

Adventure



A Romance of The South Seas

BY
JACK LONDON

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CHAPTER XX.

THE HEAD HUNTERS.

"**T**HAT fella boy he sick," Binu Charley said, pointing to a Poonga-Poonga man whose shoulder had been scratched by an arrow an hour before.

The boy was sitting down and groaning, his arms clamping his bent knees, his head drooped forward and rolling painfully back and forth. For fear of poison, Sheldon had immediately scarified the wound and injected permanganate of potash; but in spite of the precaution the shoulder was swelling rapidly.

"We'll take him on to where Tudor is lying," Joan said. "The walking will help to keep up his circulation and scatter the poison. Adamu Adam, you take hold that boy. Maybe he will want to sleep. Shake him up. If he sleep he die."

The advance was more rapid now, for Binu Charley placed the captive bushman in front of him and made him clear the runway of traps. Once, at a sharp turn where a man's shoulder would unavoidably brush against a screen of leaves, the bushman displayed great caution as he spread the leaves aside and exposed the head of a sharp pointed spear, so set that the casual passerby would receive at the least a nasty scratch.

The sun sinking behind a lofty western peak brought on an early but lingering twilight, and the expedition plodded on through the evil forest—the place of mystery and fear, of death swift and silent and horrible, of brutish appetite and degraded instinct, of human life that still wallowed in the primeval slime, of savagery degenerate and abysmal.

They turned aside from the runway at a place indicated by Binu Charley and came to an immense banyan tree half an acre in extent that made in the innermost heart of the jungle a denser jungle of its own. From out of its black depths came the voice of a man singing in a cracked eerie voice.

"My word, that big fella marster he no die!"

The singing stopped, and the voice, faint and weak, called out a hello. Joan answered, and then the voice explained:

"I'm not wandering. I was just singing to keep my spirits up. Have you got anything to eat?"

Tudor, having pulled through the fever and started to mend, was still frightfully weak and very much starved. So badly swollen was he from mosquito bites that his face was unrecognizable. Joan had her own ailments along and she prefaced their application by fomenting his swollen features with hot clothes. Sheldon, with an eye to the camp and the preparations for the night, looked on and felt the pangs of jealousy at every contact of her hands with Tudor's face and body. Somehow, engaged in their healing ministrations, they no longer seemed to him boys' hands.

The morning's action had been settled the night before. Tudor was to stay behind in his banyan refuge and gather strength while the expedition proceeded. On the far chance that they might rescue even one solitary survivor of Tudor's party, Joan was fixed in her determination to push on. With Tudor, Adamu Adam and Arah were to stop as guards.

Binu Charley led the way, by proxy, however, for by means of the poisoned spear he drove the captive bushman ahead. They plodded on, panting and sweating in the humid, stagnant air. They were immersed in a sea of wanton, prodigal vegetation.

Caught by surprise fifteen feet in the air above the path in the forks of a many branched tree, a bushman dropped like a shadow, naked as on his natal morn. It was hard for them to realize that it was a man, for he seemed a weird jungle sprite, a goblin of the forest. Only Binu Charley was not perturbed. He flung his poisoned spear over the head of the captive at the flitting form. It was a mighty cast, well intended, but the shadow, leaping, received the spear harmlessly between the legs and, tripping upon it, was flung sprawling. Before he could get away Binu Charley was upon him, clutching him by his snow white hair. He was only a young man and a dandy at that, his face blackened with charcoal, his hair whitened with wood ashes, with the freshly severed tail of a wild pig thrust through his perforated nose and two more thrust through his ears. His only other ornament was a necklace of human finger bones. At sight of their other prisoner he chattered in a high querulous falsetto, with puckered brows and troubled, wild animal eyes. He was disposed of along the middle of the line, one of the Poonga-Poonga men leading him at the end of a length of bark rope.

"Close up he stop," Binu Charley warned them in a whisper.

There as he spoke, from high over-

head came the deep resonant boom of a village drum. But the beat was slow. There was no panic in the sound. The runway now became a deeply worn path, rising so steeply that several times the party paused for breath.

"One man with a rifle could hold it against a thousand," Sheldon whispered to Joan. "And twenty men could hold it with spears and arrows."

They came out on the village, situated on a small, upland plateau, grass covered and with only occasional trees. There was a wild chorus of warning cries from the women, and spears and arrows began to fall among the invaders. At Sheldon's command the Tahitians and Poonga-Poonga men got into action with their rifles. The spears and arrows ceased, the last bushman disappeared, and the fight was over almost as soon as it had begun. On their own side no one had been hurt, while half a dozen bushmen had been killed.

"Poor brutes," Joan said. "They act only according to their natures. To eat their kind and take heads is good morality for them."

"But they should be taught not to take white men's heads," Sheldon argued.

She nodded approval and said: "If we find one head we'll burn the village. Hey, you, Charley! What fella place head he stop?"

"S'pose he stop along devil-devil house," was the answer. "That big fella house, he devil-devil."

It was the largest house in the village. Into it they went. Crouched before a slow smoking fire, in the littered ashes of a thousand fires, was an old man who blinked apathetically at the invaders. His task, it seemed, was to tend the fire, and, hung in the smoke, they found the object of their search. Joan turned and stumbled out hastily, deathly sick, reeling into the sunshine and clutching at the air for support.

"See if all are there," she called back faintly and tottered aimlessly on for a few steps, breathing the air in great drafts and trying to forget the sight she had seen.

Upon Sheldon fell the unpleasant task of tallying the heads. They were all there, nine of them, white men's heads, the faces of which he had been familiar with when their owners had camped in Berande compound and set up the polling posts. Binu Charley, hugely interested, lent a hand, turning the heads around for identification, noting the hatchet strokes and remarking the distorted expressions.

Other heads, thoroughly sun dried and smoke cured, were found in abundance, but, with two exceptions, they were the heads of blacks.

"Me savvy black Mary, me savvy white Mary," quoth Binu Charley. "Me no savvy that fella Mary. What name belong him?"

Sheldon looked. Ancient and withered, blackened by many years of the smoke of the devil-devil house, nevertheless the shrunken, mummylike face was unmistakably Chinese. How it had come there was the mystery. It was a woman's head, and he had never heard of a Chinese woman in the history of the Solomon. From the ears hung two inch long earrings, and at Sheldon's direction the Binu man rubbed away the accretions of smoke and dirt and from under his fingers appeared the polished green of jade, the sheen of pearl and the warm red of oriental gold. The other head, equally ancient, was a white man's, and Sheldon wondered what forgotten beche-de-mer fisherman or sandalwood trader had gone to furnish that ghostly trophy.

Telling Binu Charley to remove the earrings and directing the Poonga-Poonga men to carry out the old fire tender, Sheldon cleared the devil-devil house and set fire to it. Soon every house was blazing merrily, while the ancient fire tender sat upright in the sunshine, blinking at the destruction of his village. Every member of Tudor's expedition was accounted for and it was a long, dark way out of the head hunters' country. Releasing their two prisoners, who leaped away like startled deer, they plunged down the steep path into the steaming jungle.

That night found them back in camp with Tudor, and at high noon of the third day, traveling with the current and shooting the rapids, the expedition arrived at Berande. Joan, with a sigh, unbuckled her revolver belt and hung it on the nail in the living room, while Sheldon, who had been lurking about for the sheer joy of seeing her perform that particular homecoming act, sighed, too, with satisfaction. But the homecoming was not all joy to him, for Joan set about nursing Tudor and spent much time on the veranda when he lay in the hammock under the mosquito netting.

The ten days of Tudor's convalescence that followed were peaceful days on Berande. The work of the plantation went on like clockwork. With the crushing of the premature

outbreak of Gogoomy and his following all insubordination seemed to have vanished. Twenty more of the old time boys, their term of service up, were carried away by the Martha, and the fresh stock of labor, treated fairly, was proving of excellent quality. As Sheldon rode about the plantation acknowledging to himself the comfort and convenience of a horse and wondering why he had not thought of getting one himself, he pondered the various improvements for which Joan was responsible.

There were times when he was dizzy with thought of her and love of her, when he would stop his horse and with closed eyes picture her as he had seen her that first day in the stern sheets of the whaler, dashing madly in to shore and marching deliberately along his veranda to remark that it was pretty hospitable, this letting strangers sink or swim in his front yard.

It was patent to Sheldon that Tudor had become interested in Joan. Often after his morning ride over the plantation or coming in from the store or from inspection of the copra drying, Sheldon found the pair of them together on the veranda, Joan listening intent and excited and Tudor deep in some recital of personal adventure at the ends of the earth.

Sheldon noticed, too, the way Tudor looked at her and followed her about with his eyes, and in those eyes he noted a certain hungry look and on the face a certain wistful expression, and he wondered if on his own face he carried a similar involuntary advertisement. He was sure of several things—first, that Tudor was not the right man for Joan and could not possibly make her permanently happy; next, that Joan was too sensible a girl really to fall in love with a man of such superficial stamp, and, finally, that Tudor would blunder his love making somehow. And at the same time, with true lover's anxiety, Sheldon feared that the other might somehow fall to blunder and win the girl with purely fortuitous and successful meretricious show.

The situation was very unsatisfactory and perplexing. Sheldon played the difficult part of waiting and looking on, while his rival devoted himself energetically to reaching out and grasping at the fluttering prize. He did not belong to Berande, and now that he was well and strong again, it was time for him to go. Instead of which Tudor had settled himself down comfortably, resumed swimming, went dynamiting fish with Joan, spent hours with her hunting pigeons, trapping crocodiles and at target practice with rifle and revolver.

But there were certain traditions of hospitality that prevented Sheldon from breathing a hint that it was time for his guest to take himself off. And in similar fashion, feeling that it was not playing the game, he fought down the temptation to warn Joan. Had he known anything, not too serious, to Tudor's detriment, he would have been unable to utter it, but the worst of it was that he knew nothing at all against the man.

To be continued

Here is a message of hope and good cheer from Mrs. C. J. Martin, Boone Mill, Va., who is the mother of eighteen children. Mrs. Martin was cured of stomach trouble and constipation by Chamberlain's Tablets after five years of suffering, and now recommends these tablets to the public. Sold by all dealers.

STEPHENSPORT

Rev. C. R. Shepherd filled his regular appointments here Sunday.

Mrs. Wm. Meador, of Herman, Neb., was the guest of Mr. and Mrs. C. A. Tintus last week. She left this county when three years old.

Emery French, we are glad to know, is improving.

Dr. and Mrs. Shively delightfully entertained to dinner Sunday. Those present were: Mr. and Mrs. E. A. Smith, Mr. and Mrs. Chas. Waggoner and little daughter, Jane.

G. W. Payne invites you to see his new line of dry goods.

Mrs. M. L. Roberts is on the sick list. Mrs. Lizzie Paulman is visiting her sister, Mrs. John Hook, of Hardinsburg. Mrs. Scott Bell and family went to Hardinsburg yesterday for a three week's stay.

Misses Pauline Nichols and Helen Miller, of Cloverport, were guests of Mrs. Tom Steward last week.

A beautiful dinner was that given by Mr. and Mrs. R. A. Shellman Sunday. Covers were laid for the following: Rev. C. R. Shepherd, of Louisville, Mrs. J. O. Winchell, Mr. and Mrs. W. B. Gardner.

Dr. G. E. Shively and his father went to Owensboro last week on business.

Miss Bettie Allen was hostess to quite a number of her friends Tuesday night. Games were the feature of the occasion. Coffee and cake were served.

Gordon Payne has a position in the telegraph office at Owensboro.

Mr. Yandel Sargent, of Owensboro, visited Mr. and Mrs. W. B. Gardner last week and returned Monday. It is like old times to have Yandel with us and we regret that he is away.

Over-shoes at cost—G. W. Payne.

Mrs. James Crawford, who is ill with throat trouble, is some better.

Mr. and Mrs. A. B. Cashman informally entertained to dinner Friday. Those



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Joe Mulhatton For Bryan

Say Mr. Editor, you had just as well call up the coal man for we are going to have sixty more days of this zero weather. Why, old Mull saw his shadow on February 2.

Who are we for President? William Jennings Bryan, first, last and all the time. Champ Clark is our second choice. Why should we want Bryan after so many defeats? Because we had better go down in defeat with a good man at the helm than to go to victory with a bad man as our leader. Why is it that Bryan has not been elected? Just because he had rather be right than President.

We would advise the Republicans to dump Taft, Roosevelt, Sea Folette and the whole bunch and nominate Bob Mattingly, of Cloverport. Hard times and panics would be a thing of the past. See that would put Cloverport on the map. Yes, and Balltown, too.

Joe Mulhatton, Jr. Carter's Landing, Feb. 3.

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Cloverport Churches

Baptist Church

Baptist Sunday School: 9:30 a. m. O. E. Lightfoot, Superintendent. Prayer Meeting Wednesday 7:30 p. m. Baptist Aid Society meets Monday after Second Sunday, every month. Mrs. A. B. Skilman, President.

Methodist Church

Methodist Sunday School: 9:30 a. m. Ira D. Robyn, Superintendent. Preaching every Sunday at 11 a. m. and 7:30 p. m. Frank Lewis Pastor. Prayer meeting Wednesday, 7:30 p. m. Epworth League, regular service Sunday 4:45 p. m.; business meeting first Tuesday night each month. Miss Margaret Burn, President. Ladies Aid society meets first Monday each month. Mrs. Forrest Lightfoot, President. Ladies' Missionary Society meets Second Sunday in every month. Mrs. Virgil Ralabage, President. Choir practice Friday night 7:30. A. H. Murray, Director.

Presbyterian Church

Presbyterian Sunday School 9:45 a. m.—Conrad Slipp, Superintendent. Preaching every Third Sunday. Rev. Adair Minister. Prayer meeting Thursday, 7:30 p. m. Ladies Aid Society meets Wednesday after Third Sunday every month. Mrs. Chas. Satterfield, President.

Catholic Church

First Sunday of each month, Mass, Sermon, and Benediction 8:30 a. m. Preaching three Sundays at 10:15 a. m. On week days Mass at 7:00 a. m. Catechetical Instruction for the children on Saturdays at 8:30 a. m., and on Sundays at 5:30 a. m. and 2:30 p. m.

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