

Edged Tools

By HENRY SETON MERRIMAN
Author of "The Sowers," "Roder's Corner," "From One Generation to Another," Etc.

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CHAPTER XV.
N hearing the bungalow Jocelyn turned aside into the forest where a little colony of nests nestled in a hollow of the sand dunes.

"Nala," she cried, "the paddlemaker. Ask him to come to me."

In a few moments a man emerged from a shed of banana leaves. He was a scraggy man, very lightly clad, and a violent squint handicapped him seriously in the matter of first impressions.

"I came to you," said Jocelyn, "because I know that you are an intelligent man and a great traveler."

"Where do you wish me to go?"

"To Maala, on the Ogowe river. When can you leave?"

"Now."

"You can hire a dhow," she said, "and on the river you may have as many rowers as you like. You must go very quickly to Maala. There you must ask about the Englishman's expedition. Some of the men are at Maala now. They were going up country to join the other Englishmen far away—near the mountains. They have stopped at Maala. Find out why they have not gone on, and come back very quickly to tell me."

She gave him money and rode on home. Before she reached the bungalow the paddlemaker passed her at a trot, going toward the sea.

She waited for three days, and then Victor Durnovo came again. Maurice was still away. There was an awful sense of impending danger in the very air, in the loneliness of her position. Yet she was not afraid of Durnovo. She had left that fear behind. She went to the drafting room to see him full of resolution.

"I could not go away," he said after relinquishing her hand, "without coming to see you."

Jocelyn said nothing. The scared look which she had last seen in his face was no longer there, but the eyes were full of lies.

"Jocelyn," the man went on, "I suppose you know that I love you. Will you marry me?" he asked.

"No?"

"Why?"

"Because I not only do not care for you, but I despise and distrust you."

"Then," he said, "I will be candid with you. I intend you to marry me. I have intended this for some time. I am not going down on my knees to ask you to do it. That is not my way. But if you drive me to it I will make your brother Maurice go down on his knees and beg you to marry me."

"I don't think that you will do that," answered the girl steadily. "Whatever your power over Maurice may be, it is not strong enough for that. You overrate it."

"Suppose," he said in a low, hissing voice, "that I possess the voice which has only to mention to one or two people to make this place too hot for Maurice Gordon. If he escaped the fury of the natives it would be difficult to know where he could go. England would be too hot for him. They wouldn't have him there. I could see to that. He would be a ruined man, an outcast, execrated by all the civilized world."

"What is your knowledge?" asked Jocelyn in a cold, measured voice.

"If you will have it, your brother, Maurice Gordon, is a slave trader."

She drew back as she might have done from some unclean animal. She knew that he was not telling the truth. There might be extraordinary circumstances. The real truth might have quite a different sound, spoken in different words, but there was enough of the truth in it as Victor Durnovo placed it before her to condemn Maurice before the world.

"Now will you marry me?" he sneered.

"Supposing," said Jocelyn, "for one moment that there was a grain of truth in your fabrication, who would believe you? Who on this coast would take your word as telling the word of an English gentleman? Even if the whole story were true, which it is not, could you prove it? You are a liar as well as a coward and traitor! Do you think that the very servants in the stable would believe you? Do you think that the incident of the amputation at Maala is forgotten? Do you think that all Loango, even to the boatmen on the beach, knows the fact that you are here in Loango now because you are afraid to go through a savage country to the simian plateau, as you are pledged to do? You were afraid of the smallpox once. There is something else that you are afraid of now. I do not know what it is, but I will find out. Coward! Go! Leave the house at once, before I call in the stable boys to turn you out, and never dare to speak to me again!"

He heard her close the window after him as he walked away beneath the trees.

Jocelyn went out by the open window, and presently Nala came grinning toward her. He was evidently very much pleased with himself—held himself erect and squinted more violently than usual.

"I have been to Maala," he said, with considerable dignity of manner. Nala squatted on the chumun floor and proceeded to unfold a leaf. The operation took some time. Within the outer covering there was a second envelope of paper, likewise secured by a string. Finally the man produced a small note, which showed signs of having been read more than once. This he handed to Jocelyn with an absurd air of importance.

She opened the paper and read:

To Marie, at Maala—Send at once to Mr. Durnovo, informing him that the tribes have risen and are rapidly surrounding the plateau. He must return here at once with as large an armed force as he can raise, but the most important consideration is time. He must not wait for men from elsewhere, but must pick up what he can in Loango and on the way up to Maala. I reckon that we can handle the matter without outside assistance, but after that period we shall be forced to surrender or try to cut our way through without the simianite. With a larger force we could beat back the tribes and establish our hold on the plateau by force of arms. This must be forwarded to Mr. Durnovo at once, wherever he is. The letter is in duplicate, sent by two good messengers, who go by different routes.

JOHN MERRIDITH.

When Jocelyn looked up, dry lips, breathless, Nala was standing before her, beaming with self-importance.

"Who gave you this?"

"Marie, at Maala."

Who is she?
"Oh, Mr. Durnovo's woman at Maala. She keeps his house."

"But the letter is from Mr. Durnovo?" cried Jocelyn, whose fear made her unreasonably angry. "Why has he not had it?"

Nala came nearer, with upraised forefinger and expletive palm.

"Marie told me," he said, "that Mr. Meredith sent two letters. Marie gave Mr. Durnovo one. This—other letter," Jocelyn Gordon rose to the occasion. "Can you go," she said after a moment's thought, "to St. Paul de Loanda for me, at once—now?"

"Oh, yes," with a sigh.

Already Jocelyn was writing something on a sheet of paper.

"Take this," she said, "to the telegraph office at St. Paul de Loanda and send it off at once. Here is money. You understand? I will pay you when you bring back the receipt. If you have been very quick I will pay you well."

"I've been too long in this country," exclaimed Durnovo. "That's the fact. I'm not the man I was."

Guy Oscar smoked for some moments in silence, then he took his pipe from his lips.

"The only pity is," he said judicially, "that you ever undertook to look for the simianite if you were going to find it with the first difficulty."

Without further comment he walked away and entered into conversation with the captain of the steamer.

"All right," muttered Durnovo between his teeth—"all right, my sarcastic, grand gentleman. I'll be even with you yet."

In due time Maala was reached. As the canoes suitable for up river travel were by no means sufficient to transport the whole of the expeditionary force in one journey, Mr. Durnovo made. Durnovo took charge of the advance column, journeying up to the camp from which the long march through the forest was to begin, and sending back the canoes for Oscar and the remainder of the force. With these canoes he sent back word that the hostile tribes were within a few days' march, and that he was fortifying his camp.

This news seemed to furnish Guy Oscar with food for considerable thought, and after some space of time he called Marie.

She came, and, standing before him with her patient dignity of mind, he explained his situation. She took her eyes of the letter in his hand. Oscar noticed the persistency of her gaze at the time and remembered it again afterward.

"Marie," he said, "I have had rather some news from Mr. Durnovo. It will not be safe for you to stay at Maala. You must take the children down to Loango. I will send two men down with you, and will give you a letter to Miss Gordon, who will see to your way at Loango."

"Yes," said she softly. "I know." And she went into the house.

The next morning brought further rumors of approaching danger, and it seemed certain almost to keep the men away filtered through Durnovo's fortified camp farther up the river. This time the report was more definite. There were Arabs leading the tribes, and rumor further stated that an organized descent on Maala was intended. And yet there was no word from Durnovo; no sign to suggest that he had even thought of securing the safety of his housekeeper and the few aged negroes in charge of Maala. This was the first time that the termination to send Marie down to the coast, and he personally superintended their departure before taking his seat in the canoe for the up river voyage. The men of his division had all preceded him, and no one except his own boatmen knew that Maala was to be abandoned.

Despite disquieting rumors, the expedition was allowed to depart from the river camp unmolested. For two days they marched through the gloomy forest with all speed. On the third day one of the men of Durnovo's division captured a native who had been prowling on their heels in the line of march. Victor Durnovo sent a prisoner and a message to Oscar that he would come presently and see what information to be abstracted from the captive. At the midday halt Durnovo accordingly joined Oscar, and the man was brought before them. He was hardly worthy of the name, so disheveled, so miserable and half starved was he.

"Ask him," said Oscar, "whether he knows that there is an Englishman with a large force at the top of a mountain far to the east."

Durnovo translated, and the man answered with a smile. In reply to some further question the negro launched into a detailed narrative, to which Durnovo listened eagerly.

"He says," said the latter to Oscar, "that the plateau is in possession of the blacks. It was taken two months ago. The blacks were sold as slaves; the two Englishmen were tortured to death and their bodies burned."

"Oscar never moved a muscle."

"Ask him if he is quite sure about it."

"Quite," replied Durnovo after questioning. "What a pity! But I always knew it. I knew it was quite hopeless from the first."

He passed his brown hand nervously over his face, where the perspiration stood in beads.

"Yes," said Oscar slowly, "but I think we will go on all the same."

"What?" cried Durnovo. "Go on?"

"Yes," replied Guy Oscar, "we will go on, and if I find you trying to desert I'll shoot you down like a rat."

.....

"About as bad as they can be, sir. That's how things are." Joseph set down his master's breakfast on the rough table that stood in front of his tent and looked at Jack Meredith.

Meredith had a way of performing most of his toilet under his tent, and while Joseph made his discouraging report he was engaged in buttoning his waistcoat. He nodded gravely, but his manner was not that of a man who fully realized his position of imminent danger. Some men are like this. They die without getting at all flustered.

"There's not more nor two or three of the whole lot of them, is there?" Jack Meredith was putting on his coat.

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lowed Oscar out of the room, leaving that ominous silence behind.

"I leave for Maala tonight," said Oscar when they were outside. "and you are coming with me."

"I'll see you cursed first!" replied Durnovo, with a courage born of Irish whisky.

Guy Oscar said nothing, but he stretched out his right hand suddenly. His fingers closed in the collar of Victor Durnovo's coat, and that particular scion of two races found himself feebly trotting the one street of Loango.

"Le go!" he gasped.

But the hand at his neck neither relinquished nor contracted. When they reached the beach the embarkation of the little army was going forward under Maurice Gordon's supervision. Victor looked at Gordon. He reflected over the trump card held in his hand, but he was too skillful to play it then.

CHAPTER XVI.

IT was nearly dark when the little coast steamer secured by Joseph Gordon for the service turned her prow northward and steamed away.

"The truth is," Durnovo took an early opportunity of saying to Oscar, "that my nerve is no longer up to this work. I should not care to undertake this business alone, despite my reputation on the coast. It is a wonderful thing how closely the nerves are allied to the state of one's health."

"Wonderful!" acquiesced Guy Oscar, with a lack of irony which only made the irony keener.

"I've been too long in this country," exclaimed Durnovo. "That's the fact. I'm not the man I was."

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"I know what a blizzard from mutiny is. I've felt it in the atmosphere, so to speak, before now, sir."

"And what does it feel like?" inquired Jack Meredith, lightly arranging his watch-chain.

But Joseph did not answer. He stepped backward into the tent and brought two rifles. There was no need of answer. For this came in the sound of many voices, the clang and clatter of varied arms.

"Here they come, sir," said the soldier servant, respectfully mindful of his place even at this moment.

Jack Meredith merely sat down behind the little table where his breakfast stood untouched. He leaned his elbow on the table and watched the approach of the disorderly band of blacks. Some ran, some hung back, but all were armed.

In front walked a stout, truculent looking man with broad shoulders and an aggressive head.

[CONTINUED.]

Sun Baths.

Sun baths do nothing and are the most refreshing, life giving baths that one can take, whether sick or well. Every housekeeper knows the necessity of giving her woolsens the benefit of the sun from time to time, and especially after a long rainy season or a long absence of the sun. Many will object that the injury their clothes are liable to from dampness which will never reflect that an occasional exposure of their own bodies to the sunlight is equally necessary to their own health. The sun baths do not cost anything, and that is a misfortune, for people are still deluded with the idea that those things only can be good or useful which cost money. Let it not be forgotten that three of God's most beneficent gifts to man (three things most necessary to good health), sunlight, fresh air and water, are free to all. You can have them in abundance, without money and without price, if you will. If you would enjoy good health then see to it that you are supplied with pure air, to breathe all the time, that you bathe for an hour or so in the sunlight and that you drink plenty of pure water.—Pittsburg Press.

The Voltinre of the East.

Omar Khayyam was a famous Persian poet and mathematician in the twelfth century, who was employed by the Sultan Malik Shah in revising the astronomical tables and in making a thorough reform of the calendar. He is better known to us as the writer of some 500 epigrams in verses of four lines which are unsurpassed in their poetic diction, fine wit and crushing satire. These clever and fascinating quatrains were put into English by Edward FitzGerald, who in 1859 published "The Rubaiyat of Omar," a rendering marked by exquisite melodiousness and by poetic insight and power. Omar has been called the Voltinre of the East, because of his brilliant and pungent wit, while his depth of tenderness and profound thought and his denunciation of the fate which dooms to decay and death what is best and most beautiful in the world reveals much that reminds us of the words of Swinburne and sometimes Schopenhauer.

Crystal Sky Columns.

An explanation of a curious optical phenomenon, sometimes witnessed on frosty nights, which is called the "crystal sky," is offered by a scientist. The phenomenon takes the form of beautiful columns of silvery light standing over electric arc lamps and other bright lights and sometimes appearing almost to rest upon the zenith. The scientist says that sometimes the evening star has a bright shaft below as well as above, while the rising moon stands in a broad column of light. These appearances are due to floating frost crystals which keep the rays of light horizontal. On examination he found that the crystals concerned in the exhibition were thin six sided plates of ice, never more than one millimeter in diameter. When the wind blows, these little plates are upset, and the columns of light caused by reflection from their surfaces disappear.

Greatest of All Casts.

The greatest as well as the most common of all casts is the wood, which grows wherever cast iron and which is man's only friend in the great southwestern deserts of the United States and in Mexico. It furnishes always a quantity of resin, and its use indicates, it can be manufactured into a soap, perhaps the least alkaline soap ever made, even though the wood itself may grow in the center of an alkali desert. Beer is brewed from it, the Indians make a hemlock fiber from it, and horses and men can eat parts of it if the spines are cut away; also when it shoots up its one great arm skyward it tops that arm with one of the most gorgeous flowers in the world.—Argonaut.

New England Arguments.

To argue is not necessary to a New Englander as to eat and to sleep. By nature he rejects the opposite side of every question, and he prefers broad, general questions of which he knows only what the daily paper tells him. If he is alone he will argue with himself, and often he will prove to himself that he is wrong, but the argument by which he proves it is faulty.—From "The Balance of Power," by Arthur Goodrich.

Information for the Young.

"Pa, what do they call babies when there's three of them at a time—I mean the same as twins?"

"Triplets."

"Oh, yes. I couldn't think what it was. And what is it when there's four of them?"

"A calamity. Now, put that pup out of the house and keep him out or I'll send for the dog catcher!"—Chicago Record-Herald.

A Splendid Gain.

Hobson—How did you enjoy your summer trip, Bagley? Bagley—Had a delightful time; gained 130 pounds.

Hobson—One hundred and thirty pounds? I don't believe it, Bagley.

Bagley—Don't you? Well, here it comes down the street. Just wait a moment, and I'll introduce you.

Watch Jewels.

A jeweler, no matter how dishonest, would not steal the jewels in a watch, for they are valueless. They cost only 10 cents apiece. In antique watches the jewels are in the case. In modern watches they are never worth more than \$15 a gross.—Argonaut.

Selecting a Ghost.

A famous Scotch master used to tell about the clever way which he took in the question "Well, master phant, is this a general rising or are ye just taking a daunter frae yer grave by yerself?"

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