results, and keeps you steadily balanced. It can't be nice for Dicky, but I'm bound to say it serves him right."

"Don't, Kitty. Can't you see that I can never be anything but a friend to Mr Cunningham—that Dicky Bullen—that Dicky Bullen——" And her voice trailed away into nothingness.

Kitty sat up. "You don't mean to say you're considering yourself indissolubly bound to a man you manifestly care nothing for, and who at the present moment is made rather uncomfortable by the way you're playing him off against Joe Cunningham?"

"You can't undo the past," said Anne slowly. "I

cannot help what Dicky Bullen thinks, and as for playing him off I should be the last——"

"Miss Lovat, Miss Lovat," called Cunningham's voice, "aren't you coming for our game of picquet? Don't tell me you think the cards are past playing with. Do help me to put in an hour somehow."

Anne looked across at Kitty, but she made no movement to rise.

"Oh, don't be a fool," said that lady angrily. "Go and play with the poor man. He manages to give you most of his share of dinner, and you, with your silly——"

"I'm coming, Mr Cunningham," said Anne, rising. "I'm sure the cards will see us through to the end of the siege."

"And if they don't," said Kitty to Bullen, with just that touch of malice in her words that was so foreign to her, "something else will answer equally well. Spoons for choice. Why don't you laugh, Dicky, at my poor little joke," she said, turning round on him quickly.

Bullen said nothing. He lighted his pipe, and leaned up against the wall watching the other two settle down to cards just underneath the clockwork lamp which hung from the rafters. Kitty subsided on to a sofa, and Mitchell crept to her side. Pearce was outside going the rounds. Bullen did not want Anne, but he did not quite relish her utter indifference to him, when it was not possible for him to get away or fill his life with another interest.

Anne picked up her cards. She was a little shaken still by Kitty's words, but did her best not to show it.

"A point of six in spades," she began.

"Good," said Cunningham.

"A quart major."

"Crack!"

Right across the table, scattering all the cards, came a charge of pot-leg, the room filled with smoke and the report echoed and re-echoed between the walls. The two at the table sprang to their feet. Bullen, looking on, saw a great red stain broadening on the thin muslin of Anne's sleeve and the next second Cunningham had caught her in his arms and whirled her out of range of anything from the window; and he had seen Cunningham's face, though only Anne had heard the passionate tenderness of his voice.

"It is nothing," she said, "nothing, only a flesh wound." But there was a sob in her voice that was not only for her hurt.

Cunningham set her in a chair in the corner, his hand still on her shoulder as if loth to let her go. "Mrs Pearce," he cried appealingly, and then Bullen found himself by his side and they were both on the steps that led down from the verandah.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MEN WHO KEEP THE BORDERS

"There dwells a wife by the Northern Gate
  And a wealthy wife is she;
She breeds a breed o' rovin' men
  And casts them over sea.

"For since that wife had gate or gear,
  Or hearth, or garth, or bield,
She willed her sons to the white harvest,
  And that is a bitter yield.

"The good wife's sons came home again
  With little into their hands,
But the lore of men that ha' dealt with men
  In the new and naked lands.

"But the faith of men that ha' brothered men
  By more than easy breath;
And the eyes o' men that ha' read wi' men
  In the open books of death."

"THEY must have crept up to the barbed wire," said Cunningham, and even at this moment his old messmate and friend was conscious of the embarrassment in his tones. "I have let myself get careless."

"There is only particular spot where they could fire through that window," said Bullen.

"It is only one of the beggars sniping," said Pearce, coming up. "They're not thinking of rushing the barbed wire."

"Miss Lovat is hurt," said Cunningham, and though

he tried to speak quietly both men felt the tense anxiety in his voice.

Pearce ran up the steps, and the other two went round their defences.

The men were all at their posts and everything was quiet.

The moon, just setting, lighted up the cleared space between the barbed-wire defences and the bush, and showed the vegetation growing up there again, palm-trees and elephant grass and small umbrella-trees.

"The cover'll be dense there before long," said Cunningham, and Bullen knew his thoughts were following Pearce.

"We must be relieved soon," said Bullen, speaking openly for the first time. "Potiphar, we are close on starvation."

"No," said Cunningham sharply, as if admitting it would bring on him the thing he feared.

A policeman, his tunic stained and his black face grey and haggard in the silver moonlight, came up, and stood before them rubbing his stomach.

"Massa," he said wistfully, as if he looked for help from the white man, "belly hungarly too much."

"Massa hungarly too," said Cunningham with a faint smile.

"Massa," went on the man, "soldier man at Obusadi. They fit go M'Pranza."

"Nonsense," said Cunningham, "if they're at Obusadi they come here. What for they go M'Pranza."

"Go catch massa."

"Oh, hang," said Bullen, with a laugh, "that's going a bit out of their way."

But Cunningham stopped suddenly. "How you know?"

The constable answered eagerly.

"Akosua" (Akosua was the wife of Cunningham's orderly), "Akosua say Kudjo Mensa catch policeman, kill him one time, put on clothes, send him to soldier man——"

"Where is Akosua?" asked Cunningham.

Kudjo Mensa did not draw the lines very tightly. Cunningham declined to allow any woman from outside within the barbed wire, he had no intention of allowing them to spy out the poverty of the land, but he had not the heart to forbid the women from inside going out and picking up what provisions and what information they could get. The provisions were generally bought at ruinous prices, and were very scanty at that, and he was not at all sure that the information was reliable; still, this was worth considering. Akosua came to him, and he questioned her but she had nothing more to tell. Kudjo Mensa had caught an unfortunate policeman, killed him, and dressing up one of his own men in his uniform had sent him with a letter to say that they were defending M'Pranza.

"Is it a probable story?" asked Bullen.

"Horribly probable. Kudjo Mensa is an educated man, and he might write quite a circumstantial account of the affair."

"He might even sign it Richard Bullen, Commander R.N., I suppose," said Bullen.

"He might. In all probability he has. Dicky, if the soldiers go to M'Pranza, and M'Pranza's probably a heap of ashes by now——"

"You think they'll start avenging us before we're dead."

The anxious look on Cunningham's face deepened.

"What's that the lady's got in her hand?" said Bullen.

The girl, she was little more, though privation had spoiled her beauty, held a little roll of white paper.

"Give here, Akosua."

She drew back. "For Dokiter," she said.

Pearce came down the steps. "Poor Anne," he said, "she'll remember Africa."

"It's nothing serious, I hope," and again Bullen was conscious that Cunningham was trying to speak lightly, to show only an ordinary friendly interest.

"No, it's nothing serious; but the bullet was made of telegraph wire, and she'll carry the mark to her grave. Perhaps," he said, with a sudden bitter passion, "it would have been simpler if it had ended it."

"No," said Cunningham, with a sharp indrawing of his breath. "Pearce, we seem to be interfering with your secret correspondence. Akosua, give doctor his letter."

The girl handed it over quickly. "From Kudjo Mensa, I tink," she said.

"Come inside, and read it," said Cunningham.

Kitty was with Anne, and they had the big sitting-room to themselves. Pearce opened the letter and read.

"The brute," he said. "I wish you'd strung him up, Bullen, when you had the chance. It would have saved a world of trouble."

"What's he got to say?" said Dicky.

Pearce looked for a moment at Cunningham, and then spread the letter out on the table for them to read.

"DEAR SIR [it began],—It is almost a platitude to say that one should suffer for the good of many. Now I presume that things are getting a little hard with you in the camp and I have every reason to know that there is not the smallest chance of your being relieved.

Under the circumstances you might perhaps think it wise to lend an ear to a proposition I have to make.

"I am prepared on my honour to grant you, the ladies, and all in your camp who desire it, a safe-conduct to Lesondi on one condition—namely, that you give up to me the Provincial Commissioner, Mr Joseph Cunningham, with whom I have particular business, business that I have never yet had a chance of discussing with him free from interruption. Of course you will ask no questions as to what will become of him.

"You have not done me the honour to answer my last two letters, probably they have not reached you, or possibly by now things have arrived at such a point that you may be inclined to reconsider your former decision. I may as well put the alternative before you. I have no intention of abandoning the siege. The soldiers are starting for M'Pranza, so I have plenty of time, and long before they can get back I shall have taken your camp. In that case I shall not feel called upon to show any mercy. I mention this unpleasant fact merely to emphasise the chance I now offer you.

"Trusting to hear from you presently I have the honour to be, my dear sir, your obedient servant.

"KUDJO MENSA."

"The devil!" cried Bullen, looking from one to the other.

Cunningham looked across at Pearce almost shamefacedly.

"My dear old chap," said the doctor, putting his hand on his shoulder, "don't take it so badly. The man's an out-and-out blackguard. I wouldn't trust his safe-conduct as far as the compound gate."

"Why didn't you show me the other letters?"

"What the dickens was the good of making you uncomfortable?"

"They reached you then?"

"Oh, they reached me. Don't you worry. Even the black police know better than to trust Kudjo Mensa."

"It looks like my chickens coming home to roost with a vengeance," said Cunningham, and Bullen was reminded of the broken man who had received the one gun salute on board the *Irrepressible*.

"My dear chap, it's only a little dodge to make us uncomfortable. Suppose we gave you up, it would be my turn next, and then Bullen's here; you know that as well as I do."

"Yes," said Cunningham, brightening visibly, but Bullen knew he had not seen him so moved, no, not when he had lost all four long years ago.

"Look here," he said, "of course giving up Cunningham's all tommy rot, but why don't you try some more messengers. These black chaps could surely slip through."

"You saw the result the other night," said Cunningham. "If they're not killed, they're absorbed into the population."

"Cheer up," said Pearce. "I've discovered three bags of linseed meal in the medical stores. Don't you think we might serve some out to-morrow?"

"Oh, Africa!" said the Provincial Commissioner.

"Do you think the soldiers are at Obusadi?" asked Bullen.

"God knows."

"See," went on Bullen, "you fellows must tell me something. The food's getting lower and lower, and the ammunition——"

"We've plenty of ammunition," said Cunningham hastily, "such as it is, but it's been here five years, and Africa's played the devil with it. I keep the men cleaning it up, but I'm not at all sure half of it won't miss fire."

"Well," said Bullen, "suppose Wallington doesn't come in next week, shall we have even an ounce of dried apricots or a tin of pigs' feet left?"

Pearce and Cunningham looked at one another, and once more Bullen felt what an outsider he was. His old friend! His old chum!

"No need to take gloomy views," said Pearce.

"We sha'n't have a scrap of food in less than a week at the present rate, and that's starvation, as you know," said Cunningham. "Pearce, we've got to face it, we can't cut our way through."

"No, and we certainly couldn't trust Kudjo Mensa's safe-conduct."

"Do you think the beggars outside know how bad things are?" asked Bullen.

"I expect they pretty well gauge the situation. There's a constant communication going on between the women inside and the women outside. It's impossible to stop it; besides, I can't cut them off from the chance of a little food."

"And when the food's done?" asked Bullen.

Again Cunningham drew in his breath sharply.

"Presently when Kudjo Mensa thinks we are weak enough he'll try and rush the place. And we'll beat him off."

"And then?"

"He'll try again."

"And again we'll beat him off?"

"I hope so."

But the three men looked at one another. Through the wide-open window they could see the moon just sinking behind the forest, the barbed wire that made the fort showed up plainly in its white light but some of the shadows were deep and dark. Bullen saw Cunningham's face clearly in the rays of the lamp. It was drawn and lined and the sweat stood on his forehead.

"We'd better have things clear, Cunningham," said Pearce.

"There'll come a time when we can't beat them off, and then we'll save our last cartridges for ourselves and the women."

"Good God!" cried the sailor, "we haven't come to that!"

"We're within a week of it," said Pearce.

"Unless," began Cunningham, but Pearce interrupted him.

"Make no mistake about it," he said roughly, "that would be an utterly useless sacrifice."

"But if—but if—the women——"

"Of course I don't know your relations," said Pearce, "but considering we three are looking death straight in the eyes we may as well speak plainly. If you care for Anne Lovat, as I think you do, you'll just stop here and see that she does not fall into the hands of these Falabi. You can't leave us on any pretence whatever. Your place is here till Wallington comes or till——" And he flung out his hand.

"What would they do with you, Potiphar?" asked Bullen.

"There are several little things they might do with him," said Pearce. "Cut off his eyelids and peg him down across a line of driver ants, or rub him up and

down barbed wire till all the flesh was torn from his bones, or use a little pepper—— My God! these things are too close! They'd do them and then they'd come along and serve us the same way."

There was silence for a moment, the noises of the camp reached their ears, the noise and stir which a number of people make even when they are quite silent and too weak and weary to move. From beyond the camp came the incessant beating of a tom-tom, now loud and clear, now dying away, but insistent always, and sometimes a leopard called or there was a whirring of wings as a night bird flew past the verandah.

"If I thought it would save—I mean, of course, one man's life for so many," said Cunningham.

"The commissioner's place is here," said Pearce emphatically. "You know well enough our own men would turn and rend us if you went away. No, we must face it. When the worst comes to the worst I can look after my wife and you must care for Anne Lovat. Thank your God, Bullen, you have no woman on your mind now."

Again there was silence, and then Bullen burst out: "If Major Wallington gets that lying message from Kudjo Mensa you think he will go off to M'Pranza?"

"It's only too probable," said Cunningham, "if the Rewah Fetich has set the country in a blaze, as I'm afraid it has. What else would Wallington have to go on?"

"You think the men you sent out didn't get through?"

"You saw my letters returned. They may have been killed, or they may have lost the letters, or they may be so imbued with the power of the Rewah, the certainty that the white man is overthrown, that they may simply have gone over to the enemy."

"The devil! But to die with help only three days away!"

The other two men had faced this thing for the last week, so they looked at him in silence, and for the moment Cunningham felt Bullen was his old friend and comrade once more.

"Dicky," he said, and his voice was infinitely gentle. "I can see no way out. It would be certain death to try and get through."

"Don't you think," said Bullen, and he put his hand on his old messmate's shoulder, "that one of us might struggle through to Obusadi?"

"Impossible," said Pearce.

"Madness," said Cunningham, "the thing couldn't be done."

"I'm not so sure about that," said Bullen persistently. "There doesn't seem any alternative. Look at the things men did in the Indian Mutiny."

"It's different here. They could most of them speak the language like the natives, and you might disguise a European to look like a Hindoo. It would be utterly impossible to make a white man look like a negro."

"One might do a deal with furniture polish and Condy's fluid," said Bullen.

But Cunningham shook his head. "If you or I were dyed black as ink no one for a single moment would mistake us for Yamba's brother."

"Get through at night then?"

"And next morning they'd pick up your tracks and before the next night you'd be in their hands. Of course the one thing in your favour would be that they would not expect a white man to go out; still, the tracks of a booted man are unmistakable."

" Tennis shoes," suggested Bullen, " and oh, I say—shades of Fenimore Cooper—why not go down stream a few miles ? Water leaves no trail. I learned that when I was twelve."

The other two looked at each other doubtfully.

"The same old enterprising Dicky," said Cunningham, with a faint smile, " always full of resources—but which of us could go, old chap ? I can't, nor can Pearce, you can see that for yourself. Mitchell's about as much use as a headache in an emergency and——"

" There's me," said Bullen soberly. " I'm a handy man. Give me a man you can trust to show me the way, because this African bush is the very devil, and if I can get through, and if the soldiers are at Obusadi, your rescue is certain."

For a moment no one spoke, then Pearce said, " It's worth thinking about, Cunningham."

Cunningham put out his hand and pressed Bullen's. " If it's to be done I know you're the man to do it, Dicky," he said, with all his old cordiality.

" Suppose we think it over," said Pearce.

" Let's give them twenty-four more hours," suggested Bullen, and his voice sounded quite cheerful as he thought what a relief it would be to do something. " And if nothing's changed by this time to-morrow night I'll start."

" It might mean death," said Cunningham.

" Staying here appears to spell certain death for all of us, so I don't see there's much choice in the matter," said the sailor-man.

CHAPTER XXV

WASTED

"Dream that the lips once breathless
Might quicken if they would;
Say that the soul is deathless;
Dream that the gods are good;
Say March may wed September
And time divorce regret;
But not that you remember,
And not that I forget."

ANNE was surprised at the effect her wound had upon her. It was only a jagged tear up her arm, a flesh wound, as she herself had said, but it seemed to take all the strength out of her. She got out of bed next day, because she wanted to give as little trouble as possible, but she lay on the long couch in Cunningham's sitting-room and was thankful when she had to make no effort to pretend she felt better than she really was.

Kitty sat beside her most of the morning, but she could close her eyes and not try and talk to Kitty. The very meagre luncheon was a trial, but afterwards the men went out and she could go back to her sofa.

"I'm ashamed of myself I feel so shaky," she said. "I want to cry."

"Nonsense," said Kitty, "you don't want to go under at the first little difficulty, and make Fred curse the day he brought us here. He's doing that now pretty badly, I expect, poor chap. Who's that on the verandah? Joe Cunningham? Be nice to him. He's feeling pretty bad about it," and before Anne could

remonstrate Kitty slipped out on to the back verandah and round into her own bedroom.

It was not Cunningham, but Dicky Bullen, and seeing Anne lying there alone he hesitated a moment, then came forward and sat down in the chair Kitty had left.

Poor Anne! As she lay there, the man who had professed to love her and discarded her had her at a disadvantage. There is beauty even in an ugly woman when she is radiantly happy, but when a pretty woman has been worn with long anxiety, want of food and, to finish up, has suffered a night of pain, she knows she is not looking her best. Anne was painfully conscious of Dicky Bullen's eyes on her face, she knew there were lines about her eyes and the corners of her mouth, and that silver streaks were showing in the dark hair over her temples. She had told Kitty she wanted to cry and now she wanted to cry still more.

"Anne," he said simply, "I'm so sorry you're hurt."

"It is nothing," she said uneasily, touching the white silk sling in which her arm hung. Even then it seemed to her futile of Dicky Bullen to express sorrow for her pain, he who had ruined her whole life for a passing whim; but Bullen was thinking of something else.

"Do you know I'm going out to-night?"

"Where?" she asked.

"I'm going to take one of Cunningham's policemen and try and fetch Obusadi. If once Major Wallington knows exactly where we are our rescue is certain."

"Oh, but surely that is a very desperate venture."

"If Wallington does not hit us soon our position will be pretty desperate."

"Yes; of course, I have seen that," said Anne.

" I didn't come to talk about it," said Bullen simply, " only seeing you were here alone I thought I'd like to bid you good-bye and say——" He hesitated.

" Yes ? " said Anne. Honestly she wondered what he was going to say. He was willing to risk his life for them, he was a brave man then, this old love of hers.

" What I wanted to say, Anne," he said, still hesitating, " was that—that—I have eyes and that—that if the soldiers get through and I don't—I hope—I hope you'll be very happy. Old Potiphar is such a good chap."

The crimson dyed Anne's pale cheeks and then ebbed away and her eyes were full of horror and shame.

" I don't understand what you are talking about," she said, and her voice sounded thin and far away.

" Why we have been here close on four weeks and of course I have seen——"

" What could you see ? " she interrupted bitterly.

" Cunningham and you," he said wonderingly. " There can be but one meaning to it surely. I wouldn't have spoken only as I'm going out to chance Kudjo Mensa I thought——"

Anne put her hands to her face and then took them away and tried to look at him quietly.

" Mr Cunningham is my very good friend," she said, and her voice in spite of herself had a quiver in it. " Absolutely nothing more. He cannot possibly be anything more——"

" Why not ? " asked Bullen.

She looked at him gravely and the reproach in her eyes made him turn his own away.

" It's all nonsense," he said hastily, " if you're thinking of the past. You and I have been good friends all

these weeks and I shall never come into your life again."

"Nothing can undo the past," said Anne, and Bullen stared at her in amazement.

"But I am nothing to you," he said, "you've been barely civil to me since I've been here."

"You make me ashamed," she moaned, "and I loved you so."

"But you don't love me now," he persisted. "Anne, you haven't a spark of love left for me."

"I don't even hate you," she said, "to think of all that has been between us and I don't love you and can't hate you. Oh, I am ashamed."

Dicky Bullen began to feel very uncomfortable. If she would only take a common-sense view.

"But, Anne, there is no harm done, none at all. I am going right out of your life. You will marry old Potiphar and it will be all serene."

"Mr Cunningham," said Anne, trying to control her trembling voice, "will some day marry the nice, good, sweet, innocent girl he deserves."

"It seems to me," said Bullen, "that Cunningham has set his heart on a woman who is nice and good and sweet and if she is not exactly innocent he won't know it."

Then Anne blazed out. "And do you think," she said, sitting up, "that I would do so wicked a thing? Mr Cunningham is worth—is worth—— He shall not have your leavings."

"Anne!" said Bullen, a little shocked.

She looked at him sullenly, defiantly.

"Anne, have a little common-sense and look things straight in the face. Years ago now you and I were engaged, we—we found we did not suit each other——"

"That is not true," said Anne.

"Well, I behaved like a blackguard if you like to put it that way—anyhow it is all over and done with long ago."

"It is not all over and done with," said Anne. "You chose to tire of me and throw me aside. It seems strange now to think how nearly you crushed the life out of me, but your throwing me aside did not end things. It couldn't undo the past."

"You speak as if you looked upon yourself as my wife," said Bullen, in troubled tones.

"You do not suppose," said Anne, in a low tone, "I should have let you come to me for two years if I had not looked upon the bond as sacred."

"Good gracious, Anne!" there was dismay in Bullen's tones, "what are you condemning yourself to? Utter loneliness."

"It is your work, not mine," she said wearily. "I am ashamed of what I did, but I—I—for myself," she said, with sudden passion, "I do not care if the soldiers don't come."

"This is stark, staring madness," said Bullen angrily. "Why can't you forget the past and make a good fellow happy?"

"He does not want another man's cast-off mistress," said Anne, blazing again.

"Anne! Anne!" Bullen was shocked and hurt, "you must not say such things. You know I can never think of you but as one of the best of women."

"I do not know how you think of me; I only know what you made me."

"But Potiphar," said Bullen unwisely, seeking to get away from an unpleasant subject, and then a

sudden thought struck him. "You don't mean to say you told Potiphar!"

"I have told you," said Anne and it seemed to her that the last remnant of her strength was departing, "that I refuse to discuss Mr Cunningham with you."

"You told him," repeated Bullen, "you were mad enough to tell Potiphar?"

"What on earth are you two squabbling about?" asked Kitty, coming in hastily. "Fred and Mr Cunningham are ready for that Barmecide feast we call afternoon tea. What was it Anne was mad enough to tell Potiphar, Dicky? About your engagement. Oh yes, Dicky, I knew you were engaged. I told Joe Cunningham about it myself nearly three years ago, but it didn't expedite matters as I hoped it would."

"Kitty!" cried Anne.

"Kitty!" cried Bullen.

"I don't want any tea," said Anne, and she slipped out on to the back verandah as Cunningham and Pearce came on to the front.

Kitty followed her. "Don't be silly, Anne," she said a little crossly. "I only told Joe Cunningham you had been engaged to Dicky Bullen and were rather ashamed of it. Nothing more."

Anne turned her face to the wall, for the abstract had been turned into the concrete now she knew that for all these weeks Cunningham had been aware that it was his old messmate who had betrayed her, and she hid her face in the hot African pillows that smelt of musty straw and thought she could never look him in the face again.

CHAPTER XXVI

FAREWELL

"We are not sure of sorrow,
  And joy was never sure;
To-day will die to-morrow;
  Time stoops to no man's lure.
. . . . . .
From too much hope of living,
  From hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving
  Whatever gods may be,
That no life lives for ever;
That dead men rise up never;
That even the weariest river
  Winds somewhere safe to sea."

"WHERE's Anne?" asked Pearce as they sat down to their scanty evening meal.

"She's not coming in," said Kitty, "she asked me to make her excuses. No, Fred, you needn't rush off. She's not feverish, only a little overdone. I'm sure she'll be all right to-morrow."

"It's no wonder she dodges our dinner," said Cunningham, looking with distaste at the somewhat highly smelling corned beef which Amo put on the table with a great flourish, "there's something gone wrong with the tinned meats. Pearce and I couldn't make up our minds whether it was better nastiness plain, or nastiness disguised with curry powder."

"He means," said Pearce, "that cook's got a bad go of fever, and he wasn't sure that Amo was equal to disguising the nastiness. Give me a little, Cunningham, I daresay a tot of whisky will hide it."

"Never mind," said Bull enconsolingly, "the linseed meal's going excellently. See the sergeant shovelling in a mess of grass and linseed meal and weevily biscuit. 'My word, massa, that chop he be fine too much!' The men can make out with it till I come marching in with Wallington."

Cunningham looked round anxiously, but Bullen had made sure that Amo had left the room before he spoke.

"You see, there is really nothing for it but for me to go."

"You deserve the Victoria Cross, Dicky, for volunteering," said Cunningham, and his hand went out across the table to his old messmate.

"I ought to be able to slip through in the dark," said Bullen. "I don't believe it's such a desperate venture after all. I'll get you, Pearce——"

Amo came in and swept away the dish on which the beef had been, and put in its place a rotten paw-paw and two square oatmeal biscuits.

"Thank God," said Mitchell solemnly, "we've got plenty to drink."

"I've noticed," said Pearce, with a little sigh, "there's always something to be thankful for. Kitty, are you going to have some paw-paw?"

Kitty declined; the paw-paw was rotten, even beyond what a hungry woman could manage.

"I'll see if Anne will take a little," she said, rising.

When she was gone, and Amo had disappeared down below to his own meagre supper, Bullen turned again to Pearce.

"I expect I'll get through all right," he said. "I don't see why I shouldn't; look at those chaps who escaped from the Benin Massacre, but I want to be on

the safe side, so you might give me something in case I do fall into their hands."

The doctor nodded gravely.

"Mind it will be deadly," he said. "I'll give you a little phial to put in your breast pocket, and don't wait too long."

"Oh," said Cunningham, "don't go. Let's see it out together."

"As far as I can see," said Bullen as lightly as he could, "that would make a certainty of the whole six of us needing that little phial before the week is out. I should like to have a run for my money."

"Then we'll draw lots for it."

Again Bullen looked round. "You're right, Bullen," said Pearce, "neither Cunningham nor I can leave the place. It's out of the question, and Mitchell here is no bushman. No, if anybody's going to get through to Wallington it's you."

"Let's try Suri alone," said Cunningham.

"Oh, he'll go fast enough," said Pearce, "but how far will he get? They're children, these people. I'm afraid that outside, they're fully persuaded the white man's power is broken."

"Yes," said Bullen quickly, "and even if he plucked up courage to enter into communication with Wallington a fortnight hence what good would that be to us? Have him in, Potiphar, and entrust him to my tender care. I'll start when the moon goes down."

Suri came in, a tall young Mendi policeman, with bright intelligent eyes, but his face was hollow and gaunt, and his jacket hung on him in folds.

He stood before the white men and saluted.

"Suri, you go out with Captain Bullen, look 'em Major Wallington."

Suri's face brightened. A Mendi policeman will dare most things, but he looked the matter straight in the face. "Kudjo Mensa go catch 'em," he suggested.

"Oh no, he won't," said Bullen quickly, "we travel at night, hide in the daytime."

Suri nodded his head and looked Bullen up and down as if taking a fresh interest in him.

"You take Captain Bullen to Major Wallington at Obusadi in three, four days, I give you twenty pounds," said Cunningham.

Again came that somewhat pathetic smile in the hunger-worn face. "Yes, sah, I go."

"You're a good boy, Suri," said Cunningham. "Mind," he laid his hand on Bullen's shoulder, "this my friend, see you take good care of him. He no savvy this country."

"Yes, sah, I take care."

Cunningham turned to Mitchell. "There's some linseed and some brawn in the next room; it's rather high, but I expect he can manage it. Fill him up and get him into a blue cloth, will you? He can't go out in uniform. And, I say, Mitchell, just shepherd him, and don't let him talk to any of the others. We don't want it to get out that Bullen's going off."

"All right, sir," said Mitchell.

The other three sat and waited. They turned out the lamp, for the oil was getting low, and sat in the gloom of the verandah watching the yellow crescent of the moon sink slowly behind the wall of forest. At first all the camp was bathed in its light; there were the bare-footed sentinels, all their jauntiness gone, walking up and down the line of barbed wire, a few men crouching on the ground, two or three bending over a spark of fire, with the other bungalow beyond, and one or two rough

shelters the men had put up for their women; and between the barbed wire and the forest the garden Cunningham had cleared was all springing up into life again. The grass was knee deep and the slender graceful palms and the spreading umbrella-trees were already over four or five feet high.

"Another week," said Bullen, "and Kudjo Mensa'll be able to sit down outside, and pick us off comfortably at his leisure, damn him. Clearly, I must go."

They had not much to say to each other, as they sat there smoking their last pipe together. The situation was too desperate. They would think of all the things they might have said later. Lower and lower sank the moon, and Cunningham's mind went back to the old days when he and Bullen had been on the *Irrepressible* together and staunch friends. Had he only taken Bullen's advice and kept his temper neither of them would have been staking their lives in this way. Farther back still went his thoughts: he was a big boy and Bullen the smallest boy on the *Britannia*. How the small boy had looked up to and admired the big boy! Never had he received such whole-hearted adoration, and because of a woman—and again bitterness rose up against his friend. If only—— His musings were interrupted by the two women, who came stealing along as if the necessity for secrecy had impressed itself upon them.

"We had to come," said Kitty to Bullen with a sob in her voice, "to wish you Godspeed if you are really going."

"I am really going," said Bullen, "and I hope before the week's out you'll be greeting my return with pæans of joy."

"Have you made all preparations?"

"Oh, I travel light. Our provisions are beneath con-

tempt. I guess I'll do all right on a bottle of whisky and such chop as I can pick up in the bush."

"And aren't you going to take any arms?"

"Potiphar's lending me his Colt."

"You'll keep one cartridge for yourself," said Kitty, lowering her voice as the full horror of the thing dawned on her, "in case——"

"Oh, I'm doubly guarded, for your husband has given me a little phial—but it's only a sort of insurance. I know I am going to send you in help."

Dicky spoke very cheerfully. Possibly he was the most cheerful man there. At least he was going to do something. Over the others hung the deadly feeling that, whatever happened, they were powerless to help. They sat silent for a moment and Anne felt as if a hand were clutching at her heart. This man was going out to face death for their sakes and she had loved him greatly. The remembrance of all that love and longing came over her in a flood and tied her tongue. What could she say? Once she would have felt that his going, and his danger, was not to be borne, and now she could only think that he was brave, that he had been worth loving, and that she could do nothing to help him although at this moment she would have given her life.

"The moon's going," said Bullen, rising to his feet and stuffing his pipe into his pocket.

"Dicky, Dicky," emotional Kitty was sobbing passionately, and Anne felt a lump in her throat, and her hands cold as ice. Surely it is the bitterest part to stand aside and wait.

"I know I'll be all right. Don't cry, Kitty."

He was at the head of the verandah steps, furning and looking at then as a man who is going for an after-dinner stroll.

"God keep you," said Anne, and her voice was a strained whisper, but it reached him.

"Thank you," he said gravely, and ran lightly down the steps, the other men following. Mitchell brought up Suri stripped of his uniform and clad only in blue cloth.

"Twenty pounds for you, Suri, if you get through," said Cunningham. "I have written it in the letter to Major Wallington."

"Yes, sah," said Suri.

The moon had set, and it was pitch dark in the compound. There were two sentries at the opening in the barbed wire and Cunningham sent one down to the kitchen, and another across with a message to the sergeant. Then the way was clear; none in the compound would know of Bullen's departure till daylight, and would not be certain of it then.

"Good luck to you," said Pearce, and his voice was not quite steady.

Each man wrung his hand. Cunningham was his old self once more, the man who shared his boyish memories.

"Dicky, I haven't words," he began shakily, and Bullen cut him short.

"Keep a stiff upper lip," he said cheerily, "and look for me on Friday." And he gripped Cunningham's hand once more, and then slipped out into the darkness. Suri followed, and Cunningham pulled the mesh of barbed wire across the gap again.

Bullen's heart sank for a moment as he stood still in the darkness outside the defences, then he touched Suri's arm.

"Which way?"

"This way, sah."

Bullen stopped him. He adhered to his original determination to break his trail by going downstream,

and to do that, he knew he must hit the little stream that ran by Addudimi. Naturally they would keep a lookout for messengers on the road to Obusadi. He reckoned they could work their way round once they were in the forest. It might take longer, but it would certainly be safer. Suri saw the wisdom of this course, and they crept slowly round the camp, Dicky's confidence coming back to him with every step they took. It was very dark and rather cloudy, and if here and there a golden star peeped through it was blotted out again immediately by the scurrying clouds. The ground was rough and covered with creepers, and every now and again, if he did not walk warily, Bullen found himself entangled in their meshes. He could only travel by night, as a white man in European garments would be a marked figure, and still more marked a white man in native dress. There was nothing for it but a steady push on, and if every step now was taking him nearer his enemies he hoped that soon every step would be taking him away from them. He had felt weary and done up in the camp, but out in the cool fresh night air, with the sweet breeze blowing on his face, some of his strength, and all his hopefulness, came back to him.

On the outskirts of the forest a war drum was beating, then negro voices in conversation broke upon his ears, and he stopped within sight of a small fire round which were seated half-a-dozen men. He could hear Suri's quick frightened breathing and stepped back softly till a pressure on his arm brought him to a standstill within the buttress of a great cotton-wood tree. At the same moment a man came past and stood just in front of them, peering about as if he had heard something. Across his shoulder he carried a long Dane gun, and he

was so close that Bullen almost feared to breathe. He could see the outline of the man's features against the flickering firelight, could even smell the peculiar acrid odour of the negro. It seemed to him ages that he stood there hardly daring to breathe; and something had got inside his puttees, an ant, or perhaps only a grass seed, but the pain was almost unbearable. He longed to put his hand to his breast pocket to feel for the phial he carried there, that was to ensure an easy death, for discovery seemed inevitable, and then the man shouted something in his own jargon to his mates and passed on, and Bullen felt himself weak as a man must feel who has looked Death between the eyes and Death has passed on. Suri touched his arm, and they went slowly on again, leaving the little fire behind them and threading their way carefully through the scrub at the edge of the forest and about two o'clock in the morning they came to a narrow path that Bullen, looking at the stars like a sailor-man, judged ran eastwards.

Suri touched his arm. "He go Addudimi," said he.

"That's all right," said Bullen, turning into it thankfully. "Suri, where's that stream?"

"Find 'um by um by, sah."

The first rush of excitement was over, and Bullen was beginning to feel that the long confinement and want of food had told upon him. A languor was stealing over him, and he longed to lie down and sleep; but there must be no rest for them until they had put many miles behind them. Force his way through the primeval forest any longer he felt he could not, and surely this path, which at least led somewhat in the direction he wished to go, would get them on a good long way and, more important still, bring them to the stream which he looked for to cover his trail effectually. It was only a

native path beaten hard by the passing of many feet, but two men might walk abreast on it, and presently they came to cleared spaces where sweet potatoes and cassada were growing, and the hungry men stopped and helped themselves, washing their meal down with whisky, and water drawn from a hole close by. Bullen, while grudging the time, was thankful for the first full meal he had had for nearly a month, and Suri sighed the sigh of a satisfied man.

"That be fine chop," he said.

"On again," urged Bullen, repressing an intense desire to sleep, and they pushed on. The night was alive with the myriad sounds of the bush; the hum of insects was in the air, a sloth was shrieking pitifully, like a little child in pain, a nightbird every now and again sent a mournful wail ringing out over the trees and the wind sighed among the palm fronds. Every now and again there would be a rustling in the forest alongside them, a rustling that was unexplained and unexplainable, but that made the white man grasp his revolver tightly with one hand and feel with the other for the little phial in his pocket. The path wound and twisted as negro paths are apt to do, but it went always in the same direction, and at last the forest on either hand thinned a little, Bullen heard the sound of running water, and Suri, who knew the signs, stopped dead and whispered.

"Addudimi lib."

"Go on. Let's get across the stream," said Bullen, and once again his heart was in his mouth. It seemed to him that once across that stream, once sure that he had broken his trail, success must lie within his grasp.

They found it ticklish work passing the village, for the bush came right up to the fence, but everyone seemed

peacefully asleep. Suri found the path where the women evidently went down to fill their pitchers, and presently they were in the stream with the running water cool and pleasant around their knees. Steadily they went down. It was rough and full of holes and water plants, but it was not deep, and with every step they took Bullen felt his spirits rising. He stood and bathed his face for a while, with a sigh of thankfulness, and then they went on again till weariness overpowered him. He took out his watch. It was too dark to see the hands but he felt them, and judged they must have been going downstream for about an hour. The dawn was coming too, just the faintest tinge of primrose was showing on the clouds above the tree tops, and the brilliant stars were paling.

"Now, Suri, we must get out of this."

"I look 'um," said Suri obediently, and presently they found a patch of thinner forest and climbed out of the stream. Bullen turned into the forest without hesitation. He was so weary he could not even feel afraid; but if it had been dark in the stream and on the road, it was darker still in the forest, the blackness rose up before them like a wall, thorny creepers stretched out long trails to hold them, caught in their clothes and wound themselves as traps for their feet, the branches swept down from overhead, the roots rose up at their feet, and the trunks of the trees barred their path.

"It isn't worth it," said Bullen with a sigh, "we shouldn't do a mile a day," and as soon as he found space enough he sat down and called softly to Suri to do the same.

He debated in his own mind whether it would be better that one of them should watch and then decided against it. Their progress by night would depend on

their resting well in the day ; they must chance something ; and having thus decided he closed his eyes, and was soon sleeping as serenely as if he had been in his cot in his own cabin on the wide safe sea.

When he awoke it was with the refreshed feeling of a man who has accomplished something, and no longer fears the toil that is before him. The sun was filtering down through the leaves making patterns on the blue cloth, that Suri had drawn over his head, and Bullen heard rather than saw that he was sound asleep. He bent over and slipped his hand in his, waking him softly, and then they debated whether they should go on or stay where they were.

Suri was for staying where they were.

" Kudjo Mensa not dun come here for sure," was his contribution.

" All the more reason," said Bullen, looking at the thick close-growing forest all around them, " why we should get out while we can see ; we'll have to stay here if we wait for night. We must go on."

He was half afraid to move in the modified daylight that came filtering through the leaves, but he made up his mind that he must get to where some path should be within sight before the night fell. Suri said there was a path to the right, from which they could go straight on to Obusadi, and Bullen's heart beat high as he felt within measurable distance of the accomplishment of his task. After all, so many things are wiped out by self-sacrifice, and if he brought the soldiers to those beleaguered folk at Dalaga—— He dared not think, however, but scrambled steadily through the dense undergrowth, till at last, stepping through a bush, what he had thought solid ground turned out to be swamp, and he found himself standing in water ; but beyond the green

swamp he could see the path that led to Obusadi and safety. Meantime they must wait.

The long hot afternoon hours crawled by. It seemed a sin not to make for that empty road, when the necessity of those behind him was so dire, and he had to put a strong restraint upon himself in order to stay quietly where he was, to remember that to be seen by one man would ruin his enterprise, and bring death, not only upon himself, but in all probability upon those he had left behind. He was hungry too, and had nothing but a few cassada roots and a little whisky and water. The cicadas shrilled in the trees, a flock of birds flew screaming through the branches and some little black and white monkeys peered and chattered and fled in terror, and came back again, devoured with curiosity. Night, however, fell at length and then Bullen turned hopefully and gladly to Suri.

" Now," he said, " now," and in his voice was all the triumph of long, weary days left behind. Hunger and weariness were forgotten, he was like a man beginning a new life. Only that little swamp to cross and the road lay fair before them to Obusadi.

The swamp had to be crossed, and he felt his way with a stake to make sure he did not get out of his depth. Twenty-four hours since he had left Dalaga, it seemed like weeks, but only forty-eight hours more, and he should be at Obusadi. He could see the road ahead of him gleaming white and empty in the moonlight, empty as it had been the livelong day, and the water of the swamp, that had been almost up to his waist, was shallowing rapidly. The mosquitoes were piping shrilly, rising round him like a cloud. Fever ? Anyhow he wouldn't get fever for forty-eight hours, and it didn't matter what happened then, away from this

swamp. He put his foot with a sigh of thankfulness on a slimy log that helped to bank up the pathway and prevented it from falling into the swamp ; it was rotten, and it gave. He made an effort to recover himself, but before he could do so his foot had gone through the rotten wood, and he had come down with all his weight upon it. He could not restrain a cry of anguish as an exquisite pain shot up his leg.

CHAPTER XXVII

ONE OF THE GREY COMPANY

"Oh the grey, grey company
  Of the pallid dawn!
Oh the ghastly faces
  Ashen and drawn!
The Lord's lone sentinels
  Dotted down the years!
The little grey company
  Before the pioneers.

"In each others' faces
  Looked the pioneers
Drank the wine of courage
  All their battle years
For their weary sowing
  Through the drear world wide
Green they saw the harvest
  Ere the day they died.

"But the grey, grey company
  Stood every man alone
In the pallid dawn light.
  Scarcely had they known
Ere the day they perished
  That their beacon star
Was not glint of marsh light
  In the shadows far.

"Be laurel to the victor
  And roses to the fair
And asphodel Elysian
  Let the hero wear;
But lay the pitying lilies
  Upon their narrow biers
The lone grey company
  Before the pioneers."

SURI, full of concern, came rushing to the rescue, and with his help Dicky dragged himself out of the water, and on to the road he had looked at so longingly, and knew that not to save his own life, nor the lives of those who were trusting to him, could he move another step.

It was only a trivial hurt, one that on an ordinary occasion would have laid him up for a week or ten days at most, but it meant the end of everything. With the best will in the world, he could not put his foot to the ground. All the horror of the situation came upon him with a rush as, leaning on Suri's arm, he struggled across the narrow path and let himself go against the wall of greenery that held him up like an elastic curtain.

White and clear in the moonlight lay the road that went straight to Obusadi. Bullen could have cried aloud. He was tasting the first bitterness of death, and he put his hand in his pocket to make sure that the little phial was still there; but life had still something for him to do.

"Massa sick too much?" asked Suri anxiously, "massa go die," and he knelt down beside him, pitying, anxious, frightened.

"Massa dun finish," said Bullen bitterly, and then he gathered his wits together. If we must die there was no reason why the others should die too.

"Suri," he said, speaking with decision, "you go straight to Obusadi now. In two days you go reach there. You go quick, quick. Kudjo Mensa no savvy you from 'nother black man. Tell Major Wallington —no, here," and he felt in his pocket, and on a torn leaf of his note-book scribbled a message to the officer in charge. "You take that book to Major Wallington, and I think commissioner make your sergeant. That good for black man."

Suri considered the matter. "Commissioner, he say I look you proper," and the black face looked troubled and anxious in the moonlight.

Bullen's heart warmed to this man of an alien race, and he laid his hand on his arm. "You fetch soldiers. The best, Suri, quick, I give you twenty pounds."

Still the man evidently did not like to leave him. "I go back to Dalaga, commissioner, dokiter, come to-night."

They were comparatively close, far closer than Obusadi, but he put the temptation aside.

"No, Suri, you go to Obusadi one time, that best. Kudjo Mensa chop you before you catch Dalaga."

"Massa hide?" asked Suri anxiously.

"Massa hide," assented Bullen, gazing languidly down the path again, and then he turned to look for a break in the greenery that rose like a wall in the white moonlight. Suri gave him a helping hand, and presently they found an opening and Bullen crept in.

"Now, Suri, Suri, quick," he urged with passionate earnestness, and for the moment the feeling uppermost in his mind was not his own pain, nor his peril, but scorn at the carelessness that had put him out of the running. What he might suffer he almost felt he deserved, but the others were waiting wearily for rescue and relying on him to bring it. Now their only hope lay in the negro, whom Cunningham had doubted; but Bullen did not doubt him. He believed in the man who was looking at him with pitiful eyes.

"Remember, Suri, I give you twenty pounds if you bring the soldiers," and even as he said it he felt he was wronging this man by assuming that money would make any difference to his faithfulness. He would get through if he could. "Go, Suri, go, we waste time. The morning comes."

"Massa, I do go," said Suri, and turned and went down the road at a long loping trot.

Then Bullen felt himself alone indeed with a despairing desperate loneliness and, man of action as he was, his heart sank at the thought of what might be before him. Four days at the very least before the soldiers could possibly come, four foodless days, though he might crawl across the road for water at night; was it worth it? More than once his hand sought his breast pocket where he had the wherewithal to end it; but men of the English navy are made of stern stuff, even those whom a nation trains and then allows to eat their hearts out in idleness, and Dicky Bullen, lying there in the sodden

African bush, staring up at the hot white moonlight that filtered through the branches overhead, made up his mind to live if he could. The phial had been given him in order that he might not suffer useless torture; he would use it only in the last extremity.

He took off his shoe, and unwinding his puttee looked at his injured leg. A sprain undoubtedly, it was swollen to his knee, and he could not put his foot to the ground, but, perhaps in a day or two, with rest—and then he laughed bitterly. Rest, he had to rest, he could do nothing but lie here and rest, he would be lucky if he were allowed to lie in peace.

The night seemed cruelly long, and towards morning he dozed. It was impossible to sleep comfortably, though he told himself he might as well; he could not keep awake till rescue came; he could only hope to sleep lightly enough to wake at any crashing through the jungle such as men coming to capture him might make. He thought of many things all that long weary night, of his old messmate Cunningham, the man who had redeemed his one false step and stood to win here in Africa if only the soldiers came soon enough; and of Anne, the woman he had loved—how madly he had loved her once; lying here helpless, he almost wondered that such fierce love could have died so utterly; and thinking of her in his loneliness he realised, as he had never done before, the wrong he had done her. It had seemed quite natural once to take what he desired since it was so freely given, natural to want his freedom when satiety came, natural to be vexed with her that she could not treat the thing lightly; but now it seemed to him that she had chosen the better part. Perfect love is a goodly thing, perfect trust is not to be sneered at nor ridiculed. It was he who had missed his way.

He sought for excuses for himself, remembering his training, the training that is given to the average man. He remembered a saying he had once read that what to a man was merely an episode was to a woman her whole life and this way of regarding it had meant pain and loneliness and desolation to the woman who had been everything to him once. He listened to the wuff-wuff of a leopard, and the weird laugh of a hyena in the distance, and stirred uneasily on his rough couch as he realised dimly what we all come to realise in time, that it is not the attainment nor the failure that counts, but the earnest striving. Anne with her faith had had something for all her sorrow that he had never touched. Oh, Anne! Anne! And he had never even troubled to show her that he was sorry with a real sorrow. He wanted tenderness to-night—he wanted love—he was lonely with a cruel, terrible loneliness for which there could be no comfort.

Then he dozed again because the strain of listening, even of fearing, is wearing and men have dozed on the rack. When he awoke, the fierce sun was creeping through the leaves.

It seemed to him that something had aroused him and instinctively his right hand stole to his Colt and his left to his breast pocket. But there was nothing, snrely nothing, a little sloth stirring among the leaves, perhaps, some playing monkeys passing—and then he became conscious of a long stick pointing directly at him. A stick—it was—it was—the long barrel of a Dane gun.

It had come then, and he would wait no longer. His fingers touched the precious phial, but before he could grasp it, sinewy hands had seized his arm and dragged him to his feet, and round him negro voices were shout-

ing to one another in their unintelligible tongue. He had left it too late! Fool, fool! Too late! He fought desperately, but he fought ten men, and had he had the strength of ten men mere weight of numbers would have prevailed. There was but one thought in his mind now—to get at that little bottle. If he ceased struggling, perhaps, as they greatly outnumbered him, they would loose his hands; so he stopped with a suddenness that made the shouting negroes breathless, but two or three still held him, and they dragged him through the bush out on to the path to Obusadi. All the day before he had watched that path, and hoped and feared and counted the long hours, and now the very worst had happened, and his blood ran cold at what was before him.

His captors did not look warriors but were men like his own carriers, except that round their necks and arms and legs they wore tufts of grass and feathers, leopards' teeth and in the wool of one of them were stuck bits of brass, the little hooks used for hanging pictures in happier lands. They fastened his hands behind him with tie-tie, fastened them with cruel tightness, in spite of his protests. At first they wanted him to walk, but walk he could not, and then a rough hammock made its appearance and he was flung in, and presently they were on the roadway going back to Dalaga, laughing, chattering, shouting, showing thier unfortunate prisoner that they certainly feared no interruption from the only men who could save him.

All that day they went steadily on, changing bearers, and eating and drinking as they went, but no one took the least notice of him. No one wetted his lips or offered him bite or sup. Once or twice he asked them to cut his bonds, for at first his hands were numb, and then throbbed and swelled till the aching was intolerable, but

no one paid the least heed to him. As the sun was setting, the path opened out and he saw in the distance the bungalows of Dalaga clear cut against the evening sky, and found himself in the midst of a crowd of negroes armed with long Dane guns, and with blood lust in their eyes. Weary and wretched though he was, he was thankful to see the flag still flying.

His appearance was greeted with joy. Fierce laughing black faces were thrust over the hammock to peer at him, and to mock, he doubted not, if he could have understood what they said, and some fired off their long Danes in pure wantonness, but the hammock-bearers thrust on through the increasing crowd till suddenly they flung him down in a heap before a negro dressed in a long silk robe of many colours lolling back in a hammock-chair. The last rays of the setting sun lighted up the scene.

The rough cleared ground with the vegetation growing up again lay between them and Dalaga, behind was the dense greenery of the forest, and showing up against it was the figure of the brilliantly clad negro under a red umbrella. Beside him stood a girl comely as a bronze statue flicking away the flies and mosquitoes with a long whisk. Never surely had man felt more at disadvantage than Dicky Bullen lying there on the ground bound and powerless. He looked up, and the man looked down, and as their eyes met they recognised one another. This was Kudjo Mensa, the man he had strung up and beaten at Abbafanu, and this was Kudjo Mensa's revenge.

"So, Captain Bullen," the polish and purity of the English took the sailor's breath away, coming as it did from a negro in a cloth, "we're about quits at last, I take it."

"More than quits, I think," said Bullen.

"Good," said the negro thoughtfully, "good. I daresay," he went on, enunciating his words with the careful unemotional lingering on the vowels of the cultivated Oxford man, "you have heard that we dark men can make things very unpleasant when we wish, before the end comes."

"I have heard," said Bullen, and then added, "you have brought me bound all these miles in the blazing sun, you have given me neither food nor water, so I can't last long, thank God, whatever you do," and he shut his eyes as if he had looked his last on life.

Kudjo Mensa rose from his seat, and came and bent over him. "Excuse me," he said in most courteous tones, "but I have learned the ideas of you white men and I must guard against you—circumventing us," and he ran his black hands lightly over the breast of Bullen's jacket, found the pocket, and took out the precious phial.

"So," he said, "so. It is instant death, I presume. Kind, pitying, tender death," and he held the little phial up. "Now, Captain Bullen, we must show you that the negro can be a chivalrous gentleman with far more courtesy than your naval man," and he shouted a few words to his attendants and presently Dicky found his bonds cut, and himself propped against a tree before his captor, feebly rubbing his numbed and aching hands to try and restore their circulation. He was horribly conscious of his unkempt condition. He was unshaven, and unwashed, he had not taken off his clothes for thirty-six hours, and in that time he had pushed his way through dense forest and muddy swamp and fought a desperate fight for his life, or for his death —if only it had been for death and it had been all over by now! He had taken off his shoe and because of the

swelling of his foot had been unable to put it on again, even now he could not rest any of his weight upon that foot, and the long fasting and the thirst made the whole scene swim before him in the dying light. Kudjo Mensa motioned and an attendant brought up another chair into which Bullen sank thankfully.

Kudjo Mensa lay back in his chair, smoking a long cigar, and smiling to himself a little self-satisfied smile, and Bullen freed from the constraint of his bonds could only be thankful for the present comfort and ease. What might come after he dare not think. If they would only give him a drink.

"You'd like a whisky and soda, I daresay," said his captor as quietly as an English gentleman might have spoken to a guest, newly arrived and fagged from a journey, and presently a bowl of ground-nut soup and a long glass of whisky and soda were brought him. He drank the whisky eagerly and felt new life and vigour ebbing back into his limbs.

"I am afraid," said Kudjo Mensa most courteously, "we have only native chop, but you will pardon our shortcomings. I hope it is good of its kind," and Bullen ate thankfully, and was a new man. Hope was born again, and the future stretched out before him fair and inviting. Surely he might yet live to succeed. His host, or his captor, he knew not which to call him, held out a cigar-case to him. It was of burnished silver, with the arms of Balliol on it in coloured enamel, and the black man smiled a little.

"Incongruous, I suppose you are thinking, an Oxford College, and a black man in a cloth, but I can assure you the cigars are worth smoking."

"I am quite sure they match the dinner," said Bullen, not to be outdone, and he took one. An attendant

offered him a match and he lighted it, and smoked it, bewildered, yet with the enjoyment of a man who has dined well.

"I suppose," said Kudjo Mensa, lighting one himself, "you are thinking me an unutterable idiot to oppose myself to the all-conquering white man."

"Surely, at present," said Bullen, "you are top-dog. But, of course in the end——"

"Oh, of course in the end the English are sure to win?"

"I should think," said Bullen, "it is inevitable."

"I do not agree with you. If all the English were like the average man out here they certainly would, but how many men have I not met in your country who declare that England should leave Africa to the people best suited to her, and that the subject races ought to have home rule."

"I should think," said the sailor, seeking wildly round for some answer to make to this man from the schools, "that the man who brings fire and sword into a land is hardly suited to guide it."

The other waved his hand a little theatrically. "The man who can gather others around him to wield the sword can also gather them to use the ploughshare. It is merely a question of power."

"But if you use your power for bad ends," said Bullen, hesitating.

"And what do you call bad ends—my own aggrandisement? Surely that is what every little petty district commissioner in the place is doing. He certainly does not come out here for love of us. Your system is the ruin of this country; you send out to govern us men who cannot stay longer than a year in it, and who spend their

time ticking off the days on the calendar to the date of their departure."

"Not always," said Dicky, wondering what could possibly happen next. This man had been described to him as a bloodthirsty savage, and behold he was talking, as he himself said, as many a home-staying Englishman might. He would find many of the governing race to agree with him.

"The man who cannot make a country his home, marry and bring up his children in it, has no right in the country," said the negro sententiously.

"You make it no better by fighting," said Bullen feebly.

"We fight for our homes, our liberty, our hearths, as you English say, and many in England will sympathise and call us brother," and the black man laughed.

"There are some things the English will not stand," said Bullen, his eyes wandering to where the roofs of the bungalows at Dalaga stood out against the evening sky with the flag fluttering in the breeze.

"My dear sir, the stay-at-home Englishman will stand anything, and understand and forgive anything a man does in a struggle for liberty. We are fighting for our liberty, and I think, I hope, the whole country is ablaze."

Bullen wondered if it were true. A cold shiver went through him as he thought of the people in Dalaga waiting for rescue, of the two men who were saving two cartridges each, one for themselves and one for the women they loved. Would it come to that? It might, he knew, and he knew, too, that, whatever cranks at home might say and think they would be revenged, but the thought of revenge is but cold comfort to the man who is looking death in the face. He was no match for

this man he felt, as he watched the smoke of his cigar ascending in blue rings.

The other sat silent for a little; then he laughed softly. "So you don't believe in the coming of a negro kingdom?" he said.

"No," said Bullen, 'no, I certainly don't. This rising will be put down as—as—as risings in other parts of the world have been put down."

"And they will hang the ringleaders?"

"That depends," said Bullen, trying to be diplomatic, "on—on——"

"How they have behaved to the men who fall into their hands? Believe me, Captain Bullen, it wouldn't make the smallest difference how I behave to you. I'm pretty well dipped already." And the phial was gone! "They taught me many things in England," said Kudjo Mensa, "but one thing they did not eradicate, the desire for revenge."

Bullen gathered together all his strength. "Then," he said, "I am doubly indebted to you for the very excellent dinner you have given me."

The other laughed. "Perhaps civilisation gave me a desire to exchange ideas, for civilisation makes the dark man lonely—sometimes. Captain Bullen, you injured me—wantonly. What do you think I did to the last man who injured me?"

Bullen thought of Cunningham's ghastly tale of the informer, and yet it was hard to believe in face of the man's courtesy.

"I injured you, and you have acted the good Samaritan towards me," he said, with an inclination of his head.

"A wretched man informed the commissioner of a little matter in connection with a proscribed ritual, in

which I was concerned, and I, when I could lay my hands on him, had him pegged across a line of driver ants, cut off his ears and his eyelids, and left him. The ants did the rest."

"God in heaven!" cried Bullen. That a man who had had all the benefits of the schools of the West should boast of such a thing! Had he not been hampered by that broken foot he would have rushed at Kudjo Mensa, and tried to bring death upon himself quickly. As it was he could stand it no longer. He was in the power of this man who had openly acknowledged himself a brutal savage.

"Tell me what you are going to do with me and have done with it," he said, in the quick, low tones of a man who puts a restraint upon himself.

"I did propose the same fate for you in my own mind," said the other man calmly, "but if you like you may redeem yourself."

"Like?" said Bullen, and all the bitterness of dead hope was in his tones.

"Yes, it rests with you," and he held out his cigar-case again. Bullen rejected it with a movement of passionate scorn. "No? They are well worth smoking," and he selected one with care. "It may be your last, you know."

Bullen said nothing; the horror of the terrible fate about to overwhelm him had seized upon him; the dread of poor human nature at the thought of unspeakable torment.

"But, as I tell you, you may redeem yourself."

"When the fate is so terrible," said Bullen, trying to speak quietly and without a tremor, though his voice was low and hoarse for his throat was dry, "I can only conclude that the redemption is impossible."

"Not at all. It is only to write a letter."

"To write a letter?" But the simplicity of the request kindled no hope in his heart.

"Simply to write a letter to Mr Commissioner Cunningham telling him that you are in my hands and that I want five minutes' conversation with him out there on the cleared land."

It seemed so simple, why not, if he could save his life, if he could even ensure an easier death?

"But you can send in and ask him for that five minutes' conversation yourself," said Bullen, "there is nothing to stop you."

The other laughed.

"Only he will not come. He proposes to hold the place till the soldiers come from Obusadi, and even if they don't come I do not suppose he intends to trust himself to my tender mercies. He knows better than that."

Bullen was silent a moment. "Major Wallington will come from Obusadi," he said, with all the disdain of the white for the black, of the governing for the subject race in his tones.

"He may, I grant you," Bullen's heart leapt, "but this I may tell you for certain, he has not left yet, and I think they will go to M'Pranza," his heart sank again. Too late for him then. Too late. "Let me see, if you'd been lucky you'd have reached them to-morrow morning. If they start to-morrow morning and press matters, they may get in on Friday. But I dare swear they will not start to-morrow. Major Wallington is a careful, cautious man and looks before he leaps. He saves his own men and his own reputation, but it's rough on those who are waiting, isn't it?"

Bullen said nothing. He felt there was nothing to be said.

"Now, I want to speak to Cunningham. I want him to meet me out there on the open on neutral ground. You can arrange this for me, Captain Bullen, and that is why I am going to forego my revenge; a thing I have never done yet."

"I do not see that I can do anything," said Bullen, and in his heart hope was dead.

"Certainly you can. A reputation is sometimes a good thing, and Cunningham, I presume, will be a little disturbed to think you have fallen alive into my hands. I only want you to tell him exactly the facts of the case. I want him to meet me. He may either come armed and with followers or alone, whichever he pleases. Now, Captain Bullen, here is the alternative, a letter to Mr Cunningham, your freedom if he comes, that phial back if he declines."

Bullen looked up quickly at the last suggestion. That phial! The negro looked at him curiously. "He can easily say 'no,'" he suggested.

"Give me the paper," said Bullen.

Paper apparently was not quite so easy to obtain as the whisky and cigars had been. Meantime the sun had set, but the moonlight was brilliant and an attendant lighted a hurricane lamp, which burned steadily in the faint breeze. Bullen kept his eyes on the light and watched the flying ants come and immolate themselves upon it until the little table before him was strewn with the dead and dying. Suppose he let Potiphar know. He could imagine the consternation his letter would make in Dalaga; the keen desire there would be in the hearts of all of them to help him. The paper was so long in coming he had time to debate. He listened to

the chatter and the laughter of the negroes around him, and the mournful call of the tree bears ascending to the topmost branches, and tried to keep his thought on the matter in hand.

Supposing Cunningham consented to interview this pitiless negro chief, this Oxford man "gone bush"; suppose he came alone, he would be at his mercy. Suppose he brought an escort—an escort—he could have laughed—from the hungry, sick black policemen who garrisoned Dalaga. The thing was impossible, looked at every way it was impossible. He saw clearly that to write that letter, if it did anything beyond giving him an easy death, was to precipitate the downfall of Dalaga. It was possible Suri would get through, that Wallington, the cautious Wallington, would come to the rescue in time. He watched a man coming through the natives crowding upon the ground over their evening meal, with a sheet of blue-lined foolscap in one black hand and a stone bottle of ink in the other and the thought came to him that he would write, just to buy himself an easy death, because flesh and blood quailed at the ordeal that lay before him if he did not; the hours that must elapse before death came, the hours of horrible suffering that would be like years, the minutes, each one of which would be like hours. He never doubted for a moment that Kudjo Mensa, Oxford graduate and priest of the Church of England, the Rev. John Trotter, negro fetich chief, would carry out his word. He had no hope of pity; and no one would know of his sacrifice, perhaps useless martyrdom

The man laid the paper on the little unpolished mahogany camp table, put down the bottle and held out a forlorn old pen.

Then Richard Bullen turned his eyes on the man beside him. He had made up his mind. He had given his all, and more man cannot do.

" I will not write," he said very slowly.

" You know the alternative," the voice was cultivated but the black face was savage in its anger and disappointment

" I will not write."

The negro made a sign and a man came and stood before him with a long knife in his hand. The light from the lamp flickered on its keen blade.

" First your eyelids——"

" I will not write," Bullen said doggedly, and his voice was barely above a whisper, but he had made up his mind, and the very intensity of his conviction would have carried weight had he spoken no word.

Kudjo Mensa made a movement with his hand, and the sailor-man sprang up to fight for death, but hands of steel caught his arms and held them. The knife flashed before his eyes. . . .

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE BURDEN OF WAITING

> "There was a Door to which I found no Key;
> There was the Veil through which I could not see.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "A Moment's halt—a momentary taste
> Of Being from the Well amid the Waste—
> And Lo!—the phantom Caravan has reach'd
> The Nothing it set out from."

"I DON'T believe Dicky Bullen has got through," said Kitty, voicing the fears the others did not dare put into speech.

It was Saturday, and the shadows were growing long, for the sun was declining in the west. A little breeze wandered over the camp, finding its way through the verandah into the rooms, fanning tired faces and filling weary hearts with the false promise of a coolness that never came. The reek of the crowded camp rose to their nostrils, the bare-necked vultures flapped their wings as they slowly flew across it, looking with idle airs of proprietorship at the things that must ultimately come to them; and in the distance still sounded the beating of the war drums incessant, insistent, spelling death.

"He can't have got through."

"It may have taken him a day or two longer than we expected," said Cunningham. "Last night was the very first moment they could have reached us if they had come at express speed and when he gets there you've got to allow for Wallington's caution. They will

come. We've only to hold on a day or so longer. I wish——" His eyes wandered to Anne's tired face, and then he added, " We might be worse off, we have plenty to drink."

The long level rays of the sun lay across the floor, showing up the faded green paint on the unswept boards. The tapestry cloth on the square table in the centre was rent and dirty, and the whole place looked unkempt and uncared for. How could they force the starving servants to do housework when they went in fear of imminent death ? The forlornness of it all seemed to strike Anne afresh, and she rose up from the chair in which she had been lying, went to her room, came back with a cloth, and began to dust.

" Don't, Miss Lovat, don't," said Cunningham, " you make me ashamed. The servants ought to do that."

" Poor things," said Anne, with a pitying smile. " I have watched poor Amo visibly shrinking. It is I who should be ashamed. Think of two women here. and the place like this."

" Your arm," said Cunningham, still protesting ; but the forlorn, damp spoiled pictures were being put straight, chairs dusted, and the old tablecloth shaken.

" My arm has healed in a manner that does credit to Africa, or me, hasn't it, Fred ? "

" It is you, Anne," said Kitty, a little querulously, want of proper food and the long confinement were telling on her. " There is no good thing in Africa—even Mr Cunningham will admit that now."

Cunningham had been watching Anne with a bitter aching at his heart ; for " What will be the end ? " was the question that was beating on his brain, absorbing his thoughts day and night, but he turned quickly.

" I don't admit it," he said.

"Not even in the face of death?"

"Not even in the face of death," said the man who had come there because there was no other place in the wide world open to him.

Pearce looked up. "Well done, Cunningham," he said, "you have learned your lesson."

Cunningham laughed bitterly. It seemed to him, but he did not say it because of the others, that the lesson had been learned too late.

"Oh," said Kitty, "I'd admire your pluck if I wasn't here myself, but I say the country is a ghastly, horrible, useless place. It's been the white man's grave for the last four hundred years, and now I suppose there's another unfortunate five of us going to make up the terrible tale. How can you," she stamped her feet, "in the face of pretty nearly certain death, say the country is decent."

"Death is by no means certain, Mrs Pearce," said Cunningham, speaking very gently, and remembering, as he had not remembered for many a long day, that it was she who had sent him here. "Men have come out of very much worse holes than we are in. You mustn't despair."

"Then tell me," said Kitty, still openly sorry for herself and anxious to quarrel with someone if only for the excitement of making it up again, "how you can think the country is anything but useless?"

"It is rich," said Cunningham, "the more I think of it, the more I see its amazing wealth. There is not a tropical product that under proper management will not yield tenfold. Cotton, and rubber, and cocoa, and palm oil——"

"No one seems to have found it out." Anne had

dusted every chair, and having reduced the room to a semblance of order seated herself opposite Kitty, smiling faintly at Cunningham because her eyes must needs answer his.

"And there's gold," said Pearce. "Last year the whole of Australia only produced fifteen and a half million pounds' worth, and we, from I think nineteen concessions, sent home over a million of money. African gold mines are gilt-edged securities now."

"The place is full of abominable, bloodthirsty savages," protested Kitty.

"Simply a case of misdirected energy," said Cunningham. "It's a proof of their power that they're able to shut us up, and that power properly trained—Remember how the English talked of India in Thackeray's time, Mrs Pearce, and now think of the number of people who are clamouring to go there. Take this country, drain it properly, make roads and railroads, clear away the tsetse fly and the mosquito, make it as fit for a white population as India, and it will be the richest jewel in England's crown."

"Fancy saying that now, when you haven't even enough to eat," said Kitty.

"It's a proof of the strength of his convictions," said Anne.

"Considering white men have been coming here for the last four hundred years," repeated Kitty, "he's finding out all these good things rather late in the day."

"The men who have come here exploited the country for their own immediate benefit," said Cunningham. "They've been getting the golden eggs by the simple process of killing off the birds that laid them. But the pioneers are now beginning to come."

"I wonder if he calls us pioneers," said Kitty, turning

to her friend Mitchell, the D.C., but Mitchell was beyond subtle flattery and flirtation now.

"It's a d——d country," he said sullenly, "and I think the man must be touched who sees any good in it. If I can only get away——"

A silence fell among them. Cunningham had been watching Anne, and she hardly realised how much she was telling him when her eyes returned his look. Kitty had fallen hopelessly back in her chair and Pearce, the man who invariably made the best of life, was smoking thankful that he still had tobacco. Outside they could hear the ceaseless beat of the war drums, cruelly insisting on the fact that no help was coming for them yet. No help was within a day's journey at the very least.

"Mitchell," said Pearce, as he finished his pipe, "I wish you'd come and help me a moment with a dressing."

"A moment?" said Mitchell.

"Well, five minutes if you like," said the doctor sharply, "half-an-hour perhaps. Anyhow I want your help."

"Those damned blacks," began Mitchell, and Cunningham looked at him sternly. Then he rose.

"Oh, very well," he said wearily, "but——"

"No buts," said Cunningham.

"Right you are, Cunningham," said the doctor cheerfully. "What we do now'll have effect some day."

"Much good that'll do us if we're not here to see it," growled Mitchell.

"Even if we're not here to see it. And who knows, we may see it. I believe we shall."

"Such irrepressible optimism in the face of such overwhelming odds argues——"

"Oh, go hang! Kitty, if you take my advice you'll

lie down and get a little rest before dinner," and Pearce, followed by the unwilling D.C., left the room.

Kitty glanced at the other two. "For once," she said, "I think I'll follow Fred's advice," and Cunningham and Anne were left alone.

He came across the room and stood looking down at her.

"Put your feet up," he said gently, and she smiled up in his face. It was comforting to be cared for. It came to her suddenly in a flash that sent the blood into her pale cheeks, that hunger, discomfort, desperate anxiety were as nothing to her simply because this man was beside her, and his care for her seemed all embracing. The thought brought gladness, a gladness she could not deny, and then it brought shame. Thus had she felt four years ago for another man, and she had bound herself to that other man with bands of iron; that he repudiated those bonds was nothing to her, they were there all the same. Nothing could undo the past; and now, because of the very pleasure it gave her to be alone with Cunningham, she wanted to leave him.

"I think——" she began, but he stopped her.

"Stay a moment," he said, and his voice, sounding comfortably commonplace, reassured her. He had been a kindly friend all these weary weeks, he would be a kindly friend still, the very best of friends. He at least would never forget the impassable barrier that lay between them; and then another sort of shame seized upon her; the shame of having misread her friend, or having supposed, just because he had been kind, that he wanted to give more. He would be the last man to do that now that he knew the part his old messmate had played in her life. By her own act she had condemned herself. She had made her own world empty

and she wanted to hide her face among the pillows and cry her heart out, because she was desolate and alone. What matter if no help came? Death could be the only ending for her.

"Anne," said Cunningham, drawing up a chair and sitting down beside her, and the use of her Christian name made her heart beat, whether with joy or shame she could not have told, "did you know we are in a very bad way?"

How shall a man tell the woman he loves that hope is dead; that if she would escape unspeakable things it must be by the door of death. The thought had been growing in his mind, since the setting sun on Friday night had brought no help and no sign of help. If Wallington did not come—and Wallington was not coming—then she—then he—— He could not put the thought into words even in his own mind, and he could not bring himself to utter it aloud.

The pain in his voice told her something of what he was suffering, and she put out her hand and laid it on his arm, in one intense longing to help the man who had helped her so often, and so faithfully.

"Don't, don't mind so dreadfully," she said softly. "If the worst comes to the worst——" She paused and he caught her hand and held it fast in both his own.

"The worst, my dearest, means——" So she was his dearest, for one moment all else was forgotten in the one glad thought. After all, though he knew her story she was his dearest. She half turned towards him and then remembrance came and she tried to draw her hand away.

"Do you think I don't know," she said, and her voice was quivering, "that I can trust you to take care of me. Don't you know that I am so grateful—that—that—I

have no words——" Her voice broke and he released her hand and would have slipped his arm round her but she drew away.

"Oh no, no," she protested and she was speaking against the longing of her own heart. Since they must die, why not yield ?

" My dear, my dearest, we are looking death in the face, you and I," and he lifted her up from her chair, and stood holding her in front of him. " Anne, don't you love me ? "

She looked up at him quickly and then down again. Death was staring them in the face. It was not a question of days but of hours now. Convention ? Right or wrong ? His future happiness ? There was to be no future in this world for either of them ; and yet the old bond held.

" Anne, don't you love me ? "

" Oh no," she cried, " please, please. I have so much to thank you for. I owe you so much. Don't make me ashamed."

" Make you ashamed ? "

The pain in his voice hurt her, and she drew a little away from him holding out appealing hands. His face was thin and drawn and all the pity and tenderness that is in a woman's love was rushing over her.

" Oh," she pleaded, " don't look like that. Do you think I would hurt you if I could help myself. Not for worlds. But though I would give worlds I cannot blot out the past."

" You care no more for——"

" Hush, hush." She put up her hands as if to stop him. " I tied myself to a man with whom I know now I had nothing in common, but I cannot undo it. The thing is done."

"It is only an imaginary bond," said Cunningham.

"It stands good," said Anne wearily, and her eyes wandered to the sunshine on the floor.

"He repudiated it," said Cunningham fiercely.

"I cannot help what he did," said Anne, and she sat down wearily in her chair again.

Cunningham walked the whole length of the room, and then came back and stood before her.

"Listen to me," he said. "We must speak plainly. I know Dicky Bullen is a good chap, at least he has been the best of friends to me, but is there anything in common between you and him?"

"Don't," pleaded Anne, "let us forget."

"It is you who will not forget. Was there ever anything in common between you and him?"

"I thought I loved him," said Anne, barely above a whisper. "I did love him."

"Oh, love—a girl's love. But tell me, did you ever consult him about your work, did you ever ask him to help you in your writing, did you ever ask for his judgment on a story?"

If she could have smiled, she would have smiled now. Dicky Bullen with an opinion about a story!

"You know," she faltered, "he couldn't understand."

"Of course. He couldn't understand the thing that fills more than half your life." His voice was faintly triumphant. "If you two had married he might have jogged along comfortably, but you would have suffered. Half your life would have been shut off behind a closed door. It would have been the most fatal mistake, while with us—Anne, Anne, we could help each other in our work, there would be that delightful companionship which, added to love——"

But Anne had broken down utterly, and her face was hidden in her hands.

"Do you think I don't know," she said, struggling for calmness, "that I have not been feeling it all these weeks? But we must abide by our mistakes."

There was a sudden crash of war drums, loud, insistent, threatening, and involuntarily Cunningham laid his had on her shoulder as if to protect her. She put up her hand and touched his lightly, trying to smile at him through her tears.

"My dearest," he said, with passionate tenderness, "you must not forget that in all probability there is no future for us."

There was a pattering of feet on the verandah, and Kitty rushed in.

"Oh, Mr Cunningham! Mr Cunningham! They are coming! What—what will be the end?"

But for her Cunningham had no words.

CHAPTER XXIX

"ONLY WHERE THERE ARE GRAVES ARE THERE RESURRECTIONS"

"And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the canker-worm, and the caterpillar, and the palmer-worm. . . . And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied and praise the name of the Lord God, that hath dealt wondrously with you."

HISTORY is full of the tales of fortresses held long after all hope has been abandoned. "Hold it for fifteen days," cried Tennyson of Lucknow. "We have held it for fifty-seven! and ever aloft on the palace roof the old banner of England blew." And so once again at Dalaga the tiny handful of people, faced by overwhelming odds, held out long after they themselves had declared such a thing was impossible.

"Kudjo Mensa dun catch Cap'en Bullen," announced Yamba one morning, "fix him on anthill."

Cunningham looked across at Pearce with a desperate look in his eyes.

"Nonsense," said the doctor quickly, "there are no anthills in the bush. Here's your chop, and don't go spreading such yarns. Captain Bullen will be back here presently."

"Akosua dun say," said Yamba, taking a biscuit which was more weevils than biscuit, and the very small quantity of linseed meal that fell to his portion and passing out of the store-room. Akosua had in all probability got her information from the women who were every day bringing in small quantities of plantains and kenki to the besieged, very small quantities and

sold at a ruinous price but still enough to prolong the struggle.

" Do you think it's true," said Cunningham, when they had finished serving out the scanty provisions, and he shuddered, for Dicky Bullen had been a good friend and had he been his enemy the thought of such a death was terrible.

" Hardly," said Pearce, " but I'm afraid he must have fallen into their hands ; knowing our desperate straits even Wallington could not have taken ten days to come from Obusadi."

" It is possible the soldiers are not at Obusadi, and never have got as far."

" It's possible," said Pearce, " but then, Lord, man, anything's possible."

" But those persistent rumours about Dicky Bullen having fallen into their hands ? "

" It is very likely," said Pearce, with the calmness of a man who knows a like fate will in all probability be his, " that he has fallen into their hands, but not alive. He needn't do that, and Bullen was no fool. I don't doubt Kudjo Mensa would peg out his body across a line of driver ants. He would not want either his own people or us to think he was cheated of his revenge."

Cunningham made a little despairing gesture. The store-room, under the living-room of the bungalow, was very empty. Four tins of meat, one tin of biscuits, a little linseed meal in a bag, and, to add aggravation, six tins of curry powder were still on the shelves, and beside them, ranged in a row, were two dozen bottles of brandy and half-a-dozen demijohns of whisky, and three of these were full. Cunningham looked at them.

" I do not see," he said, " how we can possibly hold

out more than four days. That will be a week longer than we calculated was possible."

"No," said Pearce resignedly. "I'm afraid if we reach next Friday we shall be at the very end of our tether."

"I have a good mind," said Cunningham, "to spill out most of the liquor, just saving enough to see us through till Friday. We cannot hang out a day longer."

The doctor shook his head. "I'm always against waste," he said, "even in the face of death. Suppose Wallington did get through and we needed that liquor. Remember we can't replace it."

"And yet," said Cunningham, "it's a menace. The men are starving. Suppose they raided the stores and got at the liquor?"

They were moving towards the door, and as they passed out Cunningham locked it, and put the key in his pocket. "I grant you," said Pearce, "that's a danger, but I think it's a risk we must run. You have told them that any man found in the store-room without leave will be shot?"

"Oh, of course. But how long will discipline last? And who is to carry out the death sentence? You or I?"

Pearce turned on him sharply. "Man, it's good to look ahead, but not too far ahead. While there's a scrap of hope of Wallington's coming to the rescue, I think we ought to preserve that liquor. You don't know what use it may be to him. His coming and rescuing us wouldn't presuppose the quieting of the whole country?"

"Of course not," said Cunningham. "We might have a running fight of it all the way back to Lesondi. It depends——"

" Then as long as anything depends on it, or may depend on it, I guess we'll save the liquor," and looking at the matter all ways Cunningham was inclined to agree.

Before evening Yamba came creeping to him.

" Master, master, one small, small linseed chop, make belly sweet," he pleaded with all the pathos of a desperately hungry man.

" To-morrow, Yamba."

The man threw up his hands with the passionate gesticulation of the emotional negro.

" To-morrow this man be all for same dead."

Cunningham smiled faintly. " Not to-morrow, Yamba, not to-morrow," but the negro shook his head and went out sobbing noisily.

Cunningham walked round his defences, and every man asked him pitifully for food. Their women were like living skeletons, and the one or two little children remaining lay on the ground in the sunshine moaning fretfully. One had just died and the mother leaned over it wailing. The Provincial Commissioner turned away. It went to his heart. He had always liked the little round, laughing, dark babies, and to see them suffer and die was more than he could bear; but what could he do?

" Ay," said the doctor, greeting him, " ay. Poor little beggars. Paying for our occupation of West Africa. It's a rich country and I suppose it's worth it. Somebody always pays in this world."

" It seems to me, sometimes," said Cunningham bitterly, " that the payment is always vicarious. If only the women——"

" Don't look ahead, man, don't look ahead. It takes all my strength to bear up against Mitchell, and if you begin taking like views I shall cave in."

" There's only one view to take, I'm afraid," said Cunningham, " but I sha'n't inflict that on you before it's necessary. Don't you think the war drums are making an extra row ro-day ? "

" Something on in Kudjo Mensa's camp."

" There they go again ; double-barrelled this time."

Beyond the barbed wire Cunningham saw a couple of women standing in the long level rays of the setting sun with trays on their heads, trays on which were piled some balls of kenki.

He called to Amo, and pointed them out to him, but that worthy shook his head.

" Wanting one pound for it," said he.

" Good Lord ! And a shilling would be paying them ten times over," but nevertheless he got the pound and, calling for Akosua, Yamba's wife, who had been a pretty round girl a month ago, and now looked a withered old hag, sent her out to trade.

She came back smiling, her mouth all smeared with the toll she had taken, and Cunningham and Pearce distributed the food on the spot, but there was so small a portion for each, hardly more than a taste, that Cunningham could only groan inwardly.

" It's like one drop of water in a hundred-mile desert," he said, and Pearce assented, but his eyes were on Akosua. She was talking earnestly to her husband.

" Yamba," called Cunningham, " what does your wife say ? "

" Soldier man at Ensuessi," said Yamba, rolling his eyes, and getting all the delight that a negro gets out of the telling of good news.

" For sure ? "

" Oh, for sure. Hear um tom-tom."

Cunningham looked across at Pearce. Wallington

at Ensuessi ! That was not the direction he expected him to come from, but still——

" We'll tell the women," he said, turning to the bungalow

" But I'm tired of believing reports," said Kitty, with a sudden passionate sob.

" I think this is true," said Cunningham soberly. " There is evidently some commotion in Kudjo Mensa's camp. I have never heard the war drums kicking up such a row."

" But Ensuessi is five days away," said Kitty, who had been calculating.

" Four days," corrected Cunningham, but no one knew ketter than he did that four days meant forced marching and Wallington was not the man to push his men.

" Four days ! And we're starving ! They'll come when we're dead ! " and Kitty flung herself down on her knees, and buried her face in Anne's lap.

" We must hold out four more days," said Cunningham in a fierce whisper to Pearce. " At whatever cost we must."

The doctor echoed his words, cheerful as ever.

" Of course we must. What are four days after all we've gone through ? "

That night someone got into the store, and took away three of the four tins of meat, and all the linseed meal.

When they discovered the fact Cunningham and the doctor looked at each other blankly, and Mitchell broke out into bitter curses.

" Hold your tongue, Mitchell," said Pearce angrily. " It's bad enough without you grousing over it."

" I can't think why the gentleman was so generous

as to leave us a tin of meat," said Mitchell, " and why the dickens didn't he take the brandy," and again he cursed West Africa.

" We've got to find the culprit, and punish him," said Cunningham, and presently he had a line of sickly, starving, broken-down policemen ranged before him.

They had been smart, and they were smart no longer. They were just a handful of negroes dressed in dirty rags, leaning for support on their Martinis, such a forlorn, pitiful little handful of men, his heart ached at the very thought of what they had gone through. How could he hold any man accountable for the theft of three tins of meat and a small quantity of unpalatable linseed meal ?

He stood there before them in silence, and looked them up and down, but conscious innocence was written on every pitiful face ; their eyes were all turned in the same direction, and Cunningham, following their gaze, saw that it was directed toward his orderly Yamba, and that he was shrinking visibly.

" Yamba," said Cunningham sternly.

" I not take 'em, sah. I not take 'em, sah," cried the man, holding out trembling hands.

Cunningham paused a moment. Of course Yamba was the only man who could have stolen the key ; then something in the hang of the tunic, depending in folds from the thin shoulders, caught his eye.

" Yohnny, Robert," he cried, " search that man."

Yamba shrieked, but the next second Yohnny was holding him and Robert holding up a half-empty meat tin. Then Yamba wrenched himself away and flung himself down, sobbing passionately, at his master's feet.

" Belly hungarly too much," he sobbed. " Pickin hungarly too much, pickin go die, massa, massa ! "

He had taken it not so much for himself as for his starving child. Cunningham's heart sank. Surely he was walking in cruelly hard places.

" The penalty for breaking into the store is death," said Cunningham, and there was not a break in his voice, though the man clutched at his feet and looked at him with prayerful eyes.

" My pickin ! My pickin ! Massa, my pickin ! "

Still in the same cold, calm voice he ordered Yamba to be bound, and had him locked into a small room next to the store. Then he went into his own room, and sat down trembling on a chair beside the bed.

Pearce followed him in, and stood looking at him in silence. Outside the war drums were beating more madly than ever. They could even see the enemy rushing about, and Cunningham wondered whether this presaged a fresh onslaught. If Kudjo Mensa pressed home the attack none knew better than he it would be hopeless to think of resisting.

Pearce offered him a glass of whisky and water, and he drank it thankfully. It steadied his nerves and revived his courage, but he knew that, starving as he was, he could not afford to drink much.

" Do you think it's wise," asked Pearce, after a moment's silence, " to threaten when you cannot carry out your threat ? "

" No," said Cunningham, " that's a mistake."

" Then what in heaven's name——" he paused and began again. " It's no good ordering out a file of police to carry out your death sentence, because they won't, and upon my word I'm with them. The poor wretch was starving, and the child is dying."

Cunningham bowed his head. On his clean-shaven face the thoughtful lines between the nose and mouth

had deepened, and his blue eyes had a tense look; but he said nothing.

"Upon my word," said Pearce, "I don't know what you are going to do."

"If the soldiers are at Ensuessi," said Cunningham slowly, "they'll be here in four days, and we might hold out. Men have been in as bad straits and done so."

"Yes, it's just possible," assented Pearce, and nothing could have made Cunningham feel the slenderness of their chance more than that assent.

"But if Yamba goes scot free the men will break into the store to-night."

"There's nothing for them to take," said the doctor, with a bitter little laugh.

"There is the liquor, and they will certainly take that, and when they get that——" He broke off and let the suggestion soak in. Again there was silence between them. They had reached that stage when men do not move lightly, but Pearce got up and looked out over the waving elephant grass and umbrella-trees that lay between them and Kudjo's Mensa's camp.

"That means hell, man; that means hell," he said in a whisper.

"But they will not do it," said Cunningham, and he too spoke low.

"They will not? I'm afraid they will. They are desperate."

"They will not, when they realise that I keep my word."

"But you cannot keep your word."

"The death sentence will be carried out."

"But how——"

"Pearce, there is only one way. You and I must do

it. It is your life, and my life, and the lives of the women that are at stake."

Pearce sat down again, with his head bent forward and his clasped hands hanging between his knees. Very thin and transparent those hands looked.

" My God ! " he said, " my God ! " But Cunningham said nothing ; he took a cigar, and held it but did not light it.

Pearce watched him. " I can't do it," he burst out at last, " no, not for the sake of the woman who is dearer to me than anything on earth. I can't ; we've got to take our chance."

" There is no chance about it," said Cunningham, speaking in a monotonous tone. " It is Yamba, or you and I and your wife and Anne Lovat. Would you rather shoot your wife or Yamba ? "

But Pearce was done. The brave, plucky doctor who had seen his duty, and done it so fearlessly, who had been so cheery, and so cheering, was at the end of his tether, he could only look at his friend with black, horror-struck eyes.

" I cannot be an executioner," he said ; " Cunningham, I cannot do it. We must take our chance."

" There is no chance. . . . I can."

And through the wide-open space that did duty as window came the sound of the war drums. " No chance, no chance, no chance," they beat, and then they changed their tune, loud, insistent, cruel, " I can, I can, I can."

Pearce rose up and moved towards him, and then, apparently changing his mind, left the room, walking like a broken man. It seemed to Cunningham that he was leaving him as the world would leave him, branding him as a murderer. As evening fell he would shoot in cold blood the dependant who had served him so faith-

fully for the last four years, who had made his lightest wish his law, and who had sinned as a little hungry child might have sinned, who had sinned for the sake of his little hungry child. For that he would take his life with his own hands. It seemed to him that no matter what happened afterwards his hands would never be clean again. He had come to hard places in life, but never surely to so hard a place as this. He went on to the verandah and looked over the camp lying sweltering in the midday heat.

The men were all at their posts, dejected scarecrows, for the life of him he could not imagine why Kudjo Mensa did not rush the camp. They could not have held out against a determined rush for five minutes. Was that what the toms-toms were threatening? He could almost have wished it was. His eye fell on the door beside the store-room, and he remembered the man behind it, and his duty, and he shuddered. It was not much that a man should die, but it was awful to think that he in cold blood should kill him.

He went into the sitting-room, and there was Anne alone lying back in a long chair. She looked at him as he entered and tried to smile, but he was beyond smiling. He sat down opposite her in silence and the light fell full on his head, showing her the grey hairs. Suddenly she realised that his youth was behind him, and the pity that was in her heart made her long to comfort him. What could she say, what could she do? She tried to keep her thoughts to commonplace, tangible things. Her eyes wandered to the little shelf at the side of the room, whereon stood a whisky decanter and a seltzogene. She rose from her chair.

He thought she was going to leave him, and already

he saw himself branded a murderer in her eyes. If she would only stay with him a little ?

" Oh, stay with me a little," he said, and the yearning of years was in his voice.

She stopped, surprised. " I was only going to get you a little whisky," she said gently. " You look so tired."

" I have had as much whisky as a hungry man dare take," he said, and he put out his hand. The thought came to him that he would like to touch her while his hands were still clean.

She stood for a moment looking at him, puzzled ; then he rose from his chair and came towards her. The bright light of the African noonday showed her all the lines in his face. What was that new pain that was in it ? There was love there, yes, but there was something else in that clever, intellectual, ugly face that she did not understand, but that made her long to comfort him as she had never longed before, and between them stood but one poor scruple.

" Anne," he said. " Don't you care for me a little ? "

" Oh, more than a little ! More than a little ! " And with the truth down went every barrier. She stood there before him only a loving woman. The end was coming. Death, pitiless death, was staring them in the face. If she could give him but one spark of comfort ! The soldiers might be at Ensuessi, but at that moment Anne felt that there was to be no future in this world for either of them, so what was the good of denying him and herself any longer ?

" My dearest, my dearest." He caught her in his arms, and as he held her close she felt the fierce beating of his heart. His lips were on hers, and oh, magic of love, for the moment neither had a thought but for the delight each had in the other.

"Anne, you love me. Say you love me. Say it now."

"I love you," she said. "I love you. How I love you," and she put up her hands and smoothed the tired worn face. She pressed her own against it in sudden passionate abandonment. "Don't look like that. Let me help you."

"Toom! Toom! Toom!" went the war drums. "Toom! Toom!" and then as the two clung together there came a shot, deep-toned, reverberating. Whizz! Whirr! It had gone right across the houses and buried itself in the greenery beyond.

The war drums stopped, and for a moment a deathly silence brooded over the doomed camp. Anne clung closer to her lover. Whatever happened he was hers—hers, though they must die; or if the future parted them at least she had the joy of being loved and loving in return the one man in the world for her. For the moment the past was wiped out, the future was not born. Then there rose a hubbub in their camp. Every voice was raised in wild acclamation, and the next second there came dashing into the room Pearce, with Kitty clinging to his arm, and Mitchell, the tears running down his cheeks; Cunningham, releasing Anne, noticed that he smeared them away like the big schoolboy that he was.

"It's that blooming Wallington at last!" he cried.

Kitty was openly sobbing, and Cunningham looked across at Pearce.

It was a Maxim, undoubtedly it was a Maxim, and if the enemy were bringing guns against them—— Well, it would be the end. But it might be Wallington; your cautious, slow man having laid his plans carefully comes to the end swiftly.

Pearce's face was that of a man who does not believe in his own good fortune.

" Kitty, don't cry," he begged. " Cunningham, it might be Wallington. There's another."

Again right over the camp whizzed and whirred a shot.

" We'll give them a volley," said Cunningham, and bending over the verandah, he shouted his orders to the men, and the crash of the carbines rang out, not perhaps quite as steadily as usual, for they were starving, and help they thought was near.

Cunningham got his glasses and never in his life—no, not even when he had taken the woman he loved in his arms—had his heart thumped so madly. If they came now, it would mean life to them all, love to him and—above everything—a future unsullied by one terrible memory. His hands shook as he held up the glasses and the others crowded round.

" They're clearing out, they're bolting for the bush," and his voice sounded strange and far away in his own ears.

" The war drums have stopped, that's a good sign," said Pearce, and his voice too was quivering.

Then another sound broke on the midday stillness, the shrill call of the bugles. " Coming, coming, coming," it seemed to say as it echoed through the bush. There was silence and then a wild burst of cheering, good English hurrahs, though they came from negro throats. Cunningham could look no longer. He leaned up against the verandah post and held out the glasses to Pearce.

Anne could think of nothing but the face he turned on her.

" They see the flag ! They see the flag ! They're coming ! " cried Mitchell, in his schoolboy voice.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!" and above it all the shrill triumphant call of the bugles proclaiming peace and safety.

Suddenly, they came into view, turning the corner by a clump of palms, the men of the relief force marching two and two, clad in khaki with dashes of the red so dear to the negro heart. The tassels of their red fezzes swung in time to their footsteps; the bright noonday sun shone on the barrels of their carbines, and beside them walked a tall man in khaki uniform and a big mushroom-shaped helmet.

"Wallington!" cried Cunningham, and he knew that his highest hopes were realised! They had held Dalaga! Against heavy odds the British flag still flew! One more step had been taken in the clearing of the dark places of the earth! There was a lump in his throat and a darkness before his eyes that shut out the splendid view; a buzzing in his ears that even the shrill bugle call could hardly pierce. He turned groping and his hands caught Anne's, and he fell to his knees, and Africa and hope and happiness and fear were alike blotted out.

Right through the elephant grass, by the palms and little umbrella-trees, came the marching men, till the gap in the barbed wire opened and Pearce and Mitchell stood there to greet them.

"In time?" asked Wallington. There were lines in the tanned face, and the deep-set eyes were weary.

"Just, thank God!"

"Mr Cunningham?"

"He's only fainted."

Wallington put up his hand and saluted the flag blowing out on the faint breeze over the roof of the bungalow.

"If Cunningham hadn't kept his end of the stick up here the Lord knows what would have happened. I got word you were holding M'Pranza, and if it hadn't been for the faithfulness of Policeman Suri, who stuck to his job and followed me up with a determination and a pluck that have got to be rewarded, I don't suppose I could have got here in time."

"And Bullen ?" asked Pearce eagerly.

"Ah, Bullen !" and again Wallington saluted.

. . . . . .

For Richard Bullen, cheery sailor, brave Englishman, false lover, staunch friend, was dead. He had gone to his Calvary, and those who benefited would never know. In all the years to come the kindly thoughts that were given to him would never be haunted by the horror of the fate that had overtaken him. Swiftly they thought death had come, but death must come to all of us. What reward was his ? For some deeds this life holds out no reward, but surely in another life Richard Bullen has gained his crown of glory.

Hail to the pioneers, the men who go out and break the way for those who come after, that they may tread softly. Though they be dead yet are their deeds told in song and story, their names blazoned on the walls in letters of gold, held in highest honour by the children of their people and by their children's children. All hail to the pioneers !

But there is another company, a company of men who have gone out and struggled and fought and suffered and accomplished nothing. The grass grows where their feet have trod, the ashes of their rafters are but the ashes of a forgotten camp fire, the seed that they have sown is scattered to the winds. In Africa, in her steaming forests, by her roaring beaches, in her festering

swamps, along the banks of her muddy rivers, white lie their bones, and none even know their names. All hail to the pioneers, but when we English count our glorious dead, when we shout their names triumphant, let us pause and remember too, honouring by our silence, these nameless men, martyrs, perhaps, and heroes, the grey, grey company who have perished and are forgotten.

THE END

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