

COMPLETE BOOK

By S. Clarke Hooke

**1
2**

DEAD MAN'S LAND



"As he took that awful leap, a shower of spears came whizzing around him."

THE "HALF PENNY MARVEL" LIBRARY

No. 1

A NEW BOOK EVERY WEDNESDAY

22 WHITEFRIARS ST. LONDON E.C.

DEAD MAN'S LAND.

THE STORY OF A SEARCH FOR GOLD.

By S. CLARKE HOOK.



*"The first man that moves
dies." (Page 13.)*

CHAPTER I.

At Dead of Night—A Gallant Rescue.

A DAY of fierce tropical heat had given place to a night of the deepest darkness.

A black shadow seemed to overhang the mighty African continent. Overhead, the blue-black heavens were jewelled with myriads of stars, but they threw no light upon the earth beneath. Occasionally the intense silence was broken by a faint sound from the little camp in the hollow, or the roar of some fierce beast in the forest. Then all would become still again.

Toiling up a steep incline, and making for the summit

of the rugged cliffs which tower and frown above them, were two tall forms.

Suddenly they paused, for a river barred their way. Its waters flowed swiftly and silently towards the west, and they looked black in that weird light.

The two followed the course of the river, and as they advanced it was no longer silent, but leaped at the sandstone boulders that opposed its course, and rushed onwards in foaming eddies.

Presently the darkness was dispelled, by the moon rising over the tall trees, flooding the earth with her silvery light, and revealing the scene in all its mighty grandeur.

"I could never have believed such scenery as this existed,"

exclaimed one of the two figures. "It seems like some enchanted land."

"And you do not regret that I induced you to come here, Charlie?" asked the other.

"No; I shall never regret that, Hugh. I was penniless and friendless in England; at least I shall not be friendless here."

Following the leaping and foaming river they arrived at a spot luxuriant with ferns, where the waters divided, the one half to go hissing over a cataract, the other to turn slowly and silently into a narrow gorge, and form itself into a lake a little farther along.

Mounting the huge cliff which formed one side of the gully, the two travellers were able to gaze down at the little stream as, fully a hundred feet below, it trickled into the lake.

The block of sandstone on which they stood overhung the face of the cliff on that side, but on the opposite side, which was somewhat lower, great ferns and strange wild plants grew luxuriantly. There was no roar, for only a small portion of the river found its way into the abyss.

"Is that a lake beneath?" inquired Charles Stanley, one of the figures, in a lowered voice, for the grandeur of the scene had greatly impressed him.

"Yes," replied his companion, Hugh Allingham, "it is supposed to be three hundred feet deep. The people in the camp yonder come here to get their water. We are fully a hundred feet above it."

"Don't stand so near the edge, Hugh. That sandstone is treacherous."

"It would not be pleasant to go headlong into that hole, would it?" laughed Hugh, stepping back. "Suppose someone fell in, would you have the courage to dive down the height?"

"No! I fear not. No one is likely to fall in. Come along, Hugh; I am getting as nervous as a kitten."

"You are not the first one who has felt nervous when standing on this spot. I have accustomed myself to it to some extent, but I confess I do not like looking down that height into that awful black hole. Hush! What is that?"

Both approached the edge now, and looked over. Upon the ground on the opposite side of the gully was a dark motionless shadow. It was in the form of a man, wrapped in a cloak and wearing a broad-brimmed hat.

"That is strange," whispered Hugh. "What can that fellow be doing there at this time of night?"

For some minutes they watched this silent form. Presently the sound of a light footstep reached them, and the shadow disappeared. Then the form of a young girl appeared in its place, and she stepped to the edge of the cliff, watching the black glittering waters beneath her.

Once more that dark shadow appeared and fell upon the ground at her side. As stealthily as the shadow moved, the form that threw it appeared from behind a boulder, creeping towards the edge of the cliff.

With a bound the man sprang forward, pushed the helpless girl over into that awful abyss, and then gazed over to watch her form strike the dark waters.

For a moment the horror of the scene rendered Hugh inactive; then, drawing his revolver, he fired twice at the assassin.

Before the echo of the shots had ceased to reverberate, before Charles Stanley knew his comrade's intention, Hugh raised his hands above his head, and with one glance at the star-lit heavens, plunged headlong over the cliff into space.

With a rush he struck the water and sank far beneath the surface. Some seconds elapsed before he appeared again, but he came up alone. Again he dived; far down he sank until the pressure on his breast became unbearable; then his hand clasped something, and he rose to the surface once more. A few strokes brought him to the edge of the pool, and he lifted his unconscious burden from the water.

As the moonlight fell upon her face, Hugh saw that it was indeed a beautiful girl he had saved. He gazed in admiration upon her as he supported her head with his arm, and in a few moments she opened her eyes.

She was the first to speak.

"Let me look at that height," she said, with a Spanish accent, as she gazed upwards. "You leapt from there? Oh! how brave of you!"

"I might well take such a dive to help you."

"But you did not know me. What can I do to prove my gratitude?"

"You may tell me your name; that will be sufficient."

"Adela!"

"Adela!" he repeated, in a low voice. "How thankful I am that I was near when that ruffian tried to murder you. But come, let me take you home. You are wet, and the nights are treacherous. On the way you can tell me what brought you here at dead of night."

"I received an anonymous letter, telling me that to-night the witches danced round the old lake. They are only said to appear ten times every century. Good luck is supposed to attend everyone who sees them."

"Can you guess who sent the note?"

"No. Someone who knew me, evidently, for I have been longing to see the witches dance. Then as I waited, someone pushed me into the water," added Adela, shuddering.

"Can you think who that ruffian was?"

"Indeed, I cannot."

"You have no enemies?"

"None that I know of."

"This was a man. A tall, broadly-built man, wrapped in a cloak. Is there anyone who would benefit by your death?"

"No, I think not. There is my uncle, my father's half-brother. If I were to die he would be the only one to inherit the share my father has in the Orient Gold Reef. Yet I cannot think he would do ought to injure me."

"I cannot understand how anyone could injure you."

By this time they had reached the little camp in the hollow.

"Before I leave you, Adela," Hugh continued, "will you promise me never to go near that pool again?"

"Yes, I will promise you anything."

"Will you promise to think of me sometimes?"

"How can I do otherwise? Tell me your name, that I may mention it in my prayers."

"Hugh."

"I shall not forget it."

"We shall meet again, Adela?"

"I hope so. Then, perhaps, I shall find words to express the thankfulness I feel; now my heart is too full. Farewell."

Hugh pressed her little hand to his lips, and, as he watched her enter her home, he thought the night had grown suddenly very dark and dreary.

CHAPTER II.

Choosing their Leader—A Man's Shadow— Treachery.

THE moon is high in the heavens; it is nearly midnight. Across the plain Hugh Allingham and Charles Stanley are riding at a great pace. The lights from the little camp are long since hidden, for they have ridden many miles. Before them lies a vast forest, and towards this they are riding.

"There is a leap here," said Hugh. "Can you see the hedge?"

"Yes; perfectly."

"There is a broad ditch the other side."

Both riders lifted their horses to the leap; both cleared it splendidly; then a strange sight met their view.

Suspended from trees at the outskirts of the forest were numerous pine torches, throwing a strange lurid glare all around. Upon the ground a banquet was spread, and seated round were some twenty men. They were nearly all dressed alike in hunting shirts and riding boots, while each wore a blue scarf round his throat. Hugh and Stanley were dressed in precisely the same way.

As the horsemen reined in every man rose to his feet, and, raising his glass, drank—

"To our new comrade, Charles Stanley!"

"Come, Rodriguez!" cried one of the company, addressing a man who had sat in the shade, and who, although he formed one of them, did not resemble them in dress or appearance, "what is the matter with you, man? You are dumb as an oyster."

"Senor, I will trouble you to keep your hands off me."

"Hang you for a pompous idiot," replied the other, contemptuously.

Then followed a mixed babble of voices, in which all sought to show how glad they were to make Charles Stanley's acquaintance. "Gentlemen," came the voice of one high above all the others, "I have a proposition to make."

"Then make it. Silence for Jack Thornton's proposition."

The young man drew himself up to his full height, and a fine

specimen of manhood he was, with broad chest and flashing dark eyes.

"There are twenty-five of us here. We are going to seek our fortunes at the gold diggings. All is ready for a start to-morrow. Our wagons are loaded, and our oxen and horses in good trim. We shall meet with difficulties from the hostile tribes; now we want a leader. Comrades, I propose as that leader Hugh Allingham."

All took up the cry with one accord, till the forest echoed and re-echoed with Hugh Allingham's name.

"You, too, think Hugh a fitting leader?" inquired Jack, turning to Stanley.

"I saw a man leap from the summit of the cliff into the lake beneath to save a girl to-night. I think such a man fit to meet any danger."

"Was that Hugh?"

"It was."

"I have seen other things than that. Hugh Allingham, you are chosen our leader."

"I thank you greatly for the confidence, and I will accept the responsibility on one condition. In time of peril a leader is imperative, and I will do my best; but at other times we are friends, and no man has a right to dictate to another. Each is striving for one thing, and, being comrades, we know that no man will take advantage of his friend."

"That is right, Hugh," said Jack; "you have some knowledge of savage warfare, and are just the man we want. We do not wish to be the aggressors, but, of course, we must protect our lives and property."

"Now, Rodriguez, you were about to tell us why you came so late. Account for yourself, my friend."

"I am not in the habit of accounting for myself."

"Perhaps not. Make an exception in this case. Here's a man, our mining expert, due at the dinner at nine, and turns up at eleven. That's bad even for a mining expert who does not speak the truth as a rule; but worse than that, he turns up with a bullet hole in his hat."

Both Hugh and Stanley half rose and looked at the Spaniard, whose dark eyes were flashing angrily.

"Senor Thornton," cried Rodriguez fiercely, "do you want to quarrel with me?"

"Ha, ha! You make me laugh, Rodriguez. If you only knew what an ass you look with that slouched hat and cloak, you would dress like a human being instead of like some villain in a fifth-rate play."

"Carajo! Por Dios—"

"Speak English, man. I'm not a Spaniard—thank goodness."

"I say if you dare to speak to me thus—"

"Well, just understand that I do dare. Now, Rodriguez, I am a man who says what he thinks. You are not honest."

"I will wipe this insult out with your blood!"

"That's all foolishness. I do not make assertions like this if I cannot prove them. I wish my comrades to know your character as I know it. We have engaged you at a fixed wage because we need you. Do your work, and you will get your money; but let me catch you at your old swindling games and you shall feel my vengeance."

The Spaniard rose to his feet. He was a tall, broadly-built man, and as the light of the torches fell upon him it threw his shadow upon the grass. Stanley and Hugh rose to their feet, for something about that shadow recalled the incident of the lake.

Rodriguez did not heed them, but, with a voice trembling with fury, addressed Jack—

"You say that I, Ramon Rodriguez, am a swindler?"

"Yes, you are a swindler; you are always up to some vile trick. Do you think I do not know about the Guayana affair? Had I been present you should not have been engaged. As it is, we must make the best of a bad bargain. If you will have it, I say you are a swindler, nor are you far from being a murderer."

"Liar!"

Jack made no verbal reply, but he clenched his brawny fist, and Rodriguez went down before the crashing blow.

A few seconds elapsed before he rose, then, wiping the blood from his face, he confronted Thornton.

"You shall die! Gentlemen, this is an insult that can only be wiped out in blood."

"Now, Rodriguez, what do you want?" asked Jack Thornton.

"Your heart's blood. You shall die!"

"So you have said before. Step this way. Hitch some of

those torches on this tree. Capital. Now, my valiant Spaniard, do you want to fight me?"

Jack Thornton drew up his tall form, and eyed his opponent contemptuously. Rodriguez was mad with fury.

"I want to fight you to the death!"

"All right. Fire away! Bring out that knife of yours; it is not the first time you have used it. Are you nervous?" Jack sneered, noticing his opponent glanced at his revolvers. "Pshaw! you miserable coward. Do you fear an unarmed man?"

With a terrible oath the Spaniard advanced, and as the red glow from the torches fell upon his white, angry face, he looked more like some fiend than a human being. There was no mistaking the deadly light in those glittering black eyes.

Uttering a cry like some wild beast, he sprang at his foe, the keen knife flashed in the torchlight, but ere it descended Jack gripped the man's wrist.

So fierce was Rodriguez's blow that, in spite of Jack Thornton's grip, the blade struck his shoulder, though the wound was slight; then, seizing the Spaniard round the throat with one hand, he forced the arm that grasped the knife back, until, with a cry of pain, Rodriguez dropped his weapon.

For a few moments they struggled fiercely, then Thornton, gripping his opponent round the body, threw him to the earth.

"Bring my riding-whip, Hugh. I thought the day would come when I should repay this villain. Now, Ramon Rodriguez, I am going to chastise you for ruining my poor old father."

"Dare to touch me, dare to strike one blow, and you die!"

Jack laughed and raised the whip, and Rodriguez found his opponent dared to strike a good many blows. In vain he struggled; Jack held him by the back of the neck with one hand, while with the other he brought his whip down again and again, until the Spaniard shrieked for mercy. At last Rodriguez was allowed to rise to his feet.

"I fear, Jack, you have made a life enemy," said Hugh.

"In Rodriguez? Oh, we were enemies before. The ruffian shortened my father's days by some swindling scheme of his which left the poor old man penniless. I should be rich now were it not for that scheming ruffian. If he glares at me like that I shall feel compelled to give him another taste of my whip. It is growing late, and as we start at sunrise we had better all turn in."

The remains of the feast were soon cleared, the large fires lighted, and then, stretching themselves on the soft grass, the little band of gold seekers soon slept peacefully; while those who kept watch paced to and fro upon the outskirts of the encampment.

Whether those beautiful eyes that had looked so kindly into his kept Hugh Allingham awake or not is unknown, but for upwards of an hour he lay by the camp fire, watching the glowing embers.

Occasionally he could hear the fierce roar of some wild beast in search of its prey; but for this all was very silent in the little camp. At last his thoughts began to wander, and he dozed, only to awake with a start. At first he thought he must be dreaming, but as he roused himself he became convinced that what he saw was real. Upon the grass by his side was a dark shadow so like that which he had seen at the lake that he remained breathless with surprise. By his side lay Jack Thornton sleeping peacefully. A dark form, with a long gleaming knife in one hand, was stealthily creeping towards the sleeping man.

As Hugh looked round cautiously he recognised Rodriguez's vindictive face.

As noiselessly as the Spaniard moved, Hugh, while pretending to be asleep, prepared to spring. Rodriguez reached the sleeping man, and, with a look of triumph on his face, raised his knife for the fatal blow. Then he was seized by the throat and hurled backwards.

"Ruffian!" cried Hugh. "Would you murder a sleeping man?"

"He insulted me."

"Hulloa!" cried Jack, springing up. "Was the rascal going to stab me? I shall have to give him another taste of my whip."

"Rodriguez!" said Hugh sternly. "You are not to be trusted. Had you killed my comrade I would have shot you

down. I will not have a man like you amongst us. I shall not punish you, but you will consider your engagement with us at an end. Now go, and never let me see your face again."

"I cannot go to-night," replied Rodriguez.

Hugh led him to the edge of the encampment, and, pointing into the darkness, he repeated—

"Go!"

For a moment Rodriguez hesitated; Hugh raised his revolver and levelled it at the man's head. Rodriguez saw that further argument was useless, and, casting a defiant look back at the little encampment, he strode rapidly away in the darkness.

CHAPTER III.

The First Lion—Hugh has a Narrow Escape.

At daybreak the following morning Hugh arose and carefully examined the tracks Rodriguez had left. He was fully determined to return to the village should the Spaniard have taken that direction, as he could not help associating him with the attempted murder the night before; but, contrary to Hugh's expectations, Rodriguez had taken a northerly direction, which left no doubt that he still meant to seek revenge.

"I'll tell you what it is, Jack," said Hugh, as they were proceeding on their first day's journey, "that fellow Rodriguez means to be revenged. He has gone on ahead of us in the direction we are taking."

"All right! He can have his revenge as often as he likes. My whip is capable of doing a lot more work yet. I think I hurt him last night."

"I wish I had not revealed our plans to the rascal."

"That was an error, Hugh. I would not trust the brute. I know a little about him."

"I cannot help thinking he had a hand in that affair at the lake. It was too dark to see him plainly, but the man was about his build."

"And Rodriguez came into camp looking like a death's-head with a bullet hole through his hat. You say you fired. Well, I should not be at all surprised if he was the attempted murderer."

"Then he had better not cross my path again," cried Hugh fiercely.

All through that day they continued their journey, the wagons jolting over the uneven ground, while the crack of the drivers' whips sounded incessantly.

As the sun was sinking in the west, leaving a golden-tinted sky behind it, the little band mounted a steep incline, and then the riders reined in their horses.

Before them lay a vast plain, broken here and there by sandstone boulders. Down in the hollow a herd of deer were browsing, and quite close to them, crouching behind a huge boulder, was an enormous lion.

"Here's sport," whispered Jack, as he and some of the others, with their guns ready, descended the hill. "I have run a fox to earth many a time, but never a lion. Fancy galloping after that monster!"

Just then the shouts of the drivers reached the great brute, and he turned and eyed the horsemen. Then, shaking his shaggy mane, he uttered a prolonged roar that shook the earth.

"There's going to be a fight," observed Jack. "I want him to run away, but he does not seem to understand the art of hunting."

"He appears more inclined to make us run away," said Hugh. "I'll give him a shot, by way of explaining our meaning."

The lion answered the shot with another roar, and lashing his tail, he took two or three steps towards Hugh. For a moment it looked as if he were about to spring, but suddenly turning, he leapt across the plain. When he found he was being pursued, he quickened his pace.

Had the ground been even they would easily have overtaken him, but owing to the boulders, many half covered with grass, the riders were obliged to proceed with caution; thus for some considerable distance the great brute held his own. He was making towards a clump of bushes some two miles distant, and his pursuers followed behind him as fast as was possible, while more than one shot was fired.

"He's going to make a fight for it," cried Jack, as with a bound the lion leapt into the cover. "Who is going to pull him out? Don't all speak at once."

"I should say Jack Thornton would be a likely man. Go and lie down close to the edge of the bushes, Jack. He is sure to come out to eat you, and then we can shoot him."

Jack, however, declined the invitation, so they all commenced firing into the bushes in the hope of driving the lion into the open. The angry yells of pain which every now and again arose from the thicket told that some of the shots were taking effect; but the brute would not stir from his shelter.

Hugh had drawn his horse close to the bushes in the hope of catching sight of the lion. He was standing up in his stirrups peering into the heavy undergrowth when a cry of warning from his comrades caused him to turn.

In the bushes, but a few feet from him, he saw the head of a lioness, and by the quivering of her lithe body he knew she was about to spring. Before Hugh could turn his horse there was a low fierce growl, then the brute leapt at him as a dozen rifles rang out.

Her spring was checked, but she struck the haunches of Hugh's horse, which, maddened with terror, leapt right into the bushes where the infuriated lion was lurking. As the horse stood face to face with the monster he reared, and horse and rider fell to the earth.

Extricating himself from his plunging horse, Hugh sprang to his feet. Thrice his revolver flashed in the lion's face, then with another mighty roar the fierce brute leapt at him, striking him senseless to the earth.

"Fire!" shouted Jack as he sprang from his horse, and, regardless of the terrible death awaiting him, he leapt into the bushes. "Fire!" he repeated, as Stanley and he stood shoulder to shoulder facing the infuriated monster. A volley of rifle shots rang out; with one last roar the huge beast leapt at Jack, hurling him to the earth. Stanley sprang forward and dragged his comrade out of the reach of the struggling brute. Another volley put an end to those struggles, and the king of the forest lay lifeless upon the earth.

Jack, with a half-dazed look, rose to his feet.

Stanley was kneeling beside his unconscious friend.

"Is he—is he dead?" whispered Jack, with a strange tremble in his voice.

"No. But he has a nasty wound on the shoulder where the brute struck him. I fear his arm is dislocated."

"Bring him into camp; cut some saplings, you fellows, and make a rough stretcher. I'll soon have this brute's skin off. He shall be of some use to us after all the trouble he has caused us." Jack moistened Hugh's lips with a little water from a flask. "There! you're better now."

"Is the lion killed?"

"Yes, quite dead; so is his wife. Now if you don't keep quiet, I'll go and find another lion and set him on to you."

In a very few minutes they had rigged up a stretcher, using the skin of the lion as a rug for Hugh to rest upon, and four of his comrades carried him across the plain towards their encampment, while the riderless horses brought up the rear.

CHAPTER IV.

The Mysterious Watcher—A Midnight Attack.

HUGH'S wounds, although severe, did not prove so serious as his friends had anticipated. Thanks to a magnificent constitution, he appeared very little the worse for the conflict, although for a day or so he was unable to mount his horse.

"Hulloa! you there!" cried Jack, on the third day. "What are you doing, stupid?"

"If you think I'm going to lie in that wagon like an Egyptian mummy, you are mistaken," said Hugh, who was preparing to mount his horse. "I've had enough of playing the invalid."

"So are going to play the fool. Go on. Go and kill yourself; but remember I have warned you."

The whole camp endeavoured to persuade Hugh to rest a little longer, but he steadfastly refused, and at last he was allowed to have his own way.

The time passed pleasantly enough now. They spent the days in hunting, and as game was plentiful, they were well provided with food. But now the ground was becoming more broken, and towards the east the plain gave place to a dense forest.

"We must proceed a little more cautiously now," Hugh said, one day. "It was not far from here that the savages massacred the last party of miners who came this way."

A shudder passed through the whole band as they remembered the terrible affair to which Hugh referred.

"Well, if they attack us we will show a good front," continued Hugh, glancing along the line of riders. "We are well armed and well mounted. There is a pass not far ahead; that is where the savages made the attack. I suggest that we camp this side of it to-night."

"Hugh gives his orders as though he feared we should dispute them," laughed Jack. "Come, you fellows, let's unyoke the oxen and get the wagons in position to withstand an attack, in case of need. And one of you shoot some game, for I'm hungry."

Soon the huge camp fires were blazing and the wagons drawn into a line, so as to form a rough barricade. Supper was cooked and eaten, then pipes were lighted, and the voices grew drowsy, for there is nothing more conducive to sleep than a good meat supper eaten beside a blazing camp fire.

Hugh knew this, and he also knew that the watch the drivers would keep would be no watch at all; therefore, he was somewhat anxious for the safety of his little band.

An hour passed by, and the strange noises, ever heard at night in the African forests, increased. There was the shriek of some night bird, the roar of a wild beast, and then the moan of the night wind through the thick forest.

Hugh raised himself on his arm and listened to these sounds. The firelight threw a flickering light upon the forms of his comrades, who all slept peacefully. And as he thus listened he heard a slight movement in some bushes near—so slight, indeed, that at first he thought it was only the night breeze.

He and his comrades had placed themselves some distance from the camp fires, and upon the opposite side to the forest, so that they should be invisible to any foe lurking amongst the trees. Hugh had taken this precaution in case of a sudden attack, which he felt sure, if made at all, would be made from the forest.

Now, as he sat up, watching the spot intently from whence the rustling came, he saw a dim form appear.

It was crouching down so close to the earth that at first he thought it was some wild beast. But as he fixed his eyes upon it, he could trace in the darkness the outline of a human form; he could almost fancy he saw a pair of fierce eyes glaring into his.

For several minutes he remained motionless, watching the strange form, which remained as motionless as he. He knew that ere he could rouse his comrades the mysterious watcher would have disappeared, and he was very anxious to learn who the man could be.

That his purpose was hostile Hugh did not for one moment doubt. That stealthy movement convinced him of this. He remembered that Rodriguez had taken the same direction as they, and he thought it not at all improbable that he was waiting his time to seek revenge.

Moving as stealthily as that silent watcher, Hugh crept towards the forest, keeping within the shadows of the great trees, but as he approached the form disappeared amongst the undergrowth. Then Hugh rose to his feet, and pushed boldly into the forest.

Beneath the trees the darkness was intense, but as he remained listening he could hear someone moving amongst the bushes near him. Proceeding as noiselessly as possible, Hugh advanced towards the spot from whence the sound came; but the light from the camp fires was at his back, so that, although he would be visible to his enemy, he himself could see nothing. He paused to listen, but there was now no sound to guide him.

Determined, however, to leave no effort wanting to catch the midnight prowler, Hugh pushed forward, and when he turned once more the light from the camp fires was no longer visible; he was in utter darkness.

Groping amongst the tangled undergrowth he felt his way further and further into the forest. He knew that the watcher could not be many yards distant from him. He hoped for some sound to guide him, and he was not disappointed.

As he felt amongst the bushes he heard a slight movement; then, peering into the darkness, he saw a black object within a few feet of him.

For a moment he remained watching the form intently. He knew he would be an easy mark for his opponent, as he was standing upright while the other was crouching amongst the bushes. Every moment Hugh expected to hear the crack of a rifle, but no sound disturbed the night.

Feeling that his revolver was safe, he stepped quickly forward. Then a rifle shot rang out, and Hugh felt the bullet whizz past his temple. With a bound he leapt at the crouching form, and hurled it backwards. Then a brawny arm gripped him, and the struggle became furious. Hugh held his opponent tightly by the throat, and drawing his knife tried to parry the vicious blows that were aimed at his breast, though more than once his opponent's blade entered his flesh. Neither uttered a word, but under that tightening grip Hugh could hear his opponent's breath come in short, quick gasps, and the blows became feebler.

At that moment, when victory was about to crown his efforts, a yell arose that sent a thrill of terror through him. He had heard that cry, before and knew the awful deeds that too often followed it.

In that instant all thought of his opponent was forgotten.

Springing to his feet he plunged through the forest towards their encampment. On reaching the forest's edge, by the light of the camp fires, he saw hundreds of savages, yelling and howling in their mad fury as they brandished their long gleaming spears.

But suddenly a prolonged roll told Hugh that his comrades were ready to receive the foe, and he saw many forms go down before the deadly fire.

Making his way round the savage throng, unnoticed in the darkness, Hugh joined his comrades, and stood at their head waiting for the rush he knew would come.

On came the savages thirsting for blood, only to be met with a steady fire from their enemies, who were invisible to them.

With demoniacal yells they leapt towards their deaths, and now the roll of the rifles gave place to the rattle of the deadly revolvers. So heavy was the fire that the rush of the savages was checked.

Hugh saw them waver and his clear voice rang out in the night air.

"Charge!"

With a rush the gallant little band answered to the command, leaping into the midst of the savages and firing into their very faces. Their revolvers were silent and the clash of steel was heard.

For an instant the savages withstood the onslaught, and then with one accord they turned and fled into the forest, leaving their wounded to the mercy of the victors.

Hugh led the way back to the encampment, and having given orders to the drivers to keep a strict watch, he called his comrades around him.

"No lives lost!" cried Jack joyously. "We have gained a splendid victory. That last charge was grand. The scamps would have been on to us again in another minute if we had not forestalled them."

"Are any of our fellows wounded?"

"Yes. Stanley has got a stab, and so have one or two others; but that is nothing. That looks like blood on your shirt, Hugh?"

"I got that in the forest. There was someone prowling round the camp, and I went after him. Do you know, Jack, I firmly believe the rascal was Rodriguez?"

"It's highly probable. I know for a fact that he was in league with the savages over that Guayama massacre. If any man deserves a bullet through his brain Ramon Rodriguez does."

"If I thought it was he who attempted to murder that girl by pushing her into the lake, he should do no more harm."

"I see. It is not so important if he tries to murder you. However, we will be even with him yet. There is one thing absolutely certain. He has taken the same direction as our



HUGH ALLINGHAM,
The Leader.

selves. He is a Spaniard, and probably wants revenge for the thrashing I gave him. Well, he shall have it. I don't believe those beggars will attack us again to-night. I hope not, for I'm dead tired. Suppose we get to sleep? We may have work to do to-morrow."

Hugh threw himself on the soft grass beside his friend, and in a few minutes both were sleeping calmly.

CHAPTER V.

In the Narrow Pass—Forcing Their Way—A Well-earned Repast.

BEFORE break of day Hugh mounted his horse and rode to the top of a hill near, from which point he had a good view of the pass through which their way lay. As daylight fell upon the earth with tropical suddenness, he looked anxiously across the plain for any signs of their enemies.

"On the look-out, Hugh?" inquired Stanley riding up.

"Yes. I fear those savages mean to attack us in the pass. With those lumbering wagons we should be at their mercy. Ah! There they are. Do you see that dark mass moving round towards the further end of the pass?"

"They are not mounted. We should have time to gain the other end before they reach it."

"Not with the wagons. The ground is very broken, and it would take us a day to get through. It will not take them two hours to reach the further side. We could not mount the hill in the face of them."

"What do you purpose doing, then?"

"We cannot take the wagons through the pass. We must send them round by the south. It will mean two days' longer journey, but that cannot be avoided. We had better get back now. Will you warn our men to be in readiness? I will see to breakfast. We may have to go all day without food, and it is hard work fighting on an empty stomach."

The little camp was soon aroused, and laughing voices told how little they cared for the peril they were about to encounter. Jack was in his glory, and his merry voice could be heard all over the camp.

Hugh ordered the drivers to retrace their way, and, instead of entering the narrow defile, to take the route to the south. This would lose some time, but it would throw the savages off the trail.

Having given the drivers careful instructions as to the direction they were to take, he watched the wagons slowly disappear towards the south, and then, springing into his saddle, he led his followers down the narrow defile which led to the pass, at a gallop. It was a race as to who should reach the other end of the pass first, they or the savages, and the horses were not spared as they galloped down the steep pathway.

Hugh was congratulating himself upon being in time as they reached the bottom, and began to ascend the hill that led to the exit of the pass, when looking up, he saw some savage forms crowding in the narrow way, and barring their progress.

They were too late.

Turning in his saddle he looked back, and then he saw how serious their situation was.

Behind them was another band of savages coming down the pass with brandished spears, uttering as they came fierce yells, which were answered by those in front.

They were completely hemmed in. There was no shelter from which they could make a stand, and against such overwhelming odds they could not hope to hold out for many minutes.

Reining in his horse Hugh looked anxiously at the foe in the rear. There must have been upwards of a hundred of them, and already they were hurling spears, although the distance as yet was too great for them to take effect. In front, up the steep incline, the band of savages crowded in the pass, and each moment others arrived to increase the number. On either side of the narrow defile the cliffs rose up almost perpendicularly. There was but one hope of escape, and Hugh knew it as he looked at his fierce foes.

"Charge!" he shouted, urging his horse up the incline.

"Charge!" repeated Jack, leaping side by side with him.

Then on they dashed, riding furiously up the incline.

The enemy were evidently taken somewhat by surprise by the suddenness of the charge. Their indecision lasted but a moment. The air grew dark with spears, and deafening yells arose. But on dashed those gallant horsemen.

As Hugh leapt up the height a spear struck his arm, then another grazed his brow, but regardless of this he drew his revolver, and with a cheer he and Jack plunged simultaneously into the midst of the mass of yelling savages. Their comrades followed closely, and the blacks were struck down by the plunging horses, while the rattle of the revolvers was continuous.

So sudden and furious was the charge that the savages sprang aside to avoid the charging horses. In a moment Hugh's men had cut their way through the black wall, and the open plain lay before them. But in galloping after his leader one man had fallen from his horse. Hugh saw it, and knew at once that to escape meant to leave their companion to the mercy of the savages.

Already the blacks were making for their fallen foe, yelling as they ran. Reining round his horse, Hugh gave the word to charge once more, and once more they dashed at their fierce foes, who with cries of terror fled down the pass, while a thick shower of shot followed them.

The man who had fallen from his horse was thus saved. Except for the severe shaking he had received, he was otherwise unhurt, and was able to mount his horse again.

Hugh glanced round at his men. Each rider was in his saddle, though he knew many among them must be wounded.

"All right," cried Jack, in answer to Hugh's look. "There's nothing very serious, I think. I see you have a touch on the arm and on the cheek."

"It is nothing," replied Hugh; "merely a graze. Will some of you fellows dismount, and help me to form a barricade here? Perhaps some of you will see to reloading, and keep up a fire. It will prevent them returning until we have time to run up a breastwork."

The savages, fearful of that deadly fire, had retreated to a considerable distance down the pass, and now they were joined by the rest of their band. Hugh watched their movements closely, and he directed his men to take careful aim before firing, while the others heaped up boulders at the end of the pass. There were plenty of loose blocks of sandstone lying about, so that in a very short space of time they had raised a barrier of considerable height and strength, from behind which they could pick off the advancing foe.

"We can give them the slip when we choose," observed Jack, wiping his brow, for he had been working hard.

"Be ready!" came the warning voice of Hugh. "They are preparing for an attack!"

Every man seized his rifle, and, mounting the barricade, waited for the rush.

"Reserve your fire until I give the word!" cried Hugh.

He had mounted the barricade to obtain a better view of the foe, and no sooner did his head rise above the breastwork than a bullet whizzed past, while a white puff of smoke arose from the side of the pass.

"Keep down, Hugh," said Jack. "I don't like that rascal. He aims too straight for a savage. Can you see a white amongst them?"

"That shot was fired from the side of the pass. I can see the smoke. Here they come."

Once more that terrible yell rent the air; once more those fierce warriors rushed towards their foes, determined to take the pass at all risks. Then above the din Hugh's voice was heard.

"Fire!"

Suddenly the roar of the rifles burst forth, and as the savages rushed on, the brave little band put fresh cartridges in their weapons, to fire another volley into the midst of their foes. On came the savages, hurling a shower of spears as they came. Frantically up the height they rushed. The leaden bullets met their bare breasts, others leapt over those who fell, but still the mad rush continued.

Jack watched his leader anxiously. Beside them were their horses. In another moment it would be too late to mount and gallop away; but Hugh remained perfectly calm. He did not appear to contemplate flight. Up to the present he knew the blacks were unaware of the route taken by the drivers. But did they once force their way past the barricade and get out of the pass, they would sooner or later fall in with the wagons coming from the south. Hugh knew only too well what that would mean.

He was standing above the breastwork firing at the approaching foe, and many a spear was hurled at him, but of these he took no heed.

In spite of the heavy fire some of the savages had actually gained the barricade, and were clambering up. Hugh, grasp-

ing his rifle by the barrel, dealt some terrible blows, while his comrades followed his example. But where one black was struck senseless to the earth, half a dozen pushed forward in his place.

It appeared as though nothing would beat them off. One great chief leapt upon the barricade, and with fierce cries urged on his men, who were only too ready to answer his call. Then he turned and his wild eyes met Hugh's. The next instant they were grappling in a deadly embrace. For a moment it appeared as though both must be hurled into the yelling pack beneath, when Hugh's death would be certain. The great chief was struggling to drag his enemy down. With a mighty effort Hugh freed his right arm, then thrice his knife descended into the savage's naked breast, and he fell headlong back amongst his followers.

All the little band's rifles were empty now, and there was no time to reload, for the savages, emboldened by the lull in the firing, were crowding over the embankment. To fight hand to hand against that force was hopeless, and now it was too late to gain their horses.

"Your revolvers," shouted Hugh, leaping down and drawing his own.

The rattle of the revolvers burst forth, and as the bullets poured into the savages some of them actually leapt into the midst of their foes, while others fell back before the devastating fire.

Hugh, followed by his comrades, sprang upon the barricade, and poured forth a second volley. The effect of the revolvers at that close range was terrible. In vain the black chiefs tried to urge on their men. They were panic-stricken by that shower of bullets, and down the pass they rushed frantic with terror, trampling the wounded under their feet as they went.

"We've beaten them!" cried Jack, wiping his powder-blackened face. "And I thought they were going to beat us that time. I'll tell you, Hugh, I had half a mind to dispute your authority, and go for the horses."

"I feared for our wagons and drivers. We *must* keep these savages at bay until night," replied Hugh.

"I think we might venture on a little food. I would rather be stabbed than starved any day. We have a few birds with us, and there's a spring of water close by. Suppose we light a fire?"

Hugh readily consented. The savages were out of sight now, and he did not anticipate a renewal of the attack for the present. A fire was soon lighted, and the savoury smell of roast game gave zest to their appetites.

CHAPTER VI.

A Lonely Vigil—Discovered—Chased by Savages—A Leap for Life.

"I THINK, upon considering matters, Jack," said Hugh, when their meal was finished, "that there is only one way to effectually defeat our enemies."

"All right! I'm ready. I'll charge down the pass, or do any other mortal thing you like."

"Directly it is dark they will attack us."

"Probably."

"It is certain; and it is equally certain they will defeat us."

"I'm not going to admit that."

"No. But if you look the thing in the face you will see they must. We drove them off in daylight, but we could not do so in the darkness. And besides that, they will undoubtedly increase their numbers, and the probabilities are that some of them will attack us in the rear. Now I want you fellows to ride off directly it gets dark, and join the wagons at the point where I told them to wait for us by the river."

"And leave you to guard the pass? We are certain to obey that command."

"I am not going to guard the pass at all. I shall just draw them off in the darkness."

"Then I'll stay with you."

"That's impossible, Jack. I want you to take the lead of our fellows. Don't argue the question. You don't think I'm such a fool as to risk my life?"

"Yes, I do," growled Jack.

"At any rate, it's our only chance. You need not fear for me. I shall run no risk—less risk, indeed, than you will."

"Of course I must do it if you so direct, but I don't like it at all."

"You ought to reach the wagons in the early morning."

"And when will you reach them?"

"Probably not much later. Don't look so glum, Jack. You can't do all the work."

"I wish I hadn't suggested you as a leader," grumbled Jack. He objected strongly to the arrangement, but he would not dispute Hugh's authority.

"Never mind that, you have done it now, Jack. Just go and tell our fellows of the arrangement while I look at our foes."

Hugh mounted the embankment, but the savages were not in sight; they had withdrawn round a bend in the pass. All through the day he kept a careful watch, but still there was no sign of the enemy. And when darkness set in Hugh's comrades rode off, though much against their wills, leaving him to cover their retreat.

He had given them his rifle, which, he said, would only encumber his movements; but he borrowed three brace of revolvers, and these he placed in his belt.

Motionless he sat on his horse, and, as the darkness rapidly increased, he listened intently for a sound of the savage foe. He had given instructions for a fire to be lighted close to the mouth of the pass. This would not only lead the enemy to believe that the whole of his comrades were there, but would enable him to discern them as they came up the defile.

Hugh had ridden to the top of a hillock on one side of the pass, from which point, though in darkness himself, he could look down on the pass, and also the barricade.

The hours passed by, and it was nearly midnight before there was any sign of the foe. Then he saw by the uncertain light of the fire some stealthy forms creeping up the defile.

Hugh watched those fierce forms silently approaching, and as the firelight fell upon their savage faces, it might well have struck terror to his heart.

Nearer and nearer the stealthy forms drew. Some of them were just beneath Hugh now. Raising one of his revolvers he took careful aim. Then the deathlike silence was broken, a report followed by that awful war cry, the forerunner of so many terrible deeds. Again and again Hugh fired.

Regardless of the shots, the savages sprang up the defile and Hugh reloaded his revolver, for he knew he had need of every shot. With maddening yells they sprang towards the camp fire, searching in vain for their enemies, their hideous faces aglow with the ruddy light. The next moment the savages had leapt the barricade, and he poured in his fire.

Then he shifted his position; but in the darkness they could not tell from whence the shots came.

Suddenly a growing light on the horizon warned Hugh that he must look to his own safety. The moon was rising over the plain, and soon he would be distinctly visible to his foes.

Now, too, the cries of the savages were answered by others who were approaching from other directions. The camp fire was in front of him, and its ruddy glow threw his figure into relief.

As a number of savages approached from behind him they caught sight of the horseman and spread out to intercept his retreat.

No time was to be lost. Those by the camp fire relinquished their fruitless search, and in response to the cries of their comrades they came with a rush towards him.

Reining round his horse he drew his revolver, and as he did so the moonlight suddenly burst forth and he was visible to a hundred savage foes, thirsting for his blood. And now he saw he was completely surrounded by his enemies, whose uplifted spears gleamed in the brilliant moonlight.

Leaning forward in his saddle, Hugh urged his horse forward, firing repeatedly as he leapt towards his foes. Suddenly he felt his horse quiver, as a spear struck its haunch. Hugh tightened the reins. With a snort of terror the animal charged through the savages, striking down all that came in its path, and then leapt madly across the plain, while a shower of spears fell around horse and rider.

Hugh was wounded in more than one place, but he feared most for his horse, and, turning in the saddle, he examined the place where the spear had struck him. The weapon had merely torn the skin, and, though the wound would cause great pain, Hugh knew it was not of a serious nature. Gradually checking his horse's wild career, he turned to watch his enemies.

The whole tribe were following in his wake. There was

now quite a mile between him and his followers, but he slackened his pace, so that the distance neither increased nor decreased. Thus he led them across the plain in the opposite direction to that his comrades had taken.

For mile after mile the savages kept up their pace. They had ceased their war cries, and appeared to be concentrating all their energies on tiring out the horse. Hugh was well mounted, and knew he could ride away from them at any moment did he so wish, and his only fear was that his horse might stumble over the broken ground, when he would be an easy prey to his merciless enemies.

For two hours the chase continued, nor did the savages show any signs of fatigue. They were evidently determined to capture the white man at all risks.

Hugh quickened his speed, and gradually drew away from the black mass, but he could still see them coming on behind him, and he noticed they spread out in a long line.

At first he was at a loss to divine the reason of this movement on the part of his foes, but suddenly he guessed the cause, and a kindly word sent his horse forward at the utmost speed.

The savages fell rapidly in the rear, but still Hugh kept up that rapid pace, anxiously watching the ground in front of him. Suddenly he tightened the reins, and his horse came to a standstill.

In front of him was a broad gully. He sprang from his horse, and gazed down the abyss, but the depth was too great for the moonlight to reach the bottom, and he could only see a black yawning gulf.

Hugh glanced across it, and saw at once that no horse could ever take that awful leap; then he turned to look at his savage foes. He could see their black forms distinctly now, and they were coming towards him in a crescent. At first he thought of charging; through their ranks once more, but then he remembered that, as his horse leapt towards them, he would be an easy mark for their spears. They would be prepared for him now, and such a charge, he knew, would only mean death.

While he remained undecided what course to pursue the savages were rapidly approaching.

"They shall not take me alive," he muttered, springing into his saddle.

Then he galloped along the chasm towards the east, while the savages spread out that way to intercept him. In vain Hugh looked for a place where he might leap the gulf; it broadened as he advanced. To take such a jump was out of the question; no horse could clear that breadth.

Each moment the savages drew nearer to him. He could hear their shouts now, and as he looked upon the approaching mass, he felt certain that death awaited him in one of

two forms. On one hand, he might take a plunge into the awful gulf, and meet death in almost endless space, or he might allow himself to be captured by the savages, and be put to the most terrible of tortures. One well-directed spear at his horse's breast would leave him at their mercy.

As he saw his enemies coming nearer and nearer in the form of a semi-circle, which completely hemmed him in, Hugh determined to make one bold bid for life and liberty.

He decided to ride towards the west, keeping parallel with the gulf, but at the same time bearing off slightly to the left. This would give the savages the idea that he was about to charge them, and when there was a distance between him and the gully sufficient to give his horse enough impetus to take the terrible leap, he would suddenly wheel round and make

a bold rush for the gulf. It could scarcely become wider than it was at the point where he stood, while there was every chance that it might become narrower further along.

To stay where he was meant certain death, while his scheme might bring him liberty, and could only mean death, even if it failed.

All these things took but a short space of time to flash across Hugh's brain, and in a few seconds he was rushing, in a slanting direction, towards his foes. They saw him coming, and, thinking he meant to charge them, stood still, with uplifted spears, ready to receive him. When he was within a spear's throw he suddenly wheeled his horse round, and, before the savages realised his intention, he was leaping towards that awful gulf. Hugh could tell by his horse's action and the way he threw his head in the air that the animal feared the task which he was called upon to accomplish, and he was prepared for the worst.

With long strides the horse sprang towards the chasm; he was close to the brink when, with an affrighted snort, he balked at the leap, nearly flinging Hugh over his head into the

gulf. A wild shout of joy from the savages greeted this failure, and as Hugh looked back over his shoulder he saw that they would be upon him in another minute. He backed his horse a little, just sufficient to give it a run; then he again urged it forward. This time it seemed as though the beautiful animal had gained courage from his brave rider. On he thundered in the moonlight, and a fierce yell from the savages arose. They were close upon him now, but they did not attempt to hurl their spears—they knew that death was before the rider.

There was no balking this time; Hugh held his breath as they approached the chasm. Another stride and his horse was on the brink; then with a mighty bound he rose in the air. As he took that awful leap a shower of spears came whizzing around him. It was only when half-way across



A DARK FORM, WITH A LONG GLEAMING KNIFE IN ONE HAND, WAS STEALTHILY CREEPING TOWARDS THE SLEEPING MAN. (PAGE 3.)

that Hugh realised how great was the breadth of the chasm. It had become slightly narrower, but it was still very wide. A feeling of wild excitement seized him. The next instant they landed upon the opposite side. They had cleared the leap magnificently.

But as Hugh rode away another shower of spears were hurled after him, and he felt a sharp throb in his side.

Turning in his saddle, he discharged two of his revolvers into the yelling throng, and answering their fierce shouts with a cheer, he rode away.

As he galloped across the plain, a deadly faintness came over him. The blue light of the moon grew so misty that he could scarcely see his way, and he reeled in his saddle.

For several minutes Hugh lost all consciousness, but when he recovered from his swoon, he was still in his seat. Reining in his horse, he unbound his cloth-belt from his waist; then, still seated in his saddle, for he dared not dismount, he grasped the spear that had pierced his side, and, drawing it out, bound a handkerchief and his belt round the dreadful wound as tightly as his strength would allow.

Putting his horse into a gentle canter, and leaning well forward in his saddle to check the flow of blood from his wounded side, Hugh rode towards the spot where he hoped to meet his comrades; but a terrible faintness which was again coming over him convinced him that his chances of ever reaching them were indeed slight.

CHAPTER VII.

Hugh's Return — They Journey on.

We must now return to Jack, who, with as much ill-humour as his jovial nature was capable of feeling, led his followers away from the pass, while the wagons brought up the rear.

"It's an absurd piece of folly, Stanley. Hugh is an obstinate beggar. He'll certainly get killed."

"He's mounted."

"What is the good of that against a couple of hundred wild beasts? Make less row there, you fellows with the wagons."

"Massa Thornton," shouted one of the negro drivers; "dis beast am a bad one."

"So are you. Will you hold your row, Sambo?"

"I'd rather hold dat dan dis brute."

Try all he might Jack could not keep the drivers quiet, and nothing went right. First he gave it as his opinion that they were taking a wrong direction; then he suddenly remembered there would be a moon—a fact that Hugh had overlooked; then a wagon wheel came off, and it took them an hour to set it right. Nevertheless they made fairly good progress through the night, though Jack growled at the moonlight, saying it would cost Hugh his life.

When day dawned they made a halt, and while some went in search of game, others lighted a fire; but even deer flesh cooked to a nicety could not tempt Jack—a sure sign that he was terribly anxious.

They travelled all through the day, merely halting for meals, and by evening they reached the river at which Hugh told them to halt until he should join them.

The weary oxen were unyoked, and the camp fires lighted. Supper was cooked and eaten, though the voices of the little band were subdued. They missed their brave leader, who had risked his life that they might escape.

"If he doesn't come in to-night I shall return," said Jack, after a long silence.

"I think half-a-dozen of us should go and search for him," replied Stanley. "The rest can protect the wagons."

"I don't see the use of waiting," added Jack. "Suppose we start at once?"

"He could not possibly reach us before to-night. I think it will be better to wait until morning. I have absolute faith in Hugh's judgment; and he was particularly anxious that we should wait here for him. If he has escaped the savages, as I sincerely trust, he will not ride direct to our camp, and if we returned we should not meet him."

"He may have lost his way."

"I think not. Hugh has been over this ground many times; see how accurately he directed us to this spot. He has only to strike this river, and by following its course he cannot miss us. I really think, Jack, we had better wait here until morning."

"Very well; but I shall start at daybreak."

Thus it was arranged, and having set a watch, the men flung themselves upon the grass by the camp fire.

Far into the night Jack Thornton and Charles Stanley spoke in low voices of the chances of Hugh's escape.

"It was a mad arrangement!" said Jack, rising to his feet. "I tell you, Stanley, I believe we shall never see him again."

"Don't say that, Jack. Hark! What is that? Surely someone is approaching."

Both of them stepped towards the river bank. One of the negro drivers who was on guard was sleeping peacefully, but two of the white men were on the alert.

"I certainly thought I heard a rustling in the bushes," said Stanley, "but no one appears to be in sight."

The moon was shining brilliantly, rendering every object distinctly visible.

"Hark! the neigh of a horse!" cried Jack, looking anxiously round in all directions.

Then they saw Hugh's horse swimming across the river, and upon his back was a rider, leaning forward in his saddle.

In a moment the camp was aroused, and all crowded round the horseman. With a faint groan, Hugh slipped from his saddle, and Jack's strong arms supported him. Tenderly they bore him to the wagons, and a terrible fear seized them as the moonlight fell upon his white face.

Stanley, who had some knowledge of surgery, carefully bound up Hugh's wounded side, and presently he opened his eyes.



MEN PLUNGED THROUGH THE FLAMES, ONLY TO MEET THEIR DEATHS AT THE HANDS OF THEIR RELENTLESS FOES. (PAGE 15.)

"Keep perfectly still, old fellow. You are wounded rather badly; but if you will only keep quiet all will go well."

"Are all safe?"

"Perfectly. Don't speak, there's a good fellow. Try to sleep."

"It was nearly a long sleep, Charlie. Good-night. I am very weary."

Stanley, clasping the wounded man's hand, sat beside him, and soon Hugh's lengthened breathing told that he slept; but all through the night Stanley watched beside his friend.

The following day Hugh was too ill to be moved, though he entreated them to continue their journey.

"If you delay longer the savages will be upon us. You can put me in a wagon, and the motion will not hurt me."

"It would simply be death to you. You must not think of it," replied Stanley.

Then Hugh tried to persuade Jack that their foes would be upon them unless they started at once.

"Let them come!" was Jack's answer.

"We must start."

"You'll not start till Stanley says you may."

"Jack," pleaded Hugh, "listen to the voice of reason. The knowledge that you are waiting for death on my account is doing me far more harm than the jolting would. It will drive me into a fever."

"Keep quiet. Don't think of it."

"I cannot help it. Do you value my life, Jack?"

"Yes; a little."

"Then I tell you it depends upon our starting to-morrow. This suspense is driving me mad. Will you promise me to start to-morrow? You will not refuse me now, Jack?"

"Which way are we to go?"

"To follow the river."

"Very well. We will start at daybreak to-morrow morning. I promise."

"Thanks. That promise has done me more good than you think. I shall sleep peacefully to-night."

Jack informed Stanley and half-a-dozen others of his intention of starting on the morrow.

Then, arming themselves with axes, they made their way up the river towards a clump of trees that grew upon the bank. Felling some of those of similar thickness, they stripped off the branches, and, having cut the trunks to an even length, they lashed them firmly together with cross-pieces, so as to form a raft.

"There, my boys," exclaimed Jack, viewing their work with considerable pride; "I think he'll travel comfortably on that. Make it firm. We have plenty of cord—more than we shall ever want for mining purposes."

"How are we to get him on the raft?" inquired one.

"Carry him, bed and all. We must rig up an awning. Cut a couple of poles to guide the raft, while I get some canvas from the wagon. We are going with the tide, so shall only need to keep the craft in mid-stream."

It was daylight by the time their task was thoroughly completed. All made a hearty breakfast, and then the raft was launched and brought down stream. Tenderly Hugh was lifted on to it.

"There!" cried Jack. "Isn't that comfortable? Now just go to sleep, and dream of a certain girl named Adela. Oh! you needn't look astonished. You talked a good deal about her in your attacks of delirium during the night."

"But, Jack, you need not mention any nonsense I talked."

"Depends on circumstances. If you don't keep quiet I'll tell all the fellows, including the drivers."

All was ready, the ropes were let go, and Jack skilfully steered his raft into mid-stream. Calmly they floated down the river, and it was as much as the drivers could do to keep up with them.

A careful look-out was kept in case the savages should be following, but there were no signs of them, and when they encamped for the night they began to hope they had seen the last of their fierce foes.

Journeying in this way caused Hugh no pain, and they made very rapid progress, as, although the river wound about considerably, they were able to keep up with the wagons, which took a more direct route. Hugh rapidly regained his strength, and at the end of a week he was able once more to mount his horse. Leaving the raft to its fate, they crossed the river at a part where it was shallow, and travelled in a north-easterly direction.

As the remainder of their journey was uneventful it is not our purpose to follow them. Towards the close of a day a

fortnight later they came in view of the gold diggings, leaving the tract of country known as Dead Man's Land behind them.

CHAPTER VIII.

Zigzag Camp—Big Jake—The First Lesson.

HUGH's first thought when he reached his destination was to start work. Having staked out their claim, they set to work pitching their tents. This done, the camp fires were lighted, and supper prepared.

Hugh and his little band were not the first to reach the gold-diggings, for others had arrived there and started work some weeks previously.

Wherever gold is found, no matter in what part of the world, a motley throng always assembles with lightning rapidity to search for the precious metal, and ZIGZAG CAMP was no exception. With equal rapidity, too, a spirit store springs up at such spots.

The miners who had already located themselves at ZIGZAG CAMP, having long since finished their work for the day, had, as usual, congregated at the spirit store, to discuss some atrocious whisky and the merits of the new comers.

"It's my opinion as they wants taking down a peg," observed one individual, taking a foul black pipe from his lips, preparatory to taking a drink of his whisky. He was not of prepossessing appearance, having grizzly red hair and beard, and eyes that never met another's. Added to this he stood over six feet, and was proportionately broad, while he carried a revolver and a knife in his belt. "If so be as the new comers thinks to ride rough shod over me, they're mistaken."

"They've come nigh our claim, Jake," said another.

"Carambo!" cried a Mexican; "they have come nearer mine. Some of the land they have staked off is mine."

"I know them well," said another, who was none other than our old acquaintance, Rodriguez. "I know them very well. That dark, tall man, whom they call Jack Thornton, is a ruffian. Their leader, Hugh Allingham, is worse. He has done me much harm."

"Let's send for 'em," suggested the one known as Big Jake. "I ain't a-going to have any nonsense, and the sooner they knows it the best."

"Shall I say you want to see them?" inquired one of the company.

"Yes. Say as I want to see their leader. Jest tell 'em who I am. You ain't going, Rodriguez? Why, you ain't afeared of 'em, are you?"

"I? I fear no man. Let the man dare——"

"Stow that. We know all about that. Jest you sit down. I'll show you who's who. Bring some more whisky, Joe."

Big Jake viciously knocked the ashes out of his black pipe, and waited for the arrival of Hugh.

It so happened that the little band had just finished supper when Jake's invitation reached them, and, quite unconscious of that worthy's feelings towards them, Hugh and Jack, with two or three others, made their way to the spirit store.

The moment Hugh entered the large room and saw what company was there he regretted that he had come; then he caught sight of Rodriguez.

"Senor," cried the Spaniard, "we meet upon different conditions."

"You would do well to remember what I told you when we last met," replied Hugh sternly.

"That ain't got nothing to do with the question," said Jake, striking the table with his brawny fist. "We means you to understand as you ain't a-coming here to crow over us."

"We have no intention of so doing," replied Hugh. "We are here the same as you are, to search for gold. We have taken possession of our claim, and have a perfect right to work it."

"That's for us to say. We ain't a-going to have no nonsense. You can think yourselves mighty grand, but you ain't a-going to crow over Big Jake. Do you understand that?"

"I understand that you are talking a lot of nonsense," replied Hugh.

"Who's a-talking nonsense?" cried Jake, springing to his feet. "You see that window? Well, I'll pitch you through it in about two seconds."

"You are talking greater nonsense than ever now," replied Hugh. "If you intend to provoke a quarrel, so be it; but if

you imagine for one moment that you are going to intimidate my comrades or me, then you make a great mistake."

"I'll show you who I am in a minute."

"I am quite competent to defend myself," replied Hugh.

"You shall answer for your treatment of me," cried Rodriguez, springing up at that moment.

Hugh stepped up to the Spaniard as the latter's eyes flashed fiercely.

"You dare to threaten me? You, an attempted murderer, venture to question my conduct? Because I have been merciful to you once, Rodriguez, do not think that I shall allow you to go unpunished again." And Hugh seized him by the collar, and shook him as a dog would a rat.

Rodriguez's face turned livid. With a fierce oath he drew his knife. Hugh released his hold on the man's collar, but dealt him a heavy blow that hurled him over one of the tables, smashing glasses, and scattering the cards and card players.

A dozen ruffians sprang to their feet, and with fierce oaths drew their revolvers.

"You'll not spill my liquor like that," cried one of them.

"I am sorry," said Hugh. "I did not mean to interfere with you. I trust you will allow me to fill your glasses again."

"The man speaks fair enough," said one whose glass had been empty. "There's no need for us to get riled. Whiskies round here, Joe. We'll start a fresh game. Get out there, you Spaniard. Take my advice, and go home."

"Now then, youngster," cried Big Jake, addressing Hugh, "you and I are going to have a reckoning."

"I'll trouble you to do it outside," said Joe. "Look at that table."

"Hang your table! What do you mean by talking to me like you did?" cried Jake, walking up to Hugh, and drawing his revolver.

Hugh drew his revolver also, but made no reply to the ruffian. Jack stepped between them.

"I'll have my say to you presently," said Jake. "I'm going to teach this youngster a lesson. It's man to man. Are you afeared I shall hurt your pal?"

"No; I'm not, you ruffian," cried Jack. "I'd like to see him give you the thrashing you deserve."

"Then stand aside," roared Jake. "Stand aside."

Hugh made a sign to Jack, who drew on one side. Then the two opponents eyed one another keenly. Each held a revolver in his hand, but neither levelled his weapon. The company crowded round, leaving a space behind the combatants in case any shot should be fired.

"Will you try conclusions with your fists?" inquired Jake.

"Certainly!" replied Hugh, handing his weapon to Jack, while one of the others took Jake's revolver.

To glance at the two men the coming fight appeared very unfair. Jake was not only some inches taller than his opponent, but he was much more heavily built, and he bared an arm beside which Hugh's looked quite small.

But by Hugh's attitude it was obvious that he had science in his favour, and the breadth across his shoulders showed that he was no mean antagonist.

"Kill him, Jake!" cried one.

"I'm a'going to," replied Jake, clenching his huge fists, and rushing at his antagonist.

Hugh sprang aside, and the company cheered. Because Hugh was retreating before his opponent's furious rushes they thought he was afraid. Though he retreated, every now and then his left arm shot out with lightning rapidity, and Big Jake's face received those straight blows.

Jake began to lose his temper: try how hard he might, he could not touch his agile foe. Every time he dealt one of his swinging blows it was parried, and with a spring Hugh struck out at him. Jake's face began to show signs of those stinging blows. He saw that his only chance was to come to close quarters with his opponent.

Watching his opportunity, he made a furious rush with lowered head. Springing aside, Hugh dealt him a blow at the back of the head that hurled him headlong to the ground.

For a few moments Jake lay motionless. At last, with an oath he leapt to his feet, and seizing a revolver from one of his comrades, he fired at his opponent. The ball flew wide of its mark, but before Jake could fire again, Hugh sprang at him with an impetus that hurled him backwards. Hugh fell on the top of his fallen foe, and pinning his arm to the floor, he wrenched the weapon from his grasp.

"You coward!" he cried, holding the revolver to the man's temple. "Move an inch and you will never move again. Now, I hope for your own sake you will take warning by the lesson you have had to-night," and saying which Hugh rose.

But Big Jake understood no such lessons. Rising and wiping the blood from his face, he swore to have revenge.

"Are you going to let the young curs treat us like this? Ain't you going to stand by a fellow?"

"We'll stand by you right enough, Jake," said one of his companions.

"Get in front of that door there. Now then, pals, there's six on 'em. Down with the lot."

"Kill them all!" cried Rodriguez.

"Lend me your shooter," said Jake.

The room was full of fierce ruffians; each one was armed with a revolver and knife. Hugh's men had no chance against such odds, but for all that they stood side by side.

"Shoot 'em down," shouted Jake, levelling his revolver.

Suddenly the door was flung open. Jake, who had stood with his back to the door, received a blow on the head which stretched him on the floor. Suddenly the remainder of Hugh's men, who having heard the pistol shot, and thinking there was trouble, entered the drinking saloon. With military precision they drew themselves up in a line, while Hugh stepped in front of them.

At sight of that row of armed men the miners fell back. Rodriguez, anticipating a volley, concealed himself behind a table. Big Jake rose to his feet and eyed his enemies sullenly. Not a word was spoken, but every man held his revolver in readiness.

Hugh watched his opponents narrowly. He saw that they cowed before his followers, and a feeling of pride came over him as he glanced along that line.

"It is well that you should learn at once that we are prepared to protect our rights," said Hugh, "and to avenge our wrongs. We wished to work amicably with all; but since you will not have it so the fault rests with you. I want you to understand at once that we shall in no way interfere with you; and if you dare to interfere with us you will find that we are men with whom it is not safe to trifle."

Then, giving the word to his followers, they marched two by two from the room.

Hugh was the last man to leave it, and, although fierce looks followed him, no one ventured to fire.

CHAPTER IX.

Buried Alive—Gold! Gold! only Gold!— Deliverance.

At daybreak the following morning Hugh and his comrades commenced to sink their shaft, and many of the Zigzag Camp miners, amongst whom was Jake, left their own work to look on, although they did not attempt to molest them. It soon became apparent to them that Hugh and his comrades not only meant work, but knew how to do it.

The time passed by, and day after day the clank of the bucket bringing up the earth was heard, and although the soil showed signs of gold, it scarcely paid for the washing.

They had only opened one tunnel, and this they were running towards the west.

"I'll tell you what it is, Hugh," said Jack one day; "if we don't soon strike gold we shall strike water."

"How is that? We have found gold."

"Yes, about enough to make a sovereign. I mean that we are running directly towards the lower river; we shall come out at the bottom of the waterfall."

"Then we shall have to try back."

"This game doesn't pay, Hugh."

"Don't get impatient. We have not given it a fair trial yet."

"Oh! I'll continue, and so will the other fellows, but I tell you, I believe you are the only one who has not lost heart. Besides, Hugh, those ruffians are not safe. If you only noticed how that scamp you thrashed watches you—"

"My dear fellow, what do we care? We can protect ourselves. Now, Jack, you don't care a straw for those ruffians. You are getting disheartened at our want of success."

"And are not you?"

"No. I really feel as confident as on the very first day."

"The earth is getting poorer."

"Never mind. We shall succeed—we *must* succeed."

Look here! This looks better. Shine your lamp here, Jack. That earth is rich enough for you, isn't it?"

"Yes! That's better. You have struck oil this time."

"Call our fellows down. You say they are getting disheartened. This ought to satisfy them. It's rich with gold."

In a few minutes the men came crowding into the tunnel, all eager to examine the earth.

"It gets better and better," said Hugh, continuing his tunneling.

Handfuls of the earth were passed round, and all forgot everything except that they had at last struck a vein of gold. Hugh worked hard with pick and spade; the earth was placed in the buckets ready to be passed along the tunnel into the main shaft. So absorbed were they in their work that they did not notice the flight of time. Suddenly a noise as of distant thunder startled them; then again and again they heard it.

"Do you know what that is?" said Jack, locking at Hugh.

"I fear I do. It is earth falling into our shaft."

With one accord all hurried along the tunnel, but when they reached the entrance their progress was barred, while they still heard the sound of falling earth and heavy blows.

"The ruffians have buried us alive!" cried Jack, in horror.

"Hark! They are filling our shaft. We are lost."

For a moment the awfulness of the situation rendered them speechless. They were beneath tons of earth, and still they could hear more falling into the shaft.

"Can we dig our way through?" Jack said at last.

"Impossible!" replied Hugh. "We should have to dig our way upwards. It would avail us nothing to gain the shaft, for those murderers have already half filled it."

"We must do something. I shall go mad if we stay here waiting for death."

"You were saying just now, Jack, that we should strike the lower river if we continued much further. Do you think we are on a level with it?"

"So I reckoned the other day. The depth of our shaft is nearly the height of the fall."

"And our tunnel descends. Suppose we try to save ourselves that way? It is our only chance."

Along the tunnel Hugh's comrades followed him. They could see no hope. They must be slowly starved to death.

In silence Hugh commenced his work, filling buckets with the precious earth, which his comrades carried to the other end of the tunnel to fling away; for all the gold in the world was useless to them now. As they proceeded they brought the stakes from the further end of the tunnel to use to shore up the new part they were digging. Although Hugh and Jack worked strenuously, their progress was necessarily slow.

The earth grew richer and richer; streaks of beautiful sparkling yellow glittered on every side as the light from the lamps fell upon it. But those white faces showed no signs of pleasure at the wealth. Despair filled every one of them. Hour after hour they toiled on, taking turns of rest and work. The air in the tunnel was becoming oppressive, and they were craving for drink; but, in spite of what they suffered in mind and body, not one among them offered a complaint.

All through that day and night they toiled as only men can toil who know that their lives depend upon their efforts. But still they remained in their tomb, and now their breathing grew laboured; the workers required to be relieved more frequently, and the pangs of hunger were added to those of thirst.

Hugh saw by his watch that another day had dawned, though it was night for them—a terrible night of suffering.

The workers were changing now, only two could labour at once. Others passed them in silence. Suddenly the silence of that living tomb was broken by wild laughter, which echoed strangely in the tunnel.

"Have faith, old man," said Hugh, grasping his comrade's hand. "You have borne up so bravely."

"I think I am going mad," replied the one who had uttered that terrible laugh.

"Do not think so. The air is oppressive, but we shall soon be free."

"Free! You believe that?"

"Yes! I never lose faith or hope. We will do our best, and if death comes upon us we will meet it bravely. But I do not think it will come. This is our last day in the tomb."

"It is our last day because none will be alive on the morrow. The air is growing stifling."

"It is my turn to work," replied Hugh. "Jack, are you ready to join me?"

"Yes, old fellow." Then, lowering his voice, he added, "We will die side by side, Hugh. We shall be the last workers."

"Have faith," replied Hugh. "Who knows but to-night we shall reach the river?"

"We shall, Hugh. That mighty river we all float down into the Sea of Mystery. But come! We will fight to the end."

And they fought as brave men should. They fought against one of the most awful of deaths; fought as only brave men can when life is sweet, and death is nigh.

Hugh would not give place to the others, who wished to relieve him, and Jack insisted upon keeping his friend company.

They had already been buried many days, and now and then a hoarse peal of laughter would echo through their tomb, telling them that one or other of their companions was fast nearing insanity.

"Hugh," said Jack in a low voice, after they had worked silently for some hours, "I never knew how hard it was to die."

"When one is well it is. But when one is very ill, death is like sleep. I think I was very near death when I was wounded in the side. But that ride caused me no pain, neither did death terrify me. I felt as though I were going to sleep for ever."

"And do you feel so now?"

"No. This is different. I am in my full health now. See! I have strength yet; and death is close to us. I confess I fear it. And do you know why I fear it most, Jack?"

"No."

"For her. For Adela. You do not know what she is to me, Jack. I only saw her once, yet I believe she will grieve at my death."

"She must. You saved her life."

"It is hard to think that she will be happy with another. It is strange how selfish a man becomes when he loves a woman. Yet I would have her happy. Whatever the dead know of the living, I would have her happy, though her happiness were torture to me."

"Hugh! You believe death is near to us, or you would not speak thus, even to me."

"I have faith. After all, even if the worst comes, what is it? A few hours of suffering. Well, we will bear it."

"Our poor comrades! I fear they are all suffering greatly. Come, Jack! Let us redouble our efforts. Life may be before us."

And they toiled on at their hopeless task. Each moment their grave grew smaller, by reason of the loose earth taking up more space than that they excavated. Each moment the air became more stifling, each moment their thirst and hunger increased, and each moment threatened to be their last.

But Hugh's comrades were ready to take their turn, and he toiled steadily on.

Suddenly his pickaxe struck a solid substance, and he and Jack drew forth a nugget of shining gold—a fortune in itself. In silence they placed it on one side.

It appeared to them an awful mockery. Buried in the bowels of the earth, of what avail was that vast wealth? Once more they renewed their labours. As they cut their way through the rich earth, they laid bare three more nuggets of shining gold, and they placed that fortune in a



"BIG JAKE" OF ZIGZAG CAMP.

pile. Gold was nothing to them now. What they wanted was air and water.

Midnight! Still they worked on; many of their comrades lay panting and nearly dead on the earth. The feeble cries for air and water were heartrending. Neither Hugh nor Jack spoke. There were none to take their places. All had lost heart.

"I did not think death was so terrible," groaned Jack at last.

"Have faith, comrade," said Hugh once more; "and learn to say, 'Thy will be done.'"

"Amen," Jack answered. "It is nothing, but I am a coward."

"That you are not. Come, Jack, if we have to die we will keep up our hope to the last. Who knows but we are within a yard of the river. See, Jack! Stanley! Feel here."

"Water! It is water! Come, you fellows! At least we shall not die of thirst."

Stanley half lifted his comrade, who had uttered the maniacal laugh, to the spot, and moistened the man's parched lips before he touched a drop himself. It was only dirty water, thick with yellow sand, but it was as a fresh life to them.

"Comrades!" said Hugh. "I believe we are saved. Have faith, old friends. We must be near the river."

Seizing his pickaxe Hugh worked with all the strength that remained to him. The soft earth fell away before his blows, and his comrades filled the buckets and bore them to the other end of the tunnel. Suddenly there was a mighty roar, and the water flowed in around them until it reached their breasts, while a gust of air rushed in and cooled their fevered brows.

"We are saved! Comrades, we are saved!" cried Hugh.

They waded through the water into the river, and the roar of the waterfall sounded like music to them. Then they climbed the river bank, and each man knelt upon it. No one uttered a word, but a silent prayer came from the heart of each.

CHAPTER X.

Villainy's Reward—Farewell to Zigzag Camp.

WHEN Hugh and his comrades reached their encampment they found that almost everything of value they had left behind had been stolen by the miners. Their first feeling was intense indignation, but this quickly gave place to anxiety when they discovered that the two negro brothers, Sambo and Ned, who acted as their drivers, were missing.

Fortunately the horses and oxen had not been harmed; probably the miners contemplated taking possession of them later on.

Hugh at once commenced a search for the negroes, and soon their voices were heard in response to his call. Approaching the spot from whence the voices came, Hugh found both negroes bound hand and foot to a tree.

"How is this, Sambo?" inquired Hugh. "What has happened?"

"Dey came down on us wid a rush, Massa Hugh."

Hugh at once cut the cords which bound them.

"Who made the attack?"

"Dey all make it. Dey hit us wid their pistol butts, and when we got ober dat we found we was tied to a tree."

"Very well," exclaimed Hugh. "Now we must go to regain our property and punish the miscreants. They will probably be in the whisky store. Keep perfectly silent. We must take them by surprise."

The little band noiselessly made their way towards the whisky store.

Jake was seated nearest the door. The others were card playing, quarrelling, and drinking. Suddenly the door was thrown open, and Hugh, with levelled revolver, appeared.

"The first man that moves dies!" he cried.

Then the rest of Hugh's men, each with loaded revolver, entered the saloon.

"Fire at the one who ventures to move a hand," said Hugh.

Jake, in spite of this threat, sprang to his feet, but Hugh grappled with him, and placed a loaded revolver at his temple.

"If you struggle, I shall blow your brains out, you ruffian," said Hugh. "Jack, lend me a hand here."

Jack seized Jake's other arm, and Hugh, still holding his

revolver to his captive's temple, dragged him from the shanty.

While the unfortunate Jake was led into his enemies' camp, some of Hugh's men recovered their property from the miners' huts, while those in the drinking saloon were kept covered by the revolvers. Not a man dared to move, for they well knew that a volley poured in at that short range must prove fatal to half their number. They were completely taken by surprise by their enemies, whom they believed to be buried alive.

Hugh now approached the saloon, and, entering the door boldly, looked round at the sullen company.

"I wish you to understand me clearly," he said. "You have attempted to murder us, and you all deserve death. With you, Rodriguez, I shall deal presently; as regards the rest of you, if you keep quiet in here, it is not my intention to touch you. I believe I have caught the instigator of the villainy, and he will be punished. But I warn you that the first man who approaches this door will be shot down."

Hugh strode from the room, directing his men to withdraw, but to keep watch at the door in case any of the ruffians should attempt to escape.

"I have been considering the punishment this man deserves," said Hugh, approaching Jake, who was now securely bound. "He has attempted to take our lives, and it is only just that he should be severely punished. Sambo, bind him to that tree, and strip off his shirt; now bring your whip."

"I'll bind him just as tight as he bind me, and I'll hit 'im a lot harder." Sambo bared his huge arm and seized his whip.

Blow after blow the stalwart negro laid upon the culprit's back, whose howls and savage oaths must have been distinctly heard by his companions in the drinking saloon. Still the whip descended upon his naked back, and at last those oaths and curses turned to shrieks for mercy. Then Hugh motioned to Sambo to stop.

"Release him, Sambo. I think he has learnt a lesson that he will not forget. Now listen to me, fellow," he continues, addressing the quivering wretch. "If you attempt any more of your villainies I shall not spare you again. Begone!"

The ruffian was completely quelled. He did not attempt to answer, but with lowered head made his way to his shanty.

Hugh drew off his men, and allowed the rest of the miners to leave the store, but he kept a strict watch that night in case they should seek vengeance.

In spite of the great fatigue they had undergone, Hugh and his comrades were up at daybreak the following morning, and, proceeding to the tunnel, they secured the four great nuggets, which were too heavy for the water that flowed in to move.

"I'll tell you what it is," said Jack, eyeing their treasure. "Things are getting rather too hot for us here. If you want to keep these you'll take my advice, and leave Zigzag Camp with them at once."

"I quite agree with you," replied Hugh, "It will take us all our time to get this wealth home safely. I do not fear those miners. For the most part they are a cowardly lot. It is the savages of Dead Man's Land we have most to dread. Sambo has been telling me that he saw some among those trees last night. If they mean attacking this encampment it will go hard with those cowardly cut-throats. We cannot work this flooded tunnel, and I think we have had enough of sinking shafts. Help me with these nuggets."

They conveyed the nuggets to the wagons, then they made preparations for a start, and early that morning the wagons moved slowly across the plain, while the riders brought up the rear.

CHAPTER XI.

Captured by Savages.—Swept Away.

THE riders kept a careful watch to see that they were not followed, and it was not before the gold diggings were many miles behind that any of them ventured to separate from their comrades, even to seek game.

They were crossing a broad plain, and, although some herds of lion appeared in the distance, they were too wary to allow the horsemen to get near enough for a shot. Roast lion is a very savoury dish, especially to a hungry man, and, at last, Hugh and Jack rode ahead in the hope of getting a shot.

They had not proceeded very far when a loud roar from the great lion who led the herd told the horsemen that they were discovered, and then the chase began.

The lions were heading for a belt of trees which lay towards the east, and the horsemen tried to cut them off. Hugh, whose horse was by far the fleetest, was almost in front of the herd; but the fierce leader still leapt on.

Reining in his panting horse, Hugh levelled his rifle and fired at the beast's shoulder.

The report of the rifle frightened the rest of the herd, and turning, they dashed across the plain. Not so the old leader. With a snort of fury he sprang at his enemy. Hugh saw the bloodshot, glaring eyes, and heard the snort of rage.

Again he fired; this time the ball flattened against the infuriated brute's skull. Another second it would have dashed the rider to the earth.

Hugh saw his peril and gave his horse a gentle touch with the spurs. Then, almost touching the lion as they sprang past, he fired his pistol behind its shoulder.

So great was the fierce brute's impetus that it dashed its head against a huge tree with a crash which brought the animal to its knees. Hugh, suddenly reining round his horse, fired thrice in rapid succession.

Uttering another savage roar, the lion struggled to its feet, and pushed its way into the forest.

Confident that the beast was mortally wounded, Hugh sprang from his horse, and followed.

He could hear the bushes being torn asunder as the great beast pushed its way through, and in the excitement of the chase he did not heed how far he was following. Once he caught a glimpse of the great animal, and fired his rifle.

Maddened with pain, the lion turned and dashed at Hugh. Again the rifle rang out, and the fierce brute fell dead.

The chase was over; but now the difficulty arose as to how the desh could be conveyed to the camp. Had Jack been there this difficulty would have been easily overcome, but he was probably miles away, chasing the remainder of the herd. Hugh was too hungry to trust to his comrade's success. To leave the carcass where it lay, and bring his followers to the spot, would be quite useless. Long before they could arrive the wild beasts would have devoured that savoury meal. Therefore Hugh decided to carry away as much of the flesh as was possible. Kneeling upon the grass, he commenced his task of cutting up the animal, and so busily engaged was he that he did not detect a slight movement amongst the undergrowth at his side.

Again that rustling might have been heard, this time at his back; nearer and nearer it approached, and presently a fierce, hideous face appeared from amongst the bushes.

Inch by inch the form rose up.

It seemed as though those fierce, glaring eyes caused Hugh to turn his head, for he looked round, only to see above him the tall form of one of his fierce black foes.

Before Hugh could spring to his feet the savage, with a fierce yell, leapt upon him, and hurled him backwards.

Suddenly a yell rang through the forest; on every side the bushes were parted, on every side vicious faces appeared. Hugh determined to sell his life dearly. With the strength of despair he flung his enemy from him. Grasping his rifle by the barrel, he whirled it round his head.

Three savages leapt at him; they were swept to the earth. For a moment Hugh cleared a space around. But where those three fell, thirty took their place. Such an unequal fight could not last long. Again the gigantic savage who had first leapt upon Hugh rose to his feet. The arm that grasped the rifle was seized. Hugh turned upon his foe. Allowing the rifle to fall from his grasp, he gripped the savage by the throat with both his hands, until those fierce eyes rolled beneath the terrible pressure. Both Hugh and his enemy were hurled to the ground by the rush of the others.

The combat only lasted a few seconds. A heavy blow fell upon Hugh's head, and he remembered no more.

When he regained consciousness he found himself bound so tightly that the pressure scarcely permitted him to breathe. His legs were free, but that was all.

As he lay upon the ground the chief, whom he had so nearly strangled, approached, and addressed him in a mixture of English and Portuguese.

"The white man is going to feed our fire to-night. We will light it near a tree to which he is bound, and he shall slowly burn to death."

"Coward! You call yourself a warrior to torture an enemy. You dare not meet me face to face."

Hugh hoped that he might so enrage his enemy by these taunts as to cause him to grant his request, but in this he was mistaken. Some of the savages prodded him with their spears, but they did not attempt to let him meet their chief face to face, neither did they attempt to take his life. Such a death as that would not have satiated their thirst for vengeance.

At first Hugh hoped his captors would lead him towards the plain, so that his comrades might catch sight of him, but this hope was of short duration. They penetrated deeper into the forest, away from the direction he hoped they would take.

For miles, through the tangled bushes, they pushed their way, goading on their captive, who suffered terribly from the bonds, which were cutting into his flesh.

As the daylight was beginning to fade they reached a broad river, while the thunder of falling waters could be heard.

Hugh knew the spot; he had hunted there many a time before. He had often watched those waters rushing along, to thunder over a waterfall lower down the river, and to become foam in the rapid, a hundred feet below.

Again hope came to him. They could scarcely get him across the broad river, bound as he was. If they released him, he determined to make one more effort to escape.

Once more the chief approached.

"Can the white man swim?"

"A little."

"Can he swim across the river?"

"Not bound as I am."

Without a word, the savage motioned to two of his followers, who seized Hugh by either arm; then the chief severed the bonds with his knife.

Dragging their captive to the river bank, the savages took to the water *above* him. On one side the waterfall barred his escape, on the other his foes; some swam in front, others brought up the rear; most of them carried their knives in their mouths.

Apparently with laboured strokes Hugh swam into the stream, though so slowly, that it looked as if he could never gain the opposite shore. A couple of the savages swimming round got between him and the fall, for Hugh was being drifted down by the current, and they had no intention of allowing him to meet his death that way.

Lower and lower his head sank in the water, which every now and then reached his nose. His captors laughed at his struggles, each moment growing fainter. They were not half across the broad river yet, and he appeared to be almost sinking.

The black who was nearest, with a long stroke swam alongside the captive.

Like a flash, Hugh's arm shot out; the knife was wrenched from between the clenched teeth, and buried to the hilt in the savage's brawny back. Hugh suddenly dived, and, with a speed equal to the fastest swimmer amongst them, shot along under the water. When he came to the surface, he was some distance in front of even the leader of his foes.

Escape seemed hopeless. He still retained the knife, but of what avail could it be amongst that horde?

His recent exertions had exhausted him, and soon his foes once more completely surrounded him; again and again the knife flashed in the dying sunlight. The savages were apparently desirous of capturing him alive.

Hugh was fast being drifted nearer the cataract; he was now dangerously close to it, and many of the savages turned up stream. Not so the chief. Probably desirous of vindicating his honour he swam towards the white man.

On both were swept towards the great fall, each moment more swiftly. They ceased to struggle. It was useless; neither could possibly breast the current.

The savages on either bank could lend no aid. They could only watch their chief being swept on to his doom.

With long steady strokes Hugh beat against the torrent, but he was slowly borne backwards.

The chief made no further effort now; the waters whirled him on with terrible speed.

With one awful shriek of despair he was rolled over the height, to be beaten down by the raging waters beneath.

Then Hugh turned his face towards the mighty fall. He uttered no unmanly shriek. Even his foes watched him with admiration. He was swimming with all his strength towards the fall. The next instant the waters lifted him up, then down he sank. The roar of the waters deafened him; fire flashed in his eyes. With a crash he struck the water beneath, and sank far down.

Still taking those long steady strokes, he tried to gain the surface, but the waters sucked him back. His senses began to leave him; he heard a fierce rushing in his brain; music sounded in his ears; a beautiful paradise seemed stretched out before his view.

CHAPTER XII.

Down the Rapids—Recaptured—Help Just in the Nick of Time.

ALTHOUGH Hugh still continued the struggle for life he was unconscious of so doing.

But presently he rose to the surface and was borne swiftly down the rapid. Close beside him the rigid form of the chief rose to sink again, and Hugh saw it no more.

"Saved!" he murmured joyfully. "Adela, I shall see your beautiful face once more."

A shout stopped that joy. A shout for vengeance. Hugh looked quickly from bank to bank; both sides of the river were lined with his relentless foes, who, running swiftly along, kept pace with him. All his efforts had been in vain.

A dozen savages leapt into the torrent. Hugh was beaten beneath the waters, and dragged half-drowned to the shore. Once more his arms were bound.

Once more Hugh was goaded through the forest, and darkness had set in before a halt was made.

While some of the savages bound Hugh to a tree, others gathered wood to build a fire, which they placed quite close to the captive, so that as the heat increased he might be slowly scorched to death.

The shock from the terrible dive, the exertion he had lately undergone, rendered Hugh so weak that he was in a semi-conscious condition. His brain could scarcely grasp the whole terror of his situation. As in a dream he saw the savages seated round their camp fire.

Now Hugh lost all sense of pain. Springing to their feet, his foes, with fierce gestures and fiercer cries approached their victim, to avenge the death of their chief.

The fire was heaped nearer and nearer to the captive.

Hugh closed his eyes, and with clenched teeth waited for death. His clothes were scorched by the fierce fire; his flesh was blistered; he prayed that death might release him from the agony he endured.

At last the pain left him. His head fell forward upon his breast. He had fainted. The yelling savages raked away the fire, leaving the cool night air to fan their victim back to consciousness. His torture must not end so soon!

Once more Hugh opened his eyes; once more the savages prepared to renew the fire, when the crack of a rifle rose above their exultant shouts.

In an instant every one of the savages sprang towards the spot from whence the sound had come, but ere they reached it another shot was heard from a different angle of the glade; then another and another, until there was one steady roll, and the foe were struck down by the leaden balls.

Their captive was forgotten for the moment, as they made wild rushes into the bushes to try to meet their invisible foes.

The combat was not of long duration. The savages fell back, and leaving their wounded comrades to their fate, they rushed from the scene of death. But their way lay past the captive. This was the only side of the glade from whence no shots came.

One of the savages leapt over the camp fire. For a moment he stood opposite Hugh, and gloating over his helplessness, raised his tomahawk above his victim's head.

Hugh saw the glittering axe, then opposite him he saw a tall form with levelled rifle. It was Jack's. There was a report. The tomahawk fell from the savage's hands, and with a yell he fell backwards into the blazing fire. The next moment Jack was beside his friend.

"Steady!" exclaimed Hugh, as Jack, with trembling hands, tried to unbind the cords. "You could not have fired that shot had you trembled like this."

Soon all his rescuers had gathered round Hugh to listen to his account of the adventures he had gone through.

"Now, Jack," he said, when he had told his own story, "how did you manage to slow me?"

"Why, I went after that herd of lions, and in the excitement of the chase I forgot everything. I managed to bring down one of the fierce brutes; then I turned, expecting to see you close behind me. Astonished at not seeing you, I rode back to the place where we had separated, and saw the bushes torn asunder where the lion had entered the forest.

Of course I followed, and easily tracked you to the spot where you brought your quarry down. But here I saw signs of a desperate struggle, and the marks of many feet. I knew that it would be useless to follow alone, therefore I rode back to our wagons. Leaving our horses in charge of Stanley and a few others, we hurried after you. We tracked you to the river, across which we swam, then we saw the trail of the savages. Following this down the river we at length found the marks of your boots, and felt convinced that your foes had led you away a captive. "Our progress was slow, but we followed your trail through the forest until we could discern it no longer.

"Then I climbed a tall pine tree, and a faint light through the foliage revealed the spot where the savages had encamped for the night. You know the rest."

The little party hastily left that terrible scene, and soon they were making their way towards their encampment.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Doom of Zigzag Camp.—The Last of Big Jake and Rodriguez.

WE will return to Zigzag Camp. Big Jake, who had been unable to sleep the previous night by reason of the pain his back gave him, had fallen into a troubled sleep towards the afternoon, when he was awakened by Rodriguez.

"Those young curs have gone."

"Well, what of it?"

"They have four nuggets with them, each one worth a fortune. I saw them put them into their wagons this morning. They can be ours quite easily."

"How?"

"Let you and I follow the wagons. We can get that gold. Will you come?"

As soon as it was dark the two ruffians stole from the camp, and followed in the direction Hugh and his little band had taken.

They had not proceeded many miles when in the distance they saw the red glow from the camp fires, and making their way into the forest near they made preparations to pass the night, agreeing to watch by turns.

It was Rodriguez's first watch, and scarcely had Jake fallen into a heavy sleep than the Spaniard heard the sound of lowered voices.

By the aid of the moonlight, he saw, stealing noiselessly across the plain, a vast body of savages. They were making their way towards Zigzag Camp. He watched the savages pass in silence, then he made his way back to Jake. But ere he reached the spot he stood spell-bound with horror. Within a few yards of the sleeping man, Rodriguez saw in the moonlight the fierce face of a lioness. So great was his dread that the Spaniard did not attempt to fire. The sleeping man suddenly awoke, and sitting up, his eyes met those of the fierce brute.

With a spring the lioness leapt at him. A shriek of agony followed, and then Rodriguez heard the crunch of bones.

Panic-stricken at the awful sight, Rodriguez rushed from the forest. In his terror he forgot those other foes, more terrible to the white man than the fiercest beast.

They, too, had heard that shriek of agony, and as Rodriguez sped across the plain, fifty warriors met him. He was seized, and they made him march in front of them, goading him along with their spears.

In vain he prayed for mercy. They knew none.

As the savages drew near Zigzag Camp, lights were burning in the drinking store, and shouts of laughter were heard. On stole the savages. The store was surrounded. Then a cry that checked those other shouts arose upon the night. Those within knew that cry too well. The door and windows were bolted, and the terror-stricken inmates prepared for the coming fight.

Several of the savages stole towards the forest, and soon returned, bearing dead branches of trees and brushwood. This they piled around the wooden building, and then a ruddy glow arose in the heavens. Brighter and brighter it grew, and the fierce crackling flames leapt round the building. The door was flung open and men plunged through the flames only to meet their deaths at the hands of their relentless foes.

Rodriguez watched the awful scene in an agony of dread. He knew his turn was coming. With hideous yells the savages watched the building burn to the ground, spearing those who tried to gain safety in flight. Then the chief

approached the Spaniard, and at a word of command the wretched man was seized by his arms and legs and flung into the midst of the burning mass.

With a terrible cry Rodriguez struggled from the flames. His clothing was on fire, and in his mad terror he rushed away across the plain, while his foes followed him. They saw the burning mass, in the form of a man, making for the river. He reached the bank, the savages close behind him. He took one look at his foes and plunged into the water.

A mighty hiss followed. Not content with their fiendish work the savages waited with uplifted spears for their captive to rise to the surface, but they waited in vain. Rodriguez had met his fate at last!

CHAPTER XIV.

Hugh Gets His Reward.

ONCE more we must take the reader to that lake where Hugh had saved the life of the beautiful Adela. Once more he was standing by the pool, though it was broad day. Since his return Hugh had learnt that her name was Adela

Rodriguez, and that Ramon Rodriguez was her uncle. Knowing that ruffian's character, Hugh had no doubt it was he who attempted to murder his niece, in order that he might eventually inherit her father's wealth.

Hugh had brought his men and their treasure safely through many perils, and now as he waited beside the lake he was expecting someone. Presently the colour on his bronzed cheek deepened, and a look of hope came into his eyes. Adela was approaching. They had met many times since his return, but to-night Hugh had determined to declare his love.

For an instant her eyes met his, and emboldened by their soft light, he clasped her in his arms.

"Darling," he cried, "I love you! Will you be my wife?"

And Adela whispered—

"You saved my life once, and now it shall belong to you."

Then, beside the lake, their vows were plighted, and though years have passed since then, their love has only deepened.

THE END.

THE work of many weeks is over. What has given editors, authors, artists and others many busy days and many sleepless nights for some time past is at length completed, and the result is—No. 1 of the "HALFPENNY MARVEL" LIBRARY.

The book you hold in your hand has not been hurriedly prepared, nor offered to the public without much careful consideration. For months past the idea of producing long complete novels, written by famous authors, and illustrated by the leading artists of the day, has been simmering within the minds of those who are interested in this publication.

The books of this Library will contain nothing that is not pure and healthy—nothing that has a tendency other than to elevate; and they will, furthermore, form a healthy contrast to the deleterious rubbish appropriately known as the "penny dreadful."

THE police-court reports in the newspapers are alone sufficient proof of the harm done by the "penny dreadfuls." It is almost a daily occurrence with magistrates to have before them boys who, having read a number of "dreadfuls," followed the examples set forth in such publications, robbed their employers, bought revolvers with the proceeds, and finished by running away from home, and installing themselves in the back streets as "highwaymen."

This and many other evils the "penny dreadful" is responsible for. It makes thieves of the coming generation, and so helps to fill our gaols.

PARENTS, if you see your children reading "penny dreadfuls," take them away and give them the "HALFPENNY MARVEL" LIBRARY books instead. They will like them better, for our books will instruct as well as interest, although the information will be conveyed in a form palatable to even the most fastidious literary tastes.

In a word, then, the "HALFPENNY MARVEL" LIBRARY is produced to offer to the public, at a small sum, good healthy literature by well-known authors, and to counteract the harm done by the "penny dreadfuls."

THE EDITOR SPEAKS.

If we can rid the world of even one of these vile publications, our efforts will not have been in vain.

The books we shall publish will be equally interesting to men and women, boys and girls. We have a host of good things in store, and we hope to improve as we grow older.

By the bye, a number of readers may wonder why we have not printed on the inside of the cover. Probably everyone does not know that each colour has to be printed in separately.

Were we to print on the inner side of the cover, the ink would probably show through and mar the effect of the pictures appearing on the outer side. In addition to this, the colours take a considerable time to dry, and when this process is over, they are wanted by the binders, leaving no time for another printing on the inner side.

No. 2 of the "HALFPENNY MARVEL" LIBRARY will contain a splendid story of South African Mystery and Adventure, entitled "THE GOLD FIEND." If you like the story in the present number you are sure to like "The Gold Fiend." Some privileged few who have read the story in manuscript pronounce it to be even better than "Dead Man's Land." But you will be able to judge for yourself on Wednesday next.



"They kept him in an iron cage, round which a number of 'Braves' yelled and gesticulated wildly, threatening his life every hour during the day and night."—See No. 2 of the "Halfpenny Marvel" Library, to be issued on Wednesday next.

On this page we give you a picture, illustrating a passage from "The Gold Fiend." You will recognise No. 2, at once when you see it, for this picture will appear on the front of the cover—only there, of course, it will be larger and printed in colours. There is sure to be a great demand for No. 2, so you would do well to request your newsagent to reserve a copy for you. Next Wednesday is the day, remember.

AND now, having ushered the "HALFPENNY MARVEL" LIBRARY into the world, we leave No. 1 in your hands and await the verdict. If you think we deserve success for selling 2d. books for 3d., will you kindly help us by recommending the "HALFPENNY MARVEL" LIBRARY to your friends? In so doing you will greatly oblige

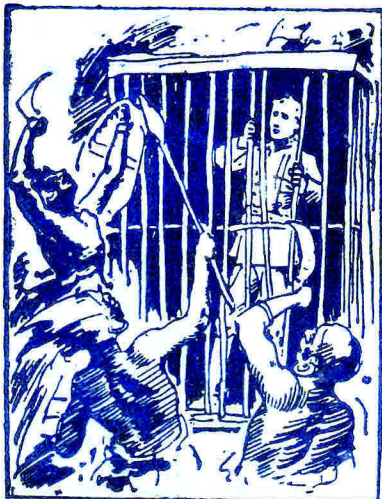
THE EDITOR.

A NEW BOOK OF THE "HALFPENNY MARVEL" LIBRARY WILL BE ISSUED EVERY WEDNESDAY.

ABOUT THE "HALFPENNY MARVEL LIBRARY."

If you are an admirer of clever original stories of bravery, mystery and adventure, written by the leading authors of the day, and forming a healthy contrast to the deleterious rubbish which it is hoped the "Halfpenny Marvel Library" will supplant, you will request your Newsagent to keep No. 2 for you. It will be out next Wednesday (Wednesday is our day, remember). We give you herewith four of the pictures in No. 2, which is called

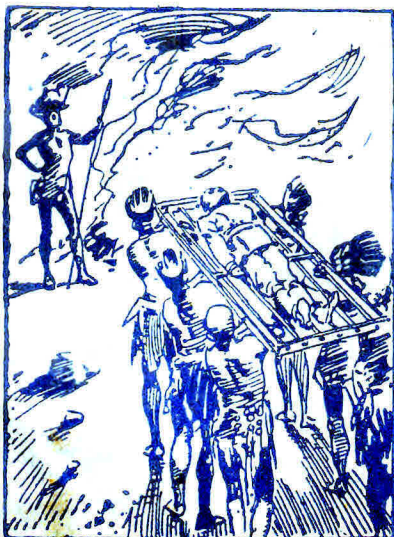
THE GOLD FIEND



They kept him in an iron cage, round which a number of "braves" yelled and gesticulated wildly, threatening his life every hour during the day and night.



As he was whirled away by the rushing torrent, Harold stood up in the canoe and raised his gun. Should he fire?



He was bound to a gigantic gridiron, and six "braves" carried him to the altar on which he was to be sacrificed.



"At last!" cried Harold, "I have found the way to the 'Witches' Diamond Cave' at last!"

NEWSAGENTS should stock the "HALFPENNY MARVEL LIBRARY" BOOKS. Back numbers will sell in enormous numbers, so please see that your stock is kept up. Supplied by all wholesalers. A new book of the Library every Wednesday.