A TALE OF THREE LIONS.

H. Rider Haggard

MOST of you will have heard of Allan Quatermain, who was one of the party that discovered King Solomon's mines some little time ago, and who afterwards came to live in England near his friend Sir Henry Curtis. He has gone back to the wilderness now, as these old hunters almost invariably do, on one pretext or another. They cannot endure civilisation for very long, its noise and racket and the omnipresence of broad-clothed humanity proving more trying to their nerves than the dangers of the desert. I think that they feel lonely here, for it is a fact that is too little understood, though it has often been stated, that there is no loneliness like the loneliness of crowds, especially to those who are unaccustomed to them. "What is there in the world," old Quatermain would say, "so desolate as to stand in the streets of a great city and listen to the footsteps falling, falling, multitudinous as the rain, and watch the white line of faces as they hurry past, you know not whence, you know not whither. They come and go, their eyes meet yours with a cold stare, for a moment their features are written on your mind, and then they are gone for ever. You will never see them again, they will never see you again; they come up out of the unknown, and presently they once more vanish into the unknown, taking their secrets with them. Yes, that is loneliness pure and undefiled; but to one who knows and loves it, the wilderness is not lonely, because the spirit of nature is ever there to keep the wanderer company. He finds companions in the winds—the sunny streams babble like Nature's children at his feet; high above him, in the purple sunset, are domes and minarets and palaces, such as no mortal man hath built, in and out of whose flaming doors the glorious angels of the sun seem to move continually. And there, too, is the wild game, following its feeding-grounds in great armies, with the springbuck thrown out before for skirmishers; then rank upon rank of long-faced blesbuck, marching and wheeling like infantry; and last the shining troops of quagga, and the fierce-eyed shaggy vilderbeeste to take the place of the cossack host that hangs upon an army's flanks.

"Oh, no," he would say, "the wilderness is not lonely, for, my boy, remember that the further you get from man, the nearer you grow to God," and though this is a saying that might well be disputed, it is one I am sure that anybody will easily understand who has watched the sun rise and set on the limitless deserted plains, and seen the thunder chariots of the clouds roll in majesty across the depths of unfathomable sky.

Well, at any rate he went back again, and now for many months I have heard nothing at all of him, and to be frank, I greatly doubt if anybody will ever hear of him again. I fear that the wilderness, that has for so many years been a mother to him, will now also prove his grave and the grave of those who accompanied him, for the quest upon which he and they have started is a wild one indeed.

But while he was in England for those three years or so between his return from the successful discovery of the wise king's buried treasures, and the death of his only son, I saw a great deal of old Allan Quatermain. I had known him years before in Africa, and after he came home, whenever I had nothing better to do, I used to run up to Yorkshire and stay with him, and in this way I at one time and another heard many of the incidents of his past life, and most curious some of them were.

1 This of course was written before Mr. Quatermain's account of the adventures in the newly-discovered country of Zu-Vendis of himself, Sir Henry Curtis, and Capt. John Good had been received in England — EDITOR.

No man can pass all those years following the rough existence of an elephant-hunter without meeting with many strange adventures, and one way and another old Quatermain has certainly seen his share. Well, the story that I am going to tell you in the following pages is one of the later of these adventures; though I forget the exact year in which it happened. At any rate I know that it was the only one of his trips upon which he took his son Harry (who is since dead) with him, and that Harry was then about fourteen. And now for the story, which I will repeat, as nearly as I can, in the words in which hunter Quatermain told it to me one night in the old oak-panelled vestibule of his house in Yorkshire. We were talking about gold-mining—

"Gold-mining!" he broke in; "ah! yes, I once went gold-mining at Pilgrim's Rest in the Transvaal, and it was after that that we had the business about Jim-Jim and the lions. Do you know it? Well, it is, or was, one of the queerest little places you ever saw. The town itself was pitched in a stony valley, with mountains all about it, and in the middle of such scenery as one does not often get the chance of seeing. Many and many is the time that I have thrown down my pick and shovel in disgust, clambered out of my claim, and walked a couple of miles or so to the top of some hill. Then I would lie down in the grass and look out over the glorious stretch of country—the smiling valleys, the great mountains touched with gold—real gold of the sunset and clothed in sweeping robes of bush, and stare into the depths of the perfect sky above; yes, and thank Heaven I had got away from the cursing and the coarse jokes of the miners, and the voices of those Basutu Kafirs as they toiled in the sun, the memory of which is with me yet. Well, for some months I dug away patiently at my claim, till the very sight of a pick or of a washing-trough became hateful to me. A hundred times a day I lamented my own folly in having invested eight hundred pounds, which was about all that I was worth at the time, in this gold-mining. But like other better people before me, I had been bitten by the gold bug, and now had to take the consequences. I had bought a claim out of which a man had made a fortune—five or six thousand pounds at least—as I thought, very cheap; that is, I had given him five hundred pounds down for it. It was all that I had made by a very rough year's elephant-hunting beyond the Zambesi, and I sighed deeply and prophetically when I saw my successful friend, who was a Yankee, sweep up the roll of Standard Bank notes with the lordly air of the man who has made his fortune, and cram them into his breeches pockets. 'Well,' I said to him—the happy vendor—'it is a magnificent property, and I only hope that my luck will be as good as yours has been.' He smiled; to my excited nerves it seemed that he smiled ominously, as he answered me in a peculiar Yankee drawl: 'I guess, stranger, as I ain't the one to make a man quarrel with his food, more especial when there ain't no more going of the rounds; and as for that there claim, well, she's been a good nigger to me; but between you and me, stranger, speaking man to man, now that there ain't any filthy lucre between us to obsculate the features of the truth, I guess she's about worked out!'

"I gasped; the fellow's effrontery took the breath out of me. Only five minutes before he had been swearing by all his gods—and they appeared to be numerous and mixed—that there were half a dozen fortunes left in the claim, and that he was only giving it up because he was downright weary of shovelling the gold out.

"'Don't look so vexed, stranger,' went on my tormentor, 'perhaps there is some shine in the old girl yet; any way you are a downright good fellow you are, therefore you will, I guess, have a real A 1, old jam, plate glass opportunity of working on the feelings of Fortune. Any way it will bring the muscle up upon your arm, for the stuff is uncommon stiff, and what is more, you will in the course of a year earn a sight more than two thousand dollars in value of experience.'

"And he went just in time, for in another minute I should have gone for him, and I saw his face no more.

"Well, I set to work on the old claim with my boy Harry and half a dozen Kafirs to help me, which, seeing that I had put nearly all my worldly wealth into it, was the least that I could do. And we worked, my word, we did work—early and late we went at it—but never a bit of gold did we see; no, not even a nugget large enough to make a scarf-pin out of. The American gentleman had secured it all and left us the sweepings.

"For three months this went on, till at last I had paid away all, or very near all, that was left of

Guillaume sc. *Heywood Hardy, pinx.*

"I took it curiously and held it up to the light."

our little capital in wages and food for the Kafirs and ourselves. When I tell you that Boer meal was sometimes as high as four pounds a bag, you will understand that it did not take long to run through our banking account.

"At last the crisis came. One Saturday night I had paid the men as usual, and bought a muid of mealie meal at sixty shillings for them to fill themselves with, and then I went with my boy Harry and sat on the edge of the great hole that we had dug in the hill-side, and which we had in bitter mockery named Eldorado. There we sat in the moonlight with our feet hanging over the edge of the claim, and were melancholy enough for anything. Presently I pulled out my purse and emptied its contents into my hand. There was a half sovereign, two florins, nine pence in silver, no coppers—for copper practically does not circulate in South Africa, which is one of the things that make living so dear there—in all exactly fourteen and ninepence.

"'There, Harry my boy!' I said, 'that is the sum total of our worldly wealth; that hole has swallowed all the rest.'

"'By George,' said Master Harry! 'I say, father, you and I shall have to let ourselves out to work with the Kafirs and live on mealie pap,' and he sniggered at his unpleasant little joke.

"But I was in no mood for joking, for it is not a merry thing to dig like anything for months and be completely ruined in the process, especially if you happen to dislike digging, and consequently I resented Harry's light-heartedness.

"'Be quiet, boy!' I said, raising my hand as though to give him a cuff, with the result that the half sovereign slipped out of it and fell into the gulf below.

"'Oh, bother,' said I, 'it's gone."

"'There, Dad,' said Harry, 'that's what comes of letting your angry passions rise; now we are down to four and nine.'

"I made no answer to these words of wisdom, but scrambled down the steep sides of the claim followed by Harry, to hunt for my little all. Well, we hunted and we hunted, but the moonlight is an uncertain thing to look for half sovereigns by, and there was some loose soil about, for the Kaffirs had knocked off working at the very spot a couple of hours before. I took a pick and raked away the clods of earth with it, in the hope of finding the coin; but all in vain. At last in sheer annoyance I struck the sharp end of the pickaxe down into the soil, which was of a very hard nature. To my astonishment it sunk in right up to the haft.

"'Why, Harry,' I said, 'this ground must have been disturbed!'

"'I don't think so, father,' he answered, 'but we will soon see,' and he began to shovel out the soil with his hands. 'Oh,' he said presently, 'it's only some old stones; the pick has gone down between them, look!' and he began to pull at one of the stones.

"'I say, Dad,' he said presently, almost in a whisper, 'it's precious heavy, feel it;' and he rose and gave me a round, brownish lump about the size of a very large apple, which he was holding in both his hands. I took it curiously and held it up to the light. It *was* very heavy. The moonlight fell upon its rough and filth-encrusted surface, and as I looked, curious little thrills of excitement began to pass through me. But I could not be sure.

"'Give me your knife, Harry,' I said.

"He did so, and resting the brown stone on my knee I scratched at its surface. Great heavens, it was soft!

"Another second and the secret was out, we had found a great nugget of pure gold, four pounds of it or more. 'It's gold, lad,' I said, 'it's gold, or I'm a Dutchman.'

"Harry, with his eyes starting out of his head, glared down at the long gleaming yellow scratch that I had made upon the virgin metal, and then burst out into yell upon yell of exultation, that went ringing away across the silent claims like the shrieks of somebody being murdered.

"'Be quiet,' I said, 'do you want every thief on the fields after you?'

"Scarcely were the words out of my mouth when I heard a stealthy footstep approaching. I promptly put the big nugget down and sat on it, and uncommonly hard it was, and as I did so I saw a lean dark face poked over the edge of the claim and a pair of beady eyes searching us out. I knew the face, it belonged to a man of very bad character known as Handspike Tom, who had, I understood, been so named at the Diamond Fields because he had murdered his mate with a handspike. He was now no doubt prowling about like a human hyæna to see what he could steal.

"'Is that you, unter Quatermain?' he says.

"'Yes, it's I, Mr. Tom,' I answered politely.

"'And what might all that there yelling be?' he asked. 'I was walking along, a-taking of the evening air and a-thinking on the stars, when I 'ears 'owl after 'owl.'

"'Well, Mr. Tom,' I answered, 'that is not to be wondered at, seeing that like yourself they are nocturnal birds.'

"''Owl after 'owl!' he repeated sternly, taking no notice of my interpretation, 'and I stops and says, "That's murder," and I listens again and thinks, "No, it ain't; that 'owl is the 'owl of hexultation; some one's been and got his fingers into a gummy yeller pot, I'll swear, and gone off 'is 'ead in the sucking of them." Now, 'unter Quatermain, is I right? is it nuggets! Oh, lor!' and he smacked his lips audibly—'great big yellow boys—is it them that you have just been and tumbled across?'

"'No,' I said boldly, 'it isn't'—the cruel gleam in his black eyes altogether overcoming my aversion to the untruth, for I knew that if once he found out what it was that I was sitting on—and by the way I have heard of rolling in gold being spoken of as a pleasant process, but I certainly do not recommend anybody who values comfort to try sitting on it—I should run a very good chance of being 'handspiked' before the night was over.

"'If you want to know what it was, Mr. Tom,' I went on with my politest air, although in agony from the nugget underneath—for I hold it always best to be polite to a man who is so ready with a handspike—'my boy and I have had a slight difference of opinion, and I was enforcing my view of the matter upon him; that's all.'

"'Yes, Mr. Tom,' put in Harry, beginning to weep, for Harry was a smart boy, and saw the difficulty we were in, 'that was it—I halloed because father beat me.'

"'Well, now, did yer, my dear boy—did yer? Well, all I can say is that a played-out old claim is a wonderful queer sort of place to come to for to argify at ten o'clock of night, and what's more, my sweet youth, if ever I should 'ave the argifying of yer'—and he leered unpleasantly at Harry—'yer won't 'oller in quite such a jolly sort o' way. And now I'll be saying good-night, for I don't like disturbing of a family party. No, I ain't that sort of man, I ain't. Good-night to yer, 'unter Quatermain—good-night to yer, my argified young one;' and Mr. Tom turned away disappointed and prowled off elsewhere, like a human jackal, to see what he could thieve or kill.

"'Thank goodness!' I said, as I slipped off the lump of gold. 'Now then, do you get up, Harry, and see if that consummate villain has gone.' Harry did so, and reported that he had vanished towards Pilgrims' Rest, and then we set to work, and very carefully, but trembling with excitement, with our hands hollowed out all the space of ground into which I had struck the pick. Yes, as I hoped, there was a regular nest of nuggets, twelve in all, running from the size of a hazel-nut to that of a hen's egg, though of course the first one was much larger than that. How they all came there nobody can say; it was one of those extraordinary freaks, with stories of which, at any rate, all people acquainted with alluvial gold-mining will be familiar. It turned out afterwards that the American who sold me the claim had in the same way made his pile—a much larger one than ours, by the way—out of a single pocket, and then worked for six months without seeing colour, after which he gave it up.

"At any rate, there the nuggets were, to the value, as it turned out afterwards, of about twelve hundred and fifty pounds, so that after all I took out of that hole four hundred and fifty pounds more than I put into it. We got them all out and wrapped them up in a handkerchief, and then fearing to carry home so much treasure, especially as we knew that Mr. Handspike Tom was on the prowl, made up our minds to pass the night where we were—a necessity which, disagreeable as it was, was wonderfully sweetened by the presence of that handkerchief full of virgin gold, which represented the interest of my lost half-sovereign.

"Slowly the night wore away, for with the fear of Handspike Tom before my eyes I did not dare to go to sleep, and at last the dawn came blushing down the sombre ways of night. I got up and watched its perfect growth, till it opened like a vast celestial flower upon the eastern sky, and the sunbeams began to spring in splendour from mountain-top to mountain-top. I watched it, and as I did so it flashed upon me, with a complete conviction that I had not felt before, that I had had enough of gold-mining to last me the rest of my natural life, and I then and there made up my mind to clear out of Pilgrims' Rest and go and shoot

buffalo towards Delagoa Bay. Then I turned, took the pick and shovel, and although it was a Sunday morning, woke up Harry and set to work to see if there were any more nuggets about. As I expected, there were none. What we had got had lain together in a little pocket filled with soil that felt quite different from the stiff stuff round and outside the pocket. There was not another trace of gold. Of course, it is possible that there were more pocketfuls somewhere about, but all I have to say is I made up my mind that, whoever found them, I should not; and, as a matter of fact, I have since heard that that claim has been the ruin of two or three people, as it very nearly was the ruin of me.

"'Harry,' I said presently, 'I am going away this week towards Delagoa to shoot buffalo. Shall I take you with me, or send you down to Durban?'

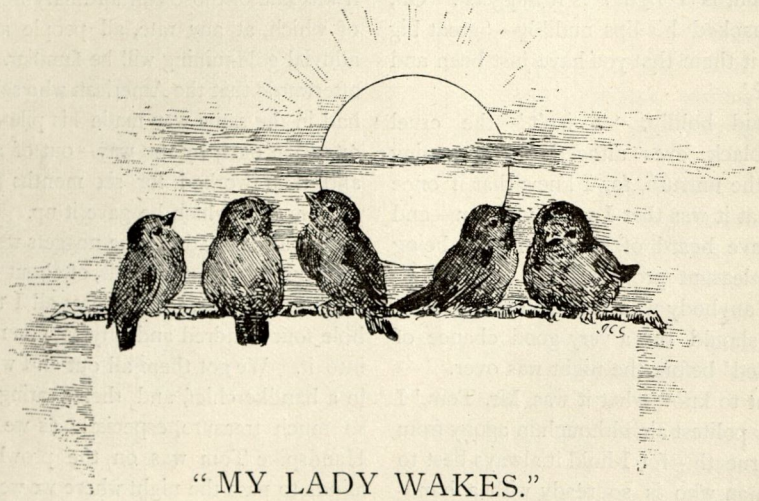
"'Oh, take me with you, father,' begged Harry, 'I want to kill a buffalo!'

"'And supposing that the buffalo kills you instead?' I asked.

"'Oh, never mind,' he said gaily, 'there are lots more where I came from.'

"I rebuked him for his flippancy, but in the end I consented to take him."

(*To be continued.*)



"MY LADY WAKES."

When my Lady sleeps, the sun
  Hides his golden face—
Starry flowers one by one
  Darken in their place—
Silently the pale moon cold
  O'er the mountain creeps,
Lonely is the world and old,
  When my Lady sleeps.

When my Lady wakes, the sky
  Suddenly grows bright—
Flash a hundred wings on high
  Welcoming the light—
While the wild bird all the day
  Sweetest music makes,
And the world is young and gay
  When my Lady wakes.

See where in her downy nest
  Now my Lady lies,
From her sweet unruffled rest
  Too content to rise;—
Nay, look up, laugh back the light
  Through the world that breaks!
So,—good-bye to sleep and night;
  See!—my Lady wakes.

MARY MACLEOD.