



RUNNING the GAUNTLET

By

CECIL FANSHAWE

A Rousing Story of Daring Adventure Amongst the Matabele of Southern Rhodesia

THE FIRST CHAPTER

The Rising of the Mafuta

I TELL you I don't like it, my lad. Even our own fellows seem restless. There may be something in the yarns about Mafuta."

Old Samuel Crum broke off, and twisted in his saddle towards his nephew, Dennis Hodson, who was riding alongside.

Dusk was falling, the swift, wonderful dusk of Southern Rhodesia. On all sides the stunted mimosa trees threw long shadows on the red sand.

Behind the two horsemen half a dozen nearly naked Matabele drove a small herd of cattle, the pattering hoofs stirring up clouds of dust.

"What have you heard, uncle?" laughed Dennis, closing his heels on the sides of his big-striding, bay horse. "I can't follow all you say when you jabber away to the natives. I know Mafuta's the boss chief of this country, but I guess he's just an ordinary——"

"He ain't ordinary!" cut in old Crum,

tugging fiercely at his grizzled moustache. "See here! You know the Matabele are an offshoot of the Zulus? Yes? Well, Mafuta declares he's a direct descendant of the Zulu King, Cetewayo. And he's stirring up trouble. I learnt that at the kraal we passed this morning. He swears he's going to wipe out the whites. The storm may burst at any moment!"

Dennis whistled.

"What about it, uncle?" he asked, after a pause. "We're miles from any white settlement. D'you reckon we've got time to buy any more cattle?"

"No. T'aint worth the risk," replied the elder man. "I intended to buy some more beasts from Kali—Kali's a brother of Mafuta, and we're not far from his kraal now. But we won't stop. We'll slip past in the dark and head straight back for Buluwayo. If we're attacked, we'll lose all we've got."

Swinging round, old Crum called out to the native followers to make more speed.

Hoarse, guttural shouts, somewhat defiant,

made answer. But the black men urged the beasts to a trot. They weren't ripe for rebellion—yet.

Samuel Crum was an old-timer. He knew natives thoroughly. But his nephew Dennis had only been a few months in Rhodesia. On leaving school, the lad had come out to join his uncle, who owned a big ranch not far from Buluwano.

When old man Crum wanted fresh stock, he took some farm hands and rode miles into the bush, buying cattle from isolated native kraals. Having got all he wanted, he drove them home. It is the best way of getting beasts cheaply.

Dennis, since he had come out, always went with his uncle. They usually did a roaring trade. But this time they found the headmen of kraals surly, demanding huge prices. Also old Crum had picked up news of an intended rising—hence his anxiety.

"How far off d'you reckon Kali's kraal, uncle?" Dennis queried suddenly. "I've never been to it."

"About a mile from here, neevy. I'd like to give it a wider berth. But we must stick to the trail. If we go round through the bush some of our stuff'll stray. I guess we won't camp till near midnight."

"Buck up, you!" the old man cried to his shouting herders. "And make less noise! D'you hear me?"

At a shambling trot the cattle were driven up a rough slope. The track was stony, and uncle and nephew rode amongst the beasts, urging them onwards.

They gained the summit of the rise, whence they could now look over a sea of boundless scrub. Then something happened.

Like shadows a number of black warriors slid from the bush just ahead. They formed up in a line, barring the way. They were grimly silent; and the last rays of the dying sun glinted red on spear blades.

"The deuce!" growled old Crum into his beard. "This looks like trouble."

Then he spurred forward, Dennis at his side. The cattle, seeing the sinister line ahead, bunched together and halted.

"Who are you?" roared Samuel Crum,

in Matabele. "Get out! By whose orders do you bar the way?"

"We come from Kali, white man," cried a stalwart savage who seemed to be the leader. "He heard that the baas Crum, with his nephew, was in this region, buying cattle. Chief Kali, brother of the mighty Mafuta, is offended that the baas has not visited his kraal."

"Tell your chief," shouted the old rancher promptly, "that I have sufficient cattle. I will visit him next time—"

"Not next time, white man," retorted the leader of the warriors threateningly. "Now!"

"Ah!" murmured the others in sullen chorus. "Not next time—now!"

Dennis, his blue eyes blazing, dropped his hand to his pistol holster. His uncle checked him with a gesture; then again faced the Matabele.

"What if I refuse?" he bellowed.

"Then our orders are to slay you both and seize your cattle."

Then followed a fateful pause. A rash movement might lead to disaster.

"We'd best go with these ruffians, Dennis," the elder man growled at length. "If we try to break through we'll lose the cattle. And I guess we can bluff Kali—buy a few head and then move on. He wouldn't dare kill us in cold blood—not before Mafuta gives the signal for the rising."

"Right you are, uncle," answered Dennis. "You ought to know how to handle the bouncer."

"Well, white man?" burst out a rough voice impatiently. "Comest thou?"

"Yes. Lead on!"

Instantly a dozen of the Matabele ran forward to dash round the flanks of the cattle and start the herd moving.

With warriors in front of them, and their cattle pressed close on their rear, old Crum and Dennis rode in grim silence. Ten minutes later they swung out of the main track, to strike into one heading due north.

The night shut down. A million stars glittered in the purple sky. From the surrounding bush came the sounds of beasts of prey. The cattle, urged on behind their owners, bellowed uneasily.



“And what if I refuse to come with you?” demanded Old Crum. “Then our orders are to slay you both and seize your cattle,” answered the stalwart leader of the band. (See Chapter 1.)

Of a sudden, straining his eyes, Dennis could see the black, rounded roofs of huts thrusting up above the thorn trees. To the lad's ears came the murmur of many voices.

“Kali's kraal, nevvv,” announced old Crum. “I ain't going to stand any nonsense from him. The high hand's the only thing that goes down with a savage.”

Then they passed through a gap in a ragged fence and found themselves in the centre of the large native village. The ruddy lights of torches, held high by bronze warriors grouped amongst the huts, illuminated the savage scene. The cattle had been halted outside the palisade.

Old Crum made straight at a knot of men standing by the door of the largest hut. He reined in his horse, then addressed himself to a muscular native who towered above his fellows.

“Hail Kali, brother of Mafuta!” he cried.

“What means this outrage?”

“Outrage, white man!” replied Kali, speaking in his own dialect. “I understand not. I had news that baas Crum and his

nephew sought cattle in my territory. I thought they must have forgotten me. Therefore I sent an invitation——”

“You sent soldiers with orders to slay us and seize our cattle if we refused to come!” thundered the old rancher, his beard bristling.

“Nay!” lied the big-built chief, with a flash of white teeth. “My warriors shall be punished for exceeding instructions. I gave no such orders. I desire to sell cattle, not steal them. I have many beasts, but little money.”

“We do not wish to buy!” old Crum snapped. “Already we have enough. Having paid our respects to the chief, I and my nephew will now depart.”

Kali folded his thick arms on his broad, naked chest. He looked up from under heavy lids.

“Baas Crum has not yet seen my cattle,” he said harshly. “They are fine beasts—none finer. Enter my hut and we will discuss their price.”

Dennis shot a glance at his uncle.

“It would be like shoving our heads in a

non s mouth, wouldn't it?" the lad whispered. "Tell the bounder to——"

"We'll have to chance it," growled old Crum. "We couldn't get off without a fight. But I don't think this scoundrel would dare start an attack without orders from Mafuta. Best have a buck and try to bluff——"

"Art afraid, baas?" interrupted Kali.

"Afraid of what?" bellowed the old man. "Of entering the chief's hut? Ho, ho! That is a good jest!"

He swung himself out of his saddle. Dennis followed suit. Both felt that their pistols were loose in their holsters. Then, leaving their horses with the reins trailing, they stamped after the chief into the big hut. By far the best course was to show a bold front.

Within, on the earthen floor, the red embers of a dying fire gave a sullen glow. The air was heavy with wood smoke.

Kali seated himself cross-legged on a skin mat. He motioned his unwilling visitors to two others. A couple of armed warriors slid into the hut and ranged themselves up behind their chief.

"We have had many deals, baas," began Kali, his head on one side. "How came you not to visit me this time? I feel affronted. Are my cattle not as good as other men's?"

"Does a wise man buy more cattle than he needs, chief?" replied old Crum, answering one question with another—native fashion.

"That depends," sparred Kali. "Are not two good oxen to be preferred to four poor ones?"

Thus it went on, old Crum striving to bring the interview to an end, declaring himself willing to buy a few beasts, but anxious to be home before rain swelled the rivers. Kali seemed to be merely wasting time.

All the while, young Dennis kept his ears strained. He was listening to the sounds outside. The kraal was seething with activity. There was a hum of voices.

All at once, while his uncle and the chief tossed questions back and forth, Dennis thought he caught a new note. A moment later he was certain of it. A few words reached him. Now he knew that their fate was sealed unless he acted swiftly,

His face expressionless, the lad turned to his uncle.

"Uncle," he breathed in English, "a runner has just come in. I heard what he said. Mafuta has risen!"

Not even by the twitch of an eyelid did old Crum betray his dismay. He merely nodded, then doubled his great fists.

A second later the hut was filled with conflict.

Leaping to his feet, the old man crashed his bunched knuckles to the chief's jaw. Kali's bullet head snicked back—the brother of Mafuta sprawled in a huddled heap.

Across the senseless body sprang Dennis.

The two Matabele who had entered with their chief were, for the instant, too amazed to move. Just as the nearest recovered and whipped up his assegai, Dennis let drive at him.

With a bull-like roar the fellow doubled up.

"That'll settle you!" cried Dennis, as he lunged out his revolver and brought the butt thudding down on the woolly head. With a groan the man sank to his knees.

But it was touch and go. Even as Dennis jumped, he saw his uncle duck to dodge a blow with a club from the other soldier. Then old Crum's fist slugged into the thick neck.

Down went the second warrior.

"To the horses, lad!" cried the old man.

"It's our one chance!"

Gripping his nephew by the arm, he thrust him from the hut.

The pair charged out into a kraal now humming like a hornets' nest. Brandished torches gave a red glare. The air was rent with whoops and whistles.

Three yelling men came running forward. They were bringing to their chief the news of Mafuta's bidding to rise and slay the whites. But at the sight of two levelled revolvers they fell back.

"Quick, Dennis!" roared old Crum. "Get mounted! The horses will bolt in——"

Then uncle and nephew made a blind dash for their mounts, to hurl themselves into the saddle and spur full tilt for the kraal exit. Savages, howling, sprang to stop them.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

From two revolvers leapt darts of flame, and thunderous reports woke the echoes. The bullets were purposely aimed high. But the fusillade startled the savages. They scattered.

Out into the dark night swept old Crum and his nephew. From behind came a furious clamour, a din like that of a raging volcano. The Matabele were in hot pursuit.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

The Doomed Laager

WITH the wind whistling in their ears, the two fugitives plunged into the maze of bush. Above the pounding tattoo of their horses' hoofs, they could hear the strident whistles and yells of the pursuers.

"We've lost the cattle, nevy!" shouted old Crum. "Our men joined the rebels. But we've saved our skins. Get On! Don't spare your horse!"

Dennis wasn't sparing his horse—a matchless thoroughbred called Wildfire. The lad was merely holding him in, to make certain of not leaving his uncle behind.

But old Crum, too, was well mounted. And stride for stride, hoofbeat for hoofbeat, the two horses raced through the scrub. The riders flattened under branches, sat back when their mounts leapt jagged boulders

At last the sounds of pursuit grew faint, then died away. The Matabele had been out-distanced. Dennis drew rein.

"Where are we making for, uncle?" the lad panted. "The farm—or Buluwayo?"

"Neither," answered the old man as he pulled up, his mount's flanks heaving. "There's a white settlement at Kentjana—about ten miles due south. They may not have heard of the rising. We'll hike straight

there and warn the folk. The whole country'll be alive with savages before dawn."

Away in the dark night-sky glittered the Southern Cross. It hung low above the horizon. Taking his direction by these stars, old Crum headed south.

For a full hour nephew and uncle pounded through the scrub. They rattled over stony ridges, thudded through the deep sand of dry river beds. Jackals fled at their approach. Night birds shot up, screaming.

Gradually the bush thinned. Thorn trees gave place to plantations of tall mealies.



Old Crum crashed his bunched knuckles to the chief's jaw; an instant later Dennis dashed at the two Matabele behind. (See Chapter 1.)

Threading through the mealies, the fugitives suddenly sighted the black outlines of dim buildings.

"Hello! Hello, there!" called out old Crum.

There was no reply. The wind soughed drearily through the mealie stalks. Somewhere out on the veldt a hyena howled his mournful dirge.

"They must be sound asleep, uncle," suggested Dennis. "Let's shout together!"

"Whoop! Hi-yah!"

As one, the two voices tore the silence. But



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no answering shout came back. Not even a dog barked. A chill ran down Dennis's spine. Could it be that there were none to answer ?

Full of forebodings, the old rancher and his nephew rode up to the nearest house. They flung themselves from their saddles and dashed into the verandah.

"What's this?" gasped Dennis, stooping swiftly and snatching something up. "A broken spear! Uncle, there's been a fight!"

Old Crum sucked in his breath, nodded swiftly, then burst open a door. His nephew at his heels, he hurled himself into a little room.

It was in wild disorder. Boxes had been overturned. Cupboard doors swung idly on creaking hinges. On the floor lay several cartridges, the brass cases twinkling in the pale moonlight that filtered through a broken window.

Then followed a rapid search of other rooms. All told the same tale.

"It's plain what happened!" cried old Crum, swinging round on his nephew. "Some other kraal must have got Mafuta's signal before the news reached Kali's. The ruffians promptly attacked this place——"

"But they must have been beaten off," broke in Dennis. "Or surely they'd have burnt the house?"

"Right, lad!" answered the elder man. "I guess the white folk gave the savages more than they bargained for. But they obviously feared another attack. So they packed up all they could, and cleared out. Come on. We'll search the other houses."

It was the work of an instant for the two fugitives to dart from the deserted dwelling, leap into their saddles, and spur for the next homestead.

But again their shouts met with no response. Again the stamp of their feet echoed hollowly on bare boards. The second house told the same tale of headlong flight as did the first.

"Well, the folk got away!" panted Dennis. "It seems they had a jolly tough fight, but obviously no one was killed."

"Except a brace of savages!" said the lad's uncle grimly. "And I reckon more savages'll soon cast up to plunder. We'd best

hike off before that happens. The settlers must ha' made tracks for Buluwayo. Maybe we'll catch 'em up."

Mounted once more, Dennis and his uncle pounded through the moonlit night. But now they rode cautiously, drawn pistols in their right hands.

Plainly, the news of Mafuta's rising had spread with astounding rapidity. The whole country must be swarming with armed savages, flocking to join their ruthless chief. Warriors might be lurking behind every dark clump of bush.

Only stopping twice to breathe their horses, the fugitives rode hour after hour. They listened anxiously for sounds of pattering feet, for distant war chants.

They heard nothing. But the strain began to tell on the elder man. More than once he swayed in his saddle. Dennis had a double anxiety.

At last the eastern sky paled. It grew pink, then red. A few moments later the flaming sun heaved above the rugged horizon. Like countless diamonds the dewdrops sparkled on grass and thorn bush.

"Look, uncle!" cried Dennis, pointing. "Smoke! And I can hear oxen and—yes, English voices."

Old Crum followed his nephew's pointing finger. He could see a spiral of blue smoke, swirling above the bush before them. To the ears of both came the lowing of oxen, also shouts in English.

"It's a camp!" yelled the old man. "It must be the settlers driven from Kentjana! Why the deuce have they stopped here? Mafuta's impis will wipe them out!"

Both galloped on through the intervening strip of bush, to burst out in sight of the camp.

Evidently the settlers had gone into laager. They had drawn their wagons up in a big circle, end on and locked together. From within the circle of hooded vehicles came sounds of bustle and activity. The settlers were preparing for defence.

As old Crum and Dennis whirled from the bush, a burly, black-bearded horseman sighted them. With a shout he spurred forward, to throw his mount back on its haunches as he came alongside.



Dennis and his companion rode furiously out of the kraal, with a horde of fiercely howling savages racing in pursuit. (See Chapter 1.)

"Why, Crum," he shouted, "I'm glad to see you! And this lad's your neevy? Good! Two more to help defend the camp!"

"But what are you at, Johnson?" roared old Crum, gripping the other man's horny hand. "Why have you stopped? You'll

"We had to," exclaimed Johnson. "Our oxen are dead-beat after the all-night trek. They can't haul the wagons another yard. And we've women and children with us, so we can't ride on. But we've news that a big police force—under Major Mitchell—is on its way from Buluwayo. It should be here by dusk."

"I hope it will!" cried old Crum. "The whole country's swarming."

Then he swiftly related how he and his nephew had been robbed of the cattle, barely escaping with their lives from Kali's kraal.

"Afterwards," the old man ended, "we made for your homesteads at Kentjana, meaning to warn you folk. But we found you'd been attacked and cleared out."

"Yes," growled Johnson, "about forty Matabele tried to rush us at dusk, but we were ready and gave 'em beans. However, it was too risky to stop, so we trekked directly

after the scrap. But come into camp; both of you look all in."

Old Crum was certainly dead-beat. The strain and the long ride had been too much for a man of his age. Dennis was aching in every limb. But a hearty breakfast in the settlers' camp, and a short sleep, set the hardy lad on his legs again.

The scorching day was spent in throwing up earthworks outside the ring of wagons. Scouts rode into the bush, but returned to report that no savages were close.

The settlers were in good spirits. Some time in the afternoon the police were bound to arrive.

But as the sun sank in the west, and still the police did not come, anxiety spread through the camp. Yet now, though the oxen had recovered, the settlers daren't move. To trek through savage country at night with laden wagons would be courting disaster.

Just as dusk was falling came news of calamity.

A sentry outside barked a challenge.

"Friend!" shouted a dust-grimed native, who had just staggered from the surrounding bush. "Where be baas Johnson? Quick!"

Reeling with exhaustion, the fellow was helped in to the camp. Johnson, instantly summoned, recognised him. It was a Mashona

native the camp boss had sent out to spy in the morning.

"Baas," gasped the Mashona, his lungs labouring, "the police have been attacked! They beat off the attack and are now coming on! But they are still far off! And between them and this camp lies Mafuta with an impi! Mafuta is well hidden! The police, knowing nothing, will——"

The Mashona's voice trailed off; he staggered. He would have fallen had not young Dennis, standing alongside, seized the fellow's arm.

"Why didn't you warn the police?" thundered Johnson.

"Baas, I tried to; but the Matabele fill the land. Twice I was sighted and hunted. And how could I break through the impi of Mafuta? Wow, the great chief himself is there."

As he finished the Mashona collapsed utterly. Then the settlers gaped blankly at each other. Old Crum swore into his greying beard. Dennis clenched his fists and his chest heaved.

For there seemed little hope. Doubtless, during the night, Kali's men would fall on the camp. Nor would the relief force arrive in time.

Mafuta himself lay in wait with a powerful regiment, ready and eager to eat up Major Mitchell's police.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

Thoroughbreds!

DENNIS broke the strained silence.

"See here, Mr. Johnson," he cried, "there's only one thing for it. Someone must ride round Mafuta's impi. The police must be warned of the trap. I'll go."

The burly Johnson swung round, bringing one great hand slamming down on Dennis's shoulder.

"Good lad!" he shouted. "There's the right stuff in you, but the thing's impossible. Between us and the police the bush will be alive with Matabele. No horse could get through."

"You don't know Wildfire," protested Dennis. "He's a thoroughbred and as fast

as the wind. Ain't that right, uncle?" the lad ended.

"Sure thing," nodded old Crum. "Wildfire can show his heels to any horse in Rhodesia. But to get through infested bush is ——"

There broke in a clamour of voices. Each settler volunteered to go. But Dennis stuck to his guns. He pointed out that all the men from Kentjana had wives and children dependent on them. He, Dennis, had no one.

"I will go!" the youngster insisted, and he spun round on his heel and raced towards his horse.

"Stop him!" bawled a dozen men. "It's rank madness for a boy to try!"

But Dennis had clapped on his saddle, tightened the girths, and vaulted on to Wildfire's back. He thundered across the camp, his bay thoroughbred arching its shining back.

"What's the best way?" he shouted, pulling up a yard from the camp boss.

"Follow the trail due east," cried Johnson, seeing that there was no holding Dennis. "The police are bound to come by it. If you fall in with stray Matabele, ride for your life. They'll give no quarter. When you sight Mafuta's impi bear round to south'ard; you'll find better going south than north."

"Right!" yelled Dennis. "So-long, you fellows! See you again to-morrow."

Waving his hand to his uncle, the youngster clapped in his spurs. Then, amidst a storm of cheers, he swept out of the laager and headed for the dark bush.

The last rays of the sun melted from the sky as Dennis vanished down the trail in a wild scurry of dust.

Wildfire's hoofs drummed on the dry earth as the great horse settled down to his stride, a drifting, gliding stretch.

The bush slipped past like an endless screen. Boulders loomed up, came abreast, and were dropped behind. On raced Wildfire, flinging the miles from beneath his pounding hoofs.

"You wonder horse!" gasped Dennis, slapping his mount's outstretched neck. "But you'll need all your speed. You carry many lives on your back this night."

Presently arose a thin, crescent moon. It

cast its pale beams over the bush. Twisted thorn trees cast evil shadows athwart the track. Dennis stared down at his own black shadow that ever bobbed beside him.

Time passed. Jackals moaned somewhere up the slopes of stony kopjes. They yapped defiance at the solitary horseman thudding past.

Dennis raced on, up the slopes of ridges, down the further sides, in and out of sandy kloofs. On the lad depended not only the lives of the settlers in camp, but also the safety of the police force advancing to its doom.

Nearing midnight, Dennis drew rein in a hollow. He swung himself to the ground. Tough as Wildfire was, the horse was beginning to feel the strain. His broad chest was wide-flecked with foam, and his red coat was grimed with dust and sweat.

"Just a short breather, old horse," whispered Dennis. "Then on again. We've got to run till we drop."

While Wildfire fought for his wind, Dennis strained his ears. The surrounding bush was dark and silent. Overhead the moon swam in a black, velvety sky.

Of a sudden, Dennis' quick ears caught something. Came the rattle of the hafts of assegais on hide shields, the shuffling patter of many naked feet.

"Heavens!" breathed Dennis. "Here's more Matabele coming up behind. I'm between Mafuta and his reinforcements."

He sprang into his saddle and struck home his spurs. Wildfire leapt forward, hoofs vollying on rocky ground. There was a roar behind. The lad had been seen, and the Matabele came surging forward.

For a hundred yards Dennis' heart was in his mouth. A couple of light assegais whizzed past his head. But Wildfire, terrified by the increasing uproar, was going all out. The next flight of spears fell short.

Dennis glanced over his shoulder, to see dark, rushing forms that were dropping behind at every stride. The lad shook his fist and yelled defiance. But now he knew he was shut in. Mafuta lay in front, the reinforcements behind.

If the first part of the ride had been hard, the second was harder.

Time and again the lad had to slow down over rough going. Twice he almost collided with savage bands. He had to quit the trail and take to the bush. Precious

hours were lost. Dawn found Wildfire, his eyes bulging and his flanks heaving, scrambling up a scrub-clad ridge. Dennis looked haggard, and his clothes had been ripped by huge thorns.

"The police can't be far off," gasped the lad. "Another spurt, Wildfire. We'll beat the savages yet."

Then they crested the rise, and Dennis could see down over a wide valley. He drew rein, shading his eyes with his hand against



A dust-grimed native staggered out of the gathering gloom of the night; he was reeling from exhaustion and he brought dire news. (See Chapter 2.)

the direct rays of the rising sun. In the background reared up a line of blue kopjes. The floor of the valley seemed covered with stunted scrub and dried yellow grass. As his gaze swept the scrub, Dennis suddenly drew in his breath.

What were those tufts of black feathers showing here and there in the tall grass? Dennis leaned forward in his saddle, his eyes round with dismay.

Yes, there were thousands—stretching from north to south in a vast, bow formation. They were the ostrich plumes on the tops of six-foot shields.

Dennis was looking down on Mafuta's hidden impi. It was most cunningly concealed. Even from the summit of the ridge the lad could scarcely pick out the warriors. No one approaching from the front could spot the trap.

"Can I get round?" breathed the lad. "Will there be time? Mafuta must know the police are close, or he wouldn't have laid his ambush."

Just then a far-off glint caught Dennis's eye. It was repeated again and again. The rays of the sun were flashing on rifle barrels.

"The police!" exclaimed Dennis, as several khaki dots were revealed. "And only a mile away. Here they come. There's no time to get round the impi. I must get through. Wildfire—one last dash!"

Dennis reached the lower slopes. Now he could see the black bent backs of crouching Matabele, could catch the sinister shimmer of broad-bladed assegais in the grass.

He gathered Wildfire for a rush, then clapped home his spurs. Forward shot Wildfire like a red thunderbolt.

There was a wild rattling amongst loose stones. A sudden pounding of hoofs. The nearest Matabele whipped round, consternation on their ferocious faces.

Dennis, tight-lipped, his blue eyes ablaze, crashed into the rear of the line.

It seemed to the lad that black, yelling forms sprang up all about him. He caught a swift glimpse of up-flung spears, cavernous mouths, and rolling eyeballs. He was deafened by bloodthirsty roars of rage.

A spear shaved his cheek. Another tore through his coat beneath his armpit.

The steep slopes seemed to give Wildfire wings. For a split second Dennis was in the storm centre. Then he was through and away, flattened on his horse's neck, assegais whistling round his head.

But the sudden uproar had warned the police. They could see the horseman flying towards them. They saw leaping forms bounding in pursuit.

In five seconds the khaki force had extended to a line, to drop prone, rifles to shoulders. Dennis whirled through the line, making for the commander and shouting his warning at the top of his voice.

"Sutu! Usutu!"

It was the old Zulu war-cry. The Matabele, kin to the Zulus, used the same dread shout, and adopted the same formation. They rose in one huge semi-circle, the horns of the impi curving inwards like a beading bow.

Mafuta had given the signal to charge. He knew that the white lad's dash had ruined his ambush.

As the Matabele poured down in a black wave, shields tossing, spears glinting, rang out a crash of musketry.

Down crashed the first wave of the Matabele, head over heels amongst the rocks. The second poured over them—to melt away before the withering fire.

The savages halted, wavered, then broke and fled.

"They run! After 'em!"

At the shouted command, the police rose with a ringing cheer and charged in pursuit. It was a rout. Mafuta's power was broken. And the great chief himself was found amongst the slain.

After the fighting the commander of the police force sought out Dennis.

"You saved us, my lad!" he cried. "If you hadn't ridden slick through that impi we'd have been trapped and overwhelmed. I shall report your action to the Government."

Major Mitchell kept his promise. The losses of old Crum and his nephew were all made good—in recognition of Dennis' gallantry.

THE END

The Dentist's Chair!

By TOM BROWN.

MY mind goes back to ancient days—
The Spanish Inquisition ;
Upon the rack the victim pays,
The price of his sedition.
His pangs, however, can't compare
With tortures of the dentist's chair !

To Mr. Wrench, of Courtfield Town,
A monster fierce and ruthless,
I went ; and, sure as my name's Brown,
He left me nearly toothless !
I roared and raved, and tore my hair,
When struggling in the dentist's chair !

" Will you have gas ? " the monster said.
" It makes the ordeal nicer."
I resolutely shook my head :
" Such things I never try, sir ! "
Gas would have deepened my despair
When quaking in the dentist's chair !

The grinning demon then unpacked
A cruel pair of tweezers.
I paled and trembled, for I lacked
The courage that was Cæsar's.
'Twas like a nightmare sitting there
And shivering in the dentist's chair !

Deep down, the demon dentist dug,
With brutal force he acted,
Then gave a most terrific tug—
I yelled like one distracted !
" It's out ! " he cried. I gave a glare,
Collapsing in the dentist's chair !

When I arrive at man's estate
I'll never be apprenticed
To a vocation that I hate—
That of a surgeon dentist.
Such sights and scenes I could not bear—
A plague upon the dentist's chair !

