

## Hilda Wade.

BY GRANT ALLEN.

### VIII.—THE EPISODE OF THE EUROPEAN WITH THE KAFFIR HEART.



UNFASHIONABLE as it is to say so, I am a man of peace: I belong to a profession whose province is to heal, not to destroy. Still, there *are* times which turn even the most peaceful of us perforce into fighters—times when those we love, those we are bound to protect, stand in danger of their lives; and at moments like that no man can doubt what is his plain duty. The Matabele revolt was one such moment. In a conflict of race we *must* back our own colour. I do not know whether the natives were justified in rising or not; most likely, yes; for we had stolen their country: but when once they rose, when the security of white women depended upon repelling them, I felt I had no alternative. For Hilda's sake, for the sake of every woman and child in Salisbury and in all Rhodesia, I was bound to bear my part in restoring order.

For the immediate future, it is true, we were safe enough in the little town; but we did not know how far the revolt might have spread; we could not tell what had happened at Charter, at Bulawayo, at the outlying stations. The Matabele, perhaps, had risen in force over the whole vast area which was once Lo-Bengula's country; if so, their first object would certainly be to cut us off from communication with the main body of English settlers at Bulawayo.

"I trust to you, Hilda," I said on the day after the massacre at Klaas's, "to divine for us where these savages are next likely to attack us."

She cooed at the motherless baby, raising one bent finger, and then turned to me with a white smile. "There you ask too much of me," she answered. "Just think what a correct answer would imply! First, a knowledge of these savages' character: next, a knowledge of their mode of fighting. Can't you see that only a person who possessed my trick of intuition, and who had also spent years in warfare among the Matabele, would be really able to answer your question?"

"And yet such questions have been answered before now by people far less in-

tuitive than you," I went on. "Why, I've read somewhere how, when the war between Napoleon the First and the Prussians broke out in 1806, Jomini predicted that the decisive battle of the campaign would be fought near Jena: and near Jena it was fought. Are not *you* better than many Jominis?"

Hilda tickled the baby's cheek. "Smile, then, baby, smile!" she said, pouncing one soft finger on a gathering dimple. "And who *was* your friend Jomini?"

"The greatest military critic and tactician of his age," I answered. "One of Napoleon's generals. I fancy he wrote a book, don't you know—a book on war—'Des Grandes Opérations Militaires,' or something of that sort."

"Well, there you are, then! That's just it! Your Jomini, or Hominy, or whatever you call him, not only understood Napoleon's temperament, but understood war and understood tactics. It was all a question of the lie of the land, and strategy, and so forth. If I had been asked, I could never have answered a quarter as well as Jomini Piccolomini—could I, baby? Jomini would have been worth a great many me's. There, there, a dear, motherless darling! Why, she crows just as if she hadn't lost all her family!"

"But, Hilda, we must be serious. I count upon you to help us in this matter. We are still in danger. Even now these Matabele may attack and destroy us."

She laid the child on her lap and looked grave. "I know it, Hubert: but I must leave it now to you men. I am no tactician. Don't take *me* for one of Napoleon's generals."

"Still," I said, "we have not only the Matabele to reckon with, recollect. There is Sebastian as well. And whether you know your Matabele or not, you at least know your Sebastian."

She shuddered. "I know him: yes, I know him. . . . But this case is so difficult. We have Sebastian—complicated by a rabble of savages, whose habits and manners I do not understand. It is *that* that makes the difficulty."





"COULD I, BABY?"

"But Sebastian himself?" I urged. "Take him first in isolation."

She paused for a full minute with her chin on her hand and her elbow on the table. Her brow gathered. "Sebastian?" she repeated. "Sebastian?—ah, there I might guess something. Well, of course, having once begun this attempt, and being definitely committed, as it were, to a policy of killing us, he will go through to the bitter end, no matter how many other lives it may cost. That is Sebastian's method."

"You don't think, having once found out that I saw and recognised him, he would consider the game lost and slink away to the coast again?"

"Sebastian? Oh, no: that is the absolute antipodes of his type and temperament."

"He will never give up because of a temporary check, you think?"

"No, never. The man has a will of sheer steel—it may break, but it will not bend. Besides, consider, he is too deeply involved. You have seen him: you know: and he knows you know. You may bring this thing home to him. Then what is his plain policy? Why, to egg on the natives whose confidence he has somehow gained into making a further attack and cutting off all Salisbury. If he had succeeded in getting you and me massacred at Klaas's, as he hoped, he would no doubt have slunk off to the coast at once, leaving his black dupes to be shot down at leisure by Rhodes's soldiers."

"I see: but having failed in that?"

"Then he is bound to go through with it and kill us if he can, even if he has to kill all Salisbury with us. That, I feel sure, is Sebastian's plan: whether he can get the Matabele to back him up in it or not is a different matter."

"But taking Sebastian himself alone?"

"Oh, Sebastian himself alone would naturally say, 'Never mind Bulawayo! Concentrate round Salisbury, and kill off all there first: when that is done, then you can move on at your ease and cut them to pieces in Charter and Bulawayo.' You see, he would have no interest in the movement, himself, once he had fairly got rid of us here. The Matabele are only the pieces in his game. It is *me* he wants, not Salisbury. He would clear out of Rhodesia as soon as he had carried his point. But he would have to give some reasonable ground to the Matabele for his first advice: and it seems a reasonable ground to say, 'Don't leave Salisbury in your rear, so as to put yourselves between two fires. Capture the outpost first: that down, march on undistracted to the principal stronghold.'"

"Who's no tactician?" I murmured, half aloud.

She laughed. "That's not tactics, Hubert: that's plain common sense—and knowledge of Sebastian. Still, it comes to nothing. The question is not, 'What would Sebastian wish?' it is, 'Could Sebastian persuade these angry black men to accept his guidance?'"

"Sebastian!" I cried; "Sebastian could persuade the very devil! I know the man's fiery enthusiasm, his contagious eloquence. He thrilled me through, myself, with his electric personality, so that it took me six years—and your aid—to find him out at last. His very abstractness tells. Why, even in this war, you may be sure, he will be making notes all the time on the healing of wounds in tropical climates, contrasting the African with the European constitution."

"Oh, yes: of course. Whatever he does, he will never forget the interests of science. He is true to his lady-love to whomever else he plays false. That is his saving virtue."

"And he will talk down the Matabele," I went on, "even if he doesn't know their language. But I suspect he does, for, you must remember, he was two years in South Africa as a young man, on a scientific expedition, collecting specimens. He can ride



like a trooper: and he knows the country. His masterful ways, his austere face, will cow the natives. Then again, he has the air of a prophet, and prophets always stir the negro. I can imagine with what air he will bid them drive out the intrusive white men who have usurped their land, and draw them flattering pictures of a new Matabele empire about to arise under a new chief, too strong for these gold-grubbing, diamond-hunting mobs from over sea to meddle with."

She reflected once more. "Do you mean to say anything of our suspicions in Salisbury, Hubert?" she asked at last.

"It is useless," I answered. "The Salisbury folk believe there is a white man at the bottom of this trouble already. They will try to catch him: that's all that is necessary. If we said it was Sebastian, people would only laugh at us. They must understand Sebastian as you and I understand him before they would think such a move credible. As a rule in life, if you know anything which other people do not know, better keep it to yourself: you will only get laughed at as a fool for telling it."

"I think so too. That is why I never say what I suspect or infer from my knowledge of types—except to a few who can understand and appreciate. Hubert, if they all arm for the defence of the town, you will stop here, I suppose, to tend the wounded?"

Her lips trembled as she spoke, and she gazed at me with a strange wistfulness. "No, dearest," I answered at once, taking her face in my hands. "I shall fight with the rest. Salisbury has more need to-day of fighters than of healers."

"I thought you would," she answered, slowly. "And I think you do right." Her face was set white: she played nervously with the baby. "I would not urge you: but I am glad you say so. I want you to stop: yet I could not love you so much if I did not see you ready to play the man at such a crisis."

"I shall give in my name with the rest," I answered.

"Hubert, it is hard to spare you—hard to send you to such danger. But for one other thing I am glad you are going . . . They must take Sebastian alive: they must *not* kill him."

"They will shoot him red-handed if they catch him," I answered confidently. "A white man who sides with the blacks in an insurrection!"

"Then *you* must see that they do not do it. They must bring him in alive and try

him legally. For me—and therefore for you—that is of the first importance."

"Why so, Hilda?"

"Hubert, you want to marry me." I nodded vehemently. "Well, you know I can only marry you on one condition—that I have succeeded first in clearing my father's memory. Now, the only man living who can clear it is Sebastian. If Sebastian were to be shot, it could *never* be cleared—and then, law of Medes and Persians, I could never marry you."

"But how can you expect Sebastian, of all men, to clear it, Hilda?" I cried. "He is ready to kill us both, merely to prevent your attempting a revision: is it likely you can force him to confess his crime, still less induce him to admit it voluntarily?"

She put her hands into the hollow of her eyes and pressed them hard with a strange, prophetic air she often had about her when she gazed into the future. "I know my man," she answered, slowly, without uncovering her eyes. "I know how I can do it—if the chance ever comes to me. But the chance must come first. It is hard to find. I lost it once at Nathaniel's. I must not lose it again. If Sebastian is killed skulking here in Rhodesia, my life's purpose will have failed: I shall not have vindicated my father's good name: and then, we can never marry."

"So I understand, Hilda, my orders are these: I am to go out and fight for the women and children of Salisbury, but I am to take care, if possible, that Sebastian shall be made prisoner alive, and on no account to let him be killed on the open!"

"I give you no orders, Hubert. I tell you how it seems best to me. But if Sebastian is shot dead—then you understand it must be all over between us. I *never* can marry you until or unless I have cleared my father."

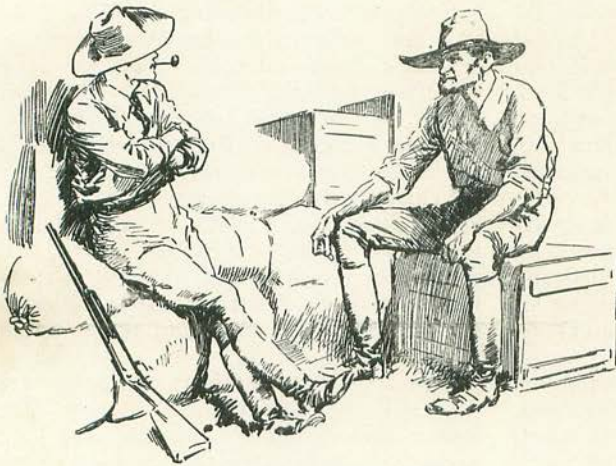
"Sebastian shall not be shot dead," I cried, with my youthful impetuosity. "He shall be brought in alive, though all Salisbury as one man try its best to lynch him."

I went out to report myself as a volunteer for service. Within the next few hours the whole town had been put in a state of siege, and all available men armed to oppose the insurgent Matabele. Hasty preparations were made for defence. The ox-waggons of settlers were drawn up outside in little circles here and there, so as to form laagers, which acted practically as temporary forts for the protection of the outskirts. In one of these I was posted. With our company were two



American scouts, named Colebrook and Doolittle, irregular fighters whose value in South African campaigns had already been tested in the old Matabele war against Lo-Bengula. Colebrook in particular was an odd-looking creature—a tall, spare man, bodied like a weasel. He was red-haired, ferret-eyed, and an excellent scout, but scrapper and more inarticulate in his manner of speech than any human being I had ever encountered. His conversation was a series of rapid interjections, jerked out at intervals, and made comprehensible by a running play of gesture and attitude.

"Well, yes," he said, when I tried to draw him out on the Matabele mode of fighting.



"I TRIED TO DRAW HIM OUT."

"Not on the open. Never! Grass, if you like. Or bushes. The eyes of them! The eyes! . . ." He leaned eagerly forward, as if looking for something. "See here, Doctor: I'm telling you. Spots. Gleaming. Among the grass. Long grass. And armed, too. A pair of 'em each. One to throw"—he raised his hand as if lancing something—"the other for close fighting. Assegais, you know. That's the name of it. Only the eyes. Creeping, creeping, creeping. No noise. One raised. Waggons drawn up in laager. Oxen outspanned in the middle. Trekking all day. Tired out: dog tired. Crawl, crawl, crawl! Hands and knees. Might be snakes. A wriggle. Men sitting about the camp-fire. Smoking. Gleam of their eyes! Under the waggons. Nearer, nearer, nearer! Then, the throwing ones in your midst. Shower of 'em. Right and left. 'Halloa! stand by, boys!' Look up: see

'em swarming, black like ants, over the waggons. Inside the laager. Snatch up rifles! All up! Oxen stampeding, men running, blacks sticking 'em like pigs in the back with their assegais. Bad job, the whole thing. Don't care for it, myself. Very tough 'uns to fight. If they once break laager."

"Then you should never let them get at close quarters," I suggested, catching the general drift of his inarticulate swift pictures.

"You're a square man, you are, Doctor! There, you touch the spot. Never let 'em get at close quarters. Sentries?—creep past 'em. Outposts?—crawl between. Had Forbes and Wilson like that. Cut 'em off.

Per-dition! . . . But Maxims will do it! Maxims! Never let 'em get near. Sweep the ground all round. Durned hard, though, to know just *when* they're coming. A night: two nights: all clear: only waste ammunition. Third, they swarm like bees: break laager: all over!"

This was not exactly an agreeable picture of what we had to expect—the more so as our particular laager happened to have no Maxims. However, we kept a sharp look-out for those gleaming eyes in the long grass of which Colebrook warned us: their flashing light was the one thing to be seen, at night above all, when the black

bodies could crawl unperceived through the tall dry herbage. On our first night out we had no adventures. We watched by turns outside, relieving sentry from time to time, while those of us who slept within the laager slept on the bare ground with our arms beside us. Nobody spoke much. The tension was too great. Every moment we expected an attack of the enemy.

Next day news reached us by scouts from all the other laagers. None of them had been attacked: but in all there was a deep, half-instinctive belief that the Matabele in force were drawing step by step closer and closer around us. Lo-Bengula's old impi or native regiments had gathered together once more under their own indunas—men trained and drilled in all the arts and ruses of savage warfare. On their own ground, and among their native scrub, those rude strategists are formidable. They know the country and how





"WE WATCHED BY TURNS."

to fight in it. We had nothing to oppose to them but a handful of the new Matabeleland police, an old regular soldier or two, and a raw crowd of volunteers, most of whom, like myself, had never before really handled a rifle.

That afternoon, the Major in command decided to send out the two American scouts to scour the grass and discover, if possible, how near our lines the Matabele had penetrated. I begged hard to be permitted to accompany them. I wanted, if I could, to get evidence against Sebastian: or at least to learn whether he was still directing and assisting the enemy. At first, the scouts laughed at my request: but when I told them privately that I believed I had a clue against the white traitor who had caused the revolt, and that I wished to identify him, they changed their tone and began to think there might be something in it.

"Experience?" Colebrook asked, in his

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brief shorthand of speech, running his ferret eyes over me.

"None," I answered. "But a noiseless tread, and a capacity for crawling through holes in hedges which may perhaps be useful."

He glanced inquiry at Doolittle, who was a shorter and stouter man, with a knack of getting over obstacles by sheer forcefulness.

"Hands and knees!" he said, abruptly, in the imperative mood, pointing to a clump of dry grass with thorny bushes ringed about it.

I went down on my hands and knees and threaded my way through the long grasses and matted boughs as noiselessly as I could. The two old hands watched me. When I emerged several yards off, much to their surprise, Colebrook turned to Doolittle. "Might answer," he said, curtly. "Major says, choose your own men. Anyhow, if they catch him, nobody's fault but his. Wants to go. Will do it."

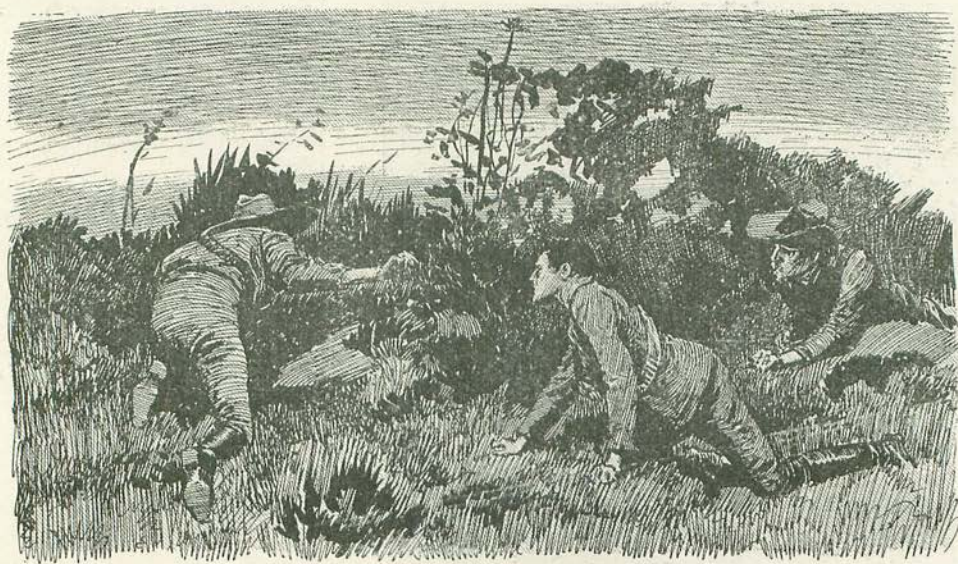
We set out through the long grass together, walking erect at first, till we had got some distance from the laager, and then creeping as the Matabele creep themselves, without dis-

placing the grass-flowers, for a mere wave on top would have betrayed us at once to the quick eyes of those observant savages. We crept on for a mile or so. At last Colebrook turned to me, one finger on his lips. His ferret eyes gleamed. We were approaching a wooded hill, all interspersed with boulders. "Kaffirs here!" he whispered low, as if he knew by instinct. *How* he knew, I cannot tell; he seemed almost to scent them.

We stole on further, going more furtively than ever now. I could notice by this time that there were waggons in front, and could hear men speaking in them. I wanted to proceed, but Colebrook held up one warning hand. "Won't do," he said, shortly, in a low tone. "Only myself. Danger ahead! Stop here and wait for me."

Doolittle and myself waited. Colebrook kept on cautiously, squirming his long body in sinuous waves like a lizard's through the





"COLEBROOK HELD UP ONE WARNING HAND."

grass, and was soon lost to us. No snake could have been lither. We waited, with ears attent. One minute, two minutes, many minutes passed. We could catch the voices of Kaffirs in the bush all round. They were speaking freely, but what they said I did not know, as I had picked up only a very few words of the Matabele language.

It seemed hours while we waited, still as mice in our ambush, and alert. I began to think Colebrook must have been lost or killed—so long was he gone—and that we must return without him. At last—we leaned forward—a muffled movement in the grass ahead! A slight wave at the base! Then it divided below, bit by bit, while the tops remained stationary. A weasel-like body slank noiselessly through. Finger on lips once more, Colebrook glided beside us.

We turned and crawled back, stifling our very pulses. For many minutes none of us spoke. But we heard in our rear a loud cry and a shaking of assegais: the Kaffirs behind us were yelling frightfully. They must have suspected something—seen some movement in the tufted heads of grass, for they spread abroad, shouting. We halted, holding our breath. After a time, however, the noise died down. They were moving another way. We crept on again, stealthily.

When at last, after many minutes, we found ourselves beyond a sheltering belt of brushwood, we ventured to rise and speak. "Well?" I asked of Colebrook. "Did you discover anything?"

He nodded assent. "Couldn't see him," he said, shortly. "But he's there right enough. White man. Heard 'em talk of him."

"What did they say?" I asked, eagerly.

"Said he had a white skin, but his heart was a Kaffir's. Great induna: leader of many impis. Prophet, wise weather doctor! Friend of old Moselekatse's. Destroy the white men from over the big water: restore the land to the Matabele. Kill all in Salisbury: especially the white women. Witches: all witches: they give charms to the men: cook lions' hearts for them: make them brave with love-drinks."

"They said that?" I exclaimed, taken aback. "Kill all the white women!"

"Yes. Kill all. White witches, every one. The young ones worst. Word of the great induna."

"And you could not see him?"

"Crept near waggons: close. Fellow himself inside. Heard his voice: spoke English, with a little Matabele. Kaffir boy who was servant at the mission interpreted."

"What sort of voice? Like this?" And I imitated Sebastian's cold, clear-cut tone as well as I was able.

"The man! That's him, Doctor. You've got him down to the ground. The very voice. Heard him giving orders."

That settled the question. I was certain of it now. Sebastian was with the insurgents.

We made our way back to our laager, flung ourselves down, and slept a little on the





“HE’S THERE RIGHT ENOUGH.”

ground before taking our turn in the fatigues of the night watch. Our horses were loosely tied, ready for any sudden alarm. About midnight, we three were sitting with others about the fire, talking low to one another. All at once Doolittle sprang up, alert and eager. “Look out, boys!” he cried, pointing his hands under the waggons. “What’s wriggling in the grass there?”

I looked, and saw nothing. Our sentries were posted outside, about a hundred yards apart, walking up and down till they met, and exchanging “All’s well” aloud at each meeting.

“They should have been stationary!” one of our scouts exclaimed, looking out at them. “It’s easier for the Matabele to see them so, when they walk up and down, moving against the sky. The Major ought to have posted them where it wouldn’t have been so simple for a Kaffir to see them and creep in between them!”

“Too late now, boys!” Colebrook burst out, with a rare effort of articulateness. “Call back the sentries, Major! The blacks have broken line! Hold there! They’re in upon us!”

Even as he spoke, I followed his eager pointing hand with my eyes, and just

descried among the grass two gleaming objects, seen under the hollow of one of the waggons. Two: then two: then two again: and behind, whole pairs of them. They looked like twin stars: but they were eyes: black eyes, reflecting the starlight and the red glare of the camp-fire. They crept on tortuously in serpentine curves through the long, dry grasses. I could feel rather than see that they were Matabele, crawling prone on their bellies, and trailing their snake-like way between the dark jungle. Quick as thought, I raised my rifle and blazed away at the foremost. So did several others. But the Major shouted, angrily, “Who fired? Don’t shoot, boys, till you hear the word of command! Back, sentries, to laager! Not a shot till they’re safe inside! You’ll hit your own people!”

Almost before he said it, the sentries darted back. The Matabele crouching on hands and

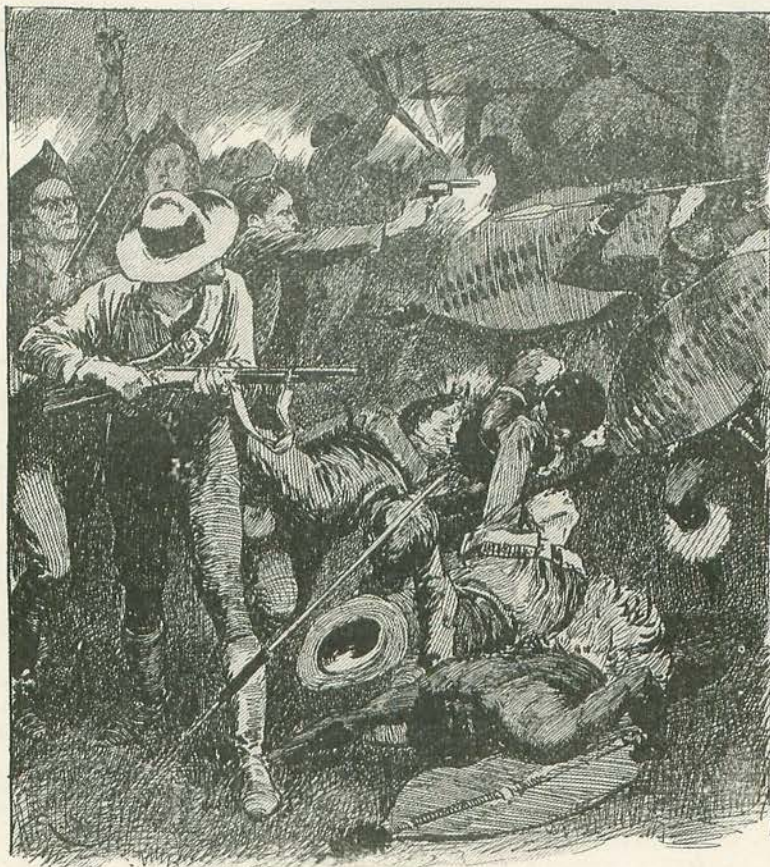
knees in the long grass had passed through them, unseen. A wild moment followed. I can hardly describe it, the whole thing was so new to me, and took place so quickly. Hordes of black human ants seemed to surge up all at once over and under the waggons. Assegaïs whizzed through the air or gleamed brandished around one. Our men fell back to the centre of the laager and formed themselves hastily under the Major’s orders. Then a pause: a deadly fire. Once, twice, thrice we volleyed. The Matabele fell by dozens—but they came on by hundreds. As fast as we fired and mowed down one swarm, fresh swarms seemed to spring from the earth and stream over the waggons. Others appeared to grow up almost beneath our feet as they wormed their way on their faces along the ground between the wheels, squirmed into the circle, and then rose suddenly erect and naked, in front of us. Meanwhile, they yelled and shouted, clashing their spears and shields: the oxen bellowed: the rifles volleyed. It was a pandemonium of sound in an orgy of gloom. Darkness, lurid flame, blood, wounds, death, horror.

Yet in the midst of all this hubbub I could not help admiring the cool military calm and self-control of our Major. His



voice rose clear above the confused tumult. "Steady, boys, steady! Don't fire at random. Pick each your likeliest man, and aim at him

By-and-by, with a little halt, for the first time they wavered. All our men now mounted the waggons, and began to fire on



"A WILD MOMENT FOLLOWED."

deliberately. That's right: easy — easy! Shoot at leisure, and don't waste ammunition!"

He stood as if he were on parade, in the midst of this palpitating turmoil of savages. Some of us, encouraged by his example, mounted the waggons, and shot from the tops at our approaching assailants.

How long the hurly-burly went on I cannot say. We fired, fired, fired, and Kaffirs fell like sheep: yet more Kaffirs rose fresh from the long grass to replace them. They swarmed with greater ease now over the covered waggons, across the mangled and writhing bodies of their fellows: for the dead outside made an inclined plane for the living to mount by. But the enemy were getting less numerous, I thought, and less anxious to fight. The steady fire told on them.

them in regular volleys as they came up. The evil effects of the surprise were gone by this time: we were acting with coolness and obeying orders. But several of our people dropped close beside me, pierced through with assegais.

All at once, as if a panic had burst over them, the Matabele with one mind stopped dead short in their advance and ceased fighting. Till that moment, no number of deaths seemed to make any difference to them. Men fell, disabled: others sprang up from the ground by magic. But now, of a sudden, their courage flagged—they faltered, gave way, broke, and shambled in a body. At last, as one man, they turned and fled. Many of them leapt up with a loud cry from the long grass where they were skulking, flung away their big shields with the white



thongs interlaced, and ran for dear life, black crouching figures, through the dense, dry jungle. They held their assegais still, but did not dare to use them. It was a flight, pell-mell — and the devil take the hindmost.

Not until then had I leisure to *think* and to realize my position. This was the first and only time I had ever seen a battle. I am a bit of coward, I believe—like most other men—though I have courage enough to confess it: and I expected to find myself terribly afraid when it came to fighting. Instead of that, to my immense surprise, once the Matabele had swarmed over the laager and were upon us in their thousands, I had no time to be frightened. The absolute necessity for keeping cool, for loading and reloading, for aiming and firing, for beating them off at close quarters—all this so occupied one's mind, and still more one's hands, that one couldn't find room for any personal terrors. "They are breaking over there!" "They will overpower us yonder!" "They are faltering now!" Those thoughts were so uppermost in one's head, and one's arms were so alert, that only after the enemy gave way and began to run at full pelt could a man find breathing-space to think of his own safety. Then the thought occurred to me, "I have been through my first fight,

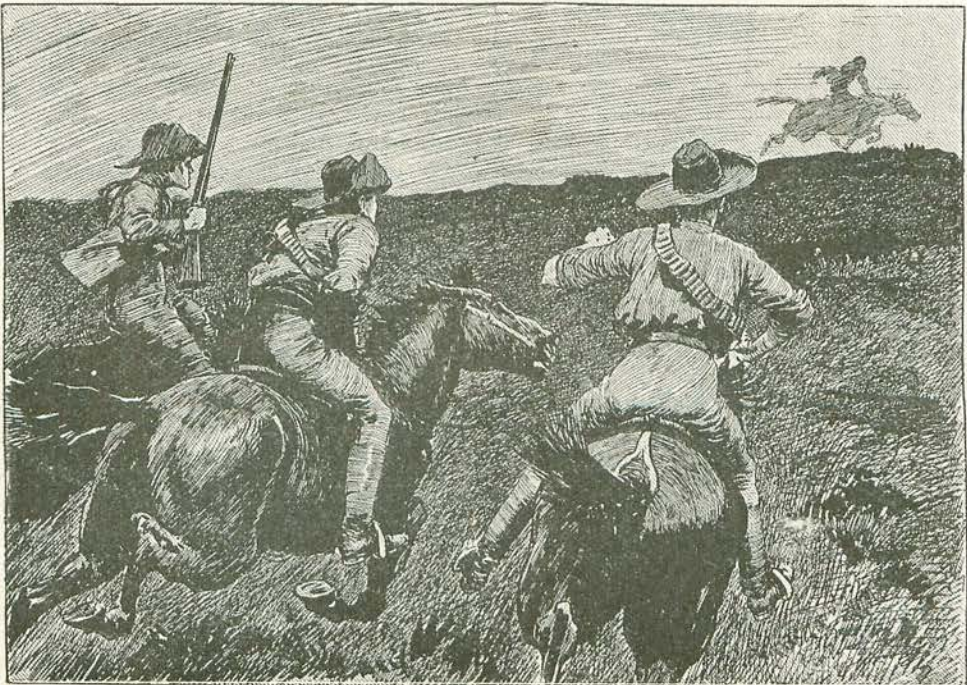
and come out of it alive: after all, I was a deal less afraid than I expected!"

That took but a second, however. Next instant, awaking to the altered circumstances, we were after them at full speed, accompanying them on their way back to their kraals in the uplands with a running fire as a farewell attention.

As we broke laager in pursuit of them, by the uncertain starlight we saw a sight which made us boil with indignation. A mounted man turned and fled before them. He seemed their leader, unseen till then. He was dressed like a European—tall, thin, unbending, in a greyish white suit: he rode a good horse, and sat it well: his air was commanding, even as he turned and fled in the general rout from that lost battle.

I seized Colebrook's arm, almost speechless with anger. "The white man!" I cried. "The traitor!"

He did not answer a word, but with a set face of white rage loosed his horse from where it was tethered among the waggons. At the same moment I loosed mine. So did Doolittle. Quick as thought, but silently, we led them out all three where the laager was broken. I clutched my mare's mane, and sprang to the stirrup to pursue our enemy. My sorrel bounded off like a bird. The fugitive had a good two minutes' start of us;



"IT WAS A MAD CHASE ACROSS THE DARK VELDT."



but our horses were fresh, while his had probably been ridden all day. I patted my pony's neck: she responded with a ringing neigh of joy. We tore after the outlaw, all three of us abreast. I felt a sort of fierce delight in the reaction after the fighting. Our ponies galloped wildly over the plain: we burst out into the night, never heeding the Matabele whom we passed on the open in panic-stricken retreat: I noticed that many of them in their terror had even flung away their shields and their assegais.

It was a mad chase across the dark veldt—we three, neck to neck, against that one desperate runaway. We rode all we knew. I dug my heels into my sorrel's flanks, and she responded bravely. The tables were turned now on our traitor since the afternoon of the massacre. *He* was the pursued and *we* were the pursuers. We felt we must run him down and punish him for his treachery.

At a breakneck pace we stumbled over low bushes: we grazed big boulders: we rolled down the sides of steep ravines: but we kept him in sight all the time, dim and black against the starry sky: slowly, slowly—yes, yes!—we gained upon him. My pony led now. The mysterious white man rode and rode—head bent, neck forward—but never looked behind him. Bit by bit we lessened the distance between us. As we drew near him at last, Doolittle called out to me in a warning voice, "Take care, Doctor! Have your revolvers ready! He's driven to bay now! As we approach he'll fire at us!"

Then it came home to me in a flash. I felt the truth of it. "He *dare* not fire!" I cried. "He dare not turn towards us. He cannot show his face! If he did we might recognise him!"

On we rode, still gaining. "Now, now," I cried, "we shall catch him!"

Even as I leaned forward to seize his rein, the fugitive, without checking his horse, without turning his head, drew his revolver from his belt, and, raising his hand, fired behind him at random. He fired towards us, on the chance. The bullet whizzed past my ear, not hitting anyone. We scattered, right and left, still galloping free and strong. We did not return his fire, as I had told the others of my desire to take him alive. We might have shot his horse; but the risk of hitting the rider, coupled with the confidence we felt of eventually hunting him to earth, restrained us. It was the great mistake we made.

He had gained a little by his shots, but we

soon caught it up. Once more I said, "We are on him!"

A minute later, we were pulled up short before an impenetrable thicket of prickly shrubs, through which I saw at once it would have been quite impossible to urge our staggering horses.

The other man, of course, reached it before us, with his mare's last breath. He must have been making for it, indeed, of set purpose; for the second he arrived at the edge of the thicket he slipped off his tired pony, and seemed to dive into the bush as a swimmer dives off a rock into the water.

"We have him now!" I cried, in a voice of triumph. And Colebrook echoed, "We have him!"

We sprang down quickly. "Take him alive, if you can!" I exclaimed, remembering Hilda's advice. "Let us find out who he is, and have him properly tried and hanged at Bulawayo! Don't give him a soldier's death! All he deserves is a murderer's!"

"You stop here," Colebrook said, briefly, flinging his bridle to Doolittle to hold. "Doctor and I follow him. Thick bush. Knows the ways of it. Revolvers ready!"

I handed my sorrel to Doolittle. He stopped behind, holding the three foam-bespattered and panting horses, while Colebrook and I dived after our fugitive into the matted bushes.

The thicket, as I have said, was impenetrable above; but it was burrowed at its base by over-ground runs of some wild animal—not, I think, a very large one; they were just like the runs which rabbits make among gorse and heather, only on a bigger scale—bigger even than a fox's or badger's. By crouching and bending our backs, we could crawl through them with difficulty into the scrubby tangle. It was hard work creeping. The runs divided soon. Colebrook felt with his hands on the ground: "I can make out the spoor!" he muttered, after a minute. "He has gone on this way!"

We tracked him a little distance in, crawling at times, and rising now and again where the runs opened out on to the air for a moment. The spoor was doubtful, and the tunnels tortuous. I felt the ground from time to time, but could not be sure of the tracks with my fingers: I was not a trained scout like Colebrook or Doolittle. We wriggled deeper into the tangle. Something stirred once or twice. It was not far from me. I was uncertain whether it was *him*—Sebastian—or a Kaffir earth-hog, the animal which seemed likeliest to have made the burrows.



Was he going to elude us even now? Would he turn upon us with a knife? If so, could we hold him?

At last, when we had pushed our way some distance in, we heard a wild cry from outside. It was Doolittle's voice. "Quick! quick! Out again! The man will escape! He has come back on his tracks and rounded!"

I saw our mistake at once. We had left our companion out there alone, rendered helpless by the care of all three horses.

Colebrook said never a word. He was a man of action. He turned with instinctive haste, and followed our own spoor back again with his hands and knees to the opening in the thicket by which we had first entered.

Before we could reach it, however, two shots rang out clear in the direction where we had left poor Doolittle and the horses. Then a sharp cry broke the stillness—the cry of a wounded man. We redoubled our pace. We knew we were outwitted.

When we reached the open we saw at once by the uncertain light what had happened. The fugitive was riding away on

a black lump, among the black bushes about him.

We looked around for him and found him. He was severely, I may even say dangerously, wounded. The bullet had lodged in his right side. We had to catch our two horses, and ride them back with our wounded man, leading the fugitive's mare in tow, all blown and breathless. I stuck to the fugitive's mare: it was the one clue we had now against him. But Sebastian, if it *was* Sebastian, had ridden off scot-free. I understood his game at a glance. He had got the better of us once more. He would make for the coast by the nearest road, give himself out as a settler escaped from the massacre, and catch the next ship for England or the Cape, now this *coup* had failed him.

Doolittle had not seen the traitor's face. The man rose from the bush, he said, shot him, seized the pony, and rode off in a second with ruthless haste. He was tall and thin, but erect—that was all the wounded scout could tell us about his assailant. And *that* was not enough to identify Sebastian.

All danger was over. We rode back to



"THE FUGITIVE WAS RIDING AWAY."

my own little sorrel. Riding for dear life, not back the way we came from Salisbury, but sideways across the veldt towards Chimoio and the Portuguese seaports. The other two horses, riderless and terrified, were scampering with loose heels over the dark plain. Doolittle was not to be seen: he lay,

Salisbury. The first words Hilda said when she saw me were, "Well, he has got away from you!"

"Yes: how did you know?"

"I read it in your step. But I guessed as much before. He is so very keen: and you started too confident."