

A SOUTH AFRICAN CRIME.

'You black rascal, I gave you out enough wood to last you two more days! You've been selling it for snuff. If I find you at such games, the only wood you will get will be about your back.'

'You lie, boss!' replied the gaunt Kaffir, in a deep, guttural voice. 'You lie!' he repeated, with a smile which showed that he meant no offence, but simply used the one English form of denial that he knew.

This Kaffir was employed as a digger in one of the South African diamond mines, where all the native labourers are called

'boys.' Besides their wages, they receive wood for cooking purposes. Now wood is very scarce and costly there, hence the 'bosses, who are usually 'Britishers,' are apt to suspect the boys of making away fraudulently with the expensive fire wood.

The man who accused this particular Kaffir was the managing partner of a firm of four Englishmen, who supposed themselves to be 'gentlemen,' and were commonly regarded as such by their neighbours at the diggings. They had come out some months earlier to seek their fortunes in diamond-mining, but the sequel proved them willing to gain money by almost any means, honest or atrocious, as the case might be.

Up to this time they had suffered that pernicious run of luck which is almost worse than no luck at all. They had put nearly all their capital in one 'bole,' from which their boys seldom brought them a diamond till the owners were on the point of giving up in despair. Encouraged by a find at least, the Englishmen would put in more money, only to experience another long succession of profitless days, followed at the last moment by a find that induced them to venture for a month longer.

So 'the luck' had gone till nearly their whole capital had melted away, and they had come to speak of the 'hole' as the 'sepulchre.' Probably their Kaffirs had been secreting and stealing the diamonds as fast as they found them, shrewdly giving the bosses just enough to keep them investing their money for the benefit of their boys.

As the manager continued to accuse and threaten this particular Kaffir violently, and as the Kaffir continued to answer unsmilingly, 'You lie, boss, you lie!' the three other partners of this firm of 'gentlemen' came to the sound of the discussion.

'Get back to your work!' roared the managing partner. As the boy ran away the manager said, petulantly:

'I say, you fellows! I wish we hadn't arranged to go on with this beggarly sepulchre for another month. Here's half the time gone, and the same old game. All the eggs in one basket and no luck. I wish we had put our last pile in the wood-cutting business, as the doctor suggested.'

'Not too late yet,' said the doctor, who was out of the quartette.

'No, why should it be? Wood cutting appears to pay those five fellows uncommonly well. I'll bet they're making sixty pounds a week. I wish some new chums would come along and buy us out, and let us have a turn in the wood trade.'

Within a range of forty miles not a stick of wood was to be found—nothing but the bare and scorched *veldt*, or plain. Hence fuel had to be transported from afar with great labour, and it was in this transportation that the manager and the doctor wished to engage. With them the two others did not agree.

'Oh, bother the wood!' said Merwyn. 'Get the stuff and make it go as far as possible—that's all I want to do in the wood trade.'

'There's more in the wood trade than appears,' said the doctor. 'We ought to look into it. I'd like to try it, anyway.'

'What do you mean by there being more in it than appears?' said Merwyn.

'Well, I've thought about that Wood Supplying Association for a long time. I've never been able to make out clearly what they really do for their money. My belief is that wood cutting is not their only occupation.'

'Gammon! Why?'

'Where do they get their diamonds?' said the doctor, laying his finger to the side of his nose and looking profound.

'Do you suppose they have found diggings that they keep to themselves?'

'I don't know. That's one possible explanation. But diamonds they certainly get somewhere. They were the first men I met after I came here. I suppose they took me for a globe-trotter, as my garments still had a tinge of Pall Mall. One of them was anxious to supply me with specimen diamonds. Where do they get those stones?'

'Buy them for speculation,' said Merwyn.

'No, they do not buy. I've inquired. They never buy a stone on this Kopje. So

I say again, Where do they get the diamonds? Well, if things don't change for the better with us soon, I'll renew my acquaintance with those wood-dealers, and give them the chance to choose between opposition or taking us into partnership.'

With this the conference ended, and the partners strolled away to their respective posts for watching their Kaffirs. As overlookers their duties were principally three: First, to keep the boys at work; second, to prevent the boys secreting 'finds' instead of bringing them to the managing partner; third, to sort the diamonds brought in.

The wood firm whose doings were thus discussed had been the object of much speculation before this. But all attempts to become familiar with that close society had failed. The camp continued to wonder the five men, evidently broken down 'awfully' about their steady wood trade to dipping in the diggers' lucky bag, with the chance of a find that would set them up again in their former style of life.

Many men of the camp had volunteered to work for the firm, and others had suggested that they would like a trip with the wood contractors 'just for a change, you know.' But not one of them got either engagement or invitation.

The wood-dealing firm had been at first an ordinary hunting party, who looked in at the camp in the course of their wanderings. About four months later they re-appeared with waggons, and set in at once to carry out plans which were evidently carefully prepared.

Day in and day out, after their discussion about the wood firm, the four diggers worked at their unresponsive claim, steadily getting nearer to bankruptcy, and sturdily postponing its announcement in hopes of a change of luck. Indeed the claim was a very provoking one. Every

FACTS ARE CHIEFS THAT WINNA DING, AND DAURNA BE DISPUTED.—Barna.

Times change, and with them manners and tastes. The unimpeachable evidence of statistics of trade tell us that the people really appreciate a good and pure article in preference to a dear and inferior one. This has never been so clearly demonstrated as in the records of the Customhouse.

In 1895 Chinese Tea made its first appearance in New Zealand. That year the quantity imported from all sources was 4,442,867lb, of which

CHINA supplied 2,987,661lb, or 66 2/3 per cent. India supplied 150,640lb, or 3 1/2 per cent. CEYLON supplied 493lb or 0.01 per cent.

That insignificant little shipment to this colony was so appreciated that people asked for more—and got it.

5 years later (1899) the imports stood thus:—

CHINA supplied 376,240lb, or 25 1/2 per cent. India supplied 667,302lb, or 17 per cent. CEYLON supplied 363,137lb or 9 3/4 per cent.

The total imports for that year from all sources were 3,449,165lb.

It was this year that Suratera Tea was introduced, and became a boon and a blessing to humanity. How it has established itself in the homes of the colony, he seen by the manner in which it has displaced all rivals, and materially assisted to drive China teas out of consumption. In 1896

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I have known instances in which most of these symptoms were present in one patient. As a rule a great many are present. In no case are many absent.

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