

month it yielded some trifling diamond, just enough to keep them from abandoning the wretched speculation, but never enough to yield a sum that would enable them to cry quits and supply themselves for some other venture.

When the month ended the usual miserable find turned up and found its way to the Diamond Kooper down the street, just in time to provide the means of struggling on.

It was particularly painful to the managers to have to pass a fair proportion of the find's value over to that strictly business like wood firm, whose representative insisted on cash in advance of delivery.

During the previous week the diggers had not bought much wood, because their boys had absconded in such numbers that few were left to supply with fuel.

Why were the boys running away more frequently than usual? The doctor especially pondered this problem, but he was too inexperienced to hit upon the true reason just yet. The head boy's story that the absconders were homestead did not appear to be good enough. Certainly the Kaffir were better fed and warmed at the mines than they were likely to be at home. It did not occur to the doctor that they might make home more comfortable with the proceeds of stolen diamonds.

One fine day about this time a visiting wagon-train from beyond the Transvaal brought an unfortunate native into camp. He had been picked up about four days off, starving and suffering from a bullet wound in the shoulder. Of this wound he would give no account.

When he found out in which direction the party was journeying he had fought hard to get away, half-delirious though he was. When eventually safely landed in the hospital hut, the poor wretch sought the darkest corner, and effaced himself as

much as possible, as though fearful of some impending punishment.

In the course of the day the only doctor on the field—he of the diamond firm—heard of the wounded Kaffir, and strolled down to the hospital hut, which was also the prison, in front of which many a boy had been flogged for not giving up hands to their masters. Having opened the heavily-padded door, the doctor peered round for his patient.

No sooner did the Kaffir catch sight of the visitor than he started up with a howl of fright, and made a determined rush for the door, where his weakness brought him down insensible.

In a moment the doctor, in his strictest professional capacity, was by the Kaffir's side. Before the wounded man had recovered his consciousness, the bullet had been cut out from close under the skin of his back. This put the poor wretch in comparative comfort as he lay on the heap of sacks which did duty for a bed. There the doctor left him, and after carefully relocking the door went on his way in search of some medicines which he found would be required.

Arrived at his tent the doctor put the bullet on the old packing case that served as a common table. Then he gathered up what he wanted, and set out again for the hospital or prison hut.

This time the Kaffir did not attempt to escape, though his terrified aspect showed that he expected some awful retribution.

'Strange!' thought the doctor. 'Perhaps he expects the usual Boer treatment, and thinks that we are uncommonly slow in putting him to torture, or no—perhaps it is the place that frightens him. If he ever worked on these claims he must have seen diamond-stealers flogged outside that door. Oh, now I understand!'

The doctor peered into the Kaffir's terrified face.

'Yes, by Jove, I do know him! If he's not one of our runaway boys I'm a Dutchman. I suppose he expects me to have him flogged for desertion.'

As the doctor did not resent the man's fight, he addressed all his skill to the wound. Soon the Kaffir made up his mind that he was not suspected of the robbery which had really been the motive of his desertion. He had taken diamonds from the mine, and sold them. His late employers were too inexperienced to be aware that a 'boy' seldom decamped without a diamond smuggled away in some tight knot of his waist cloth.

'Digger law' forbade the possession of diamonds by any black man, and cruelly punished every ascertained infraction of this rule.

Possibly the Kaffir was affected to remorse by the compassion which the doctor seemed to bestow; perhaps he was afraid of being searched, and thought it safer to yield his booty voluntarily. At any rate he tore to pieces a hard knot in his skin girdle, and let fall a noble diamond that flashed a bright course right across the dark clay floor of the hut.

In a moment the doctor grasped the situation, and picked up the sparkling beauty so strangely returned to its owners. Then, feeling rather more inclined to shake the thief's hand than give him over to his floggers, he put him back kindly on the sacks, and hurried off to share the good news with his chums.

He found them in solemn conclave, minutely inspecting some object that they passed from one to the other.

'What! Got a stone worth looking at at last?' cried the doctor, jumping at conclusions. 'Then luck is changing with a rush! See, here's a beauty for you! Let me see yours!'

Then, in exchange for the gem he gave them, he received the bullet he had left on the table.

'Why does this interest you?' asked the doctor, twiddling the bullet.

'So queer to find it here,' said Merwyn. 'Oh, I put it on the table,' said the doctor, and told them the story.

'Very strange,' said Merwyn. 'The rifle that fired that bullet is an old friend of mine. I'd swear to that ammunition anywhere. Bad times made me sell my shooting gear, and the man who bought the gun that carries that sort of ball is Thompson of the wood firm. Bless him for the lucky shot that brought back that sparkler.'

'If that's the case, the shot may turn out more lucky still,' added the doctor, after a few moments' deep thought, 'that is, if you chaps are not too scrupulous.'

'Ready for anything,' said Merwyn. 'Well, let me have the stone, the bullet and three days' leave, and when I return I shall have something that will put us all in fair way of getting on the home visiting list again.'

'What do you mean?' 'Never mind. Let me alone. Work the stone as capital, and trust to me for a proper investment.'

The issue was not long in doubt. The stone was handed over, and the next morning the doctor was gone.

A week later any one who pleased might jump the deserted 'sepulchre.' Its owners had somehow or other joined the wood-

cutters, and to all appearance deserted diamond-digging for steady industry.

So camp affairs rolled on for upwards of a year, and Kaffirs came and Kaffirs absconded apocryphally as of old.

At last a day came when the auctioneer had a grand sale, no less than the entire plant of the dissolving wood firm. This was knocked down at a bargain to some speculative strangers jointly with two of the retiring firm; and the new lot set in to improve the business if possible.

They did so with a vengeance, for in less than four months the entire staff were in jail with a good chance of being lynched by claim-holders from all parts.

In plain words the firm's real 'business' had been discovered. It consisted of way-laying absconding Kaffirs, and relieving them of the diamonds they had stolen, in the certainty that they would not dare to complain. How many 'boys' the knives had found it necessary to murder was not to be ascertained.

The trial was a singular one. No charge against the prisoners could be sustained in law. They had certainly robbed black thieves of stolen diamonds, but the gems had never been seen by their true owners. Hence none of these could swear to their property. No Kaffir could be found to appear against the 'wood company.' There-

fore the rascally 'gentlemen' laughed defiantly at those who arrested them.

But though they escaped from court, they did not so easily get away from the vigilance committees organized by the camp. A handsome coat of tar and feathers was given to each rogue, and all were finally fairly kicked out of the company of honest men. But the original sale had long escaped to England, where they thought they would go scot-free. Fortunately the story was well circulated there, and every man concerned ultimately suffered exposure and disgrace.

W. B. CHURCHWARD.


Prompt.—'May I kiss you?' 'No, Mr Simpson; I don't feel well enough acquainted.' (Interesting pause.) 'There, now do you feel well enough acquainted?' 'Yes, George.'

'I must have been a fool when I married,' said little Tompkins, glaring fiercely at his wife. 'Certainly, my dear,' said Mrs Tompkins sweetly. 'It couldn't come on so badly all in two years, could it?'

'There are six necessities, you know, for a happy marriage.' 'What are they?' 'First, a good husband.' 'And the others?' 'The other five are money.'

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LIST OF SUCCESSSES FOR THE YEAR 1896-7.

Four Boys passed the Matriculation Examination.

Four Boys passed the Senior Civil Service Examination.

Nine Boys passed the Junior Civil Service Examination, two of whom gained the 18th and 38th places in New Zealand on a list of 233 successful candidates.

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