

**CLASSICS TO GO**

**KATE MEREDITH  
FINANCIER**

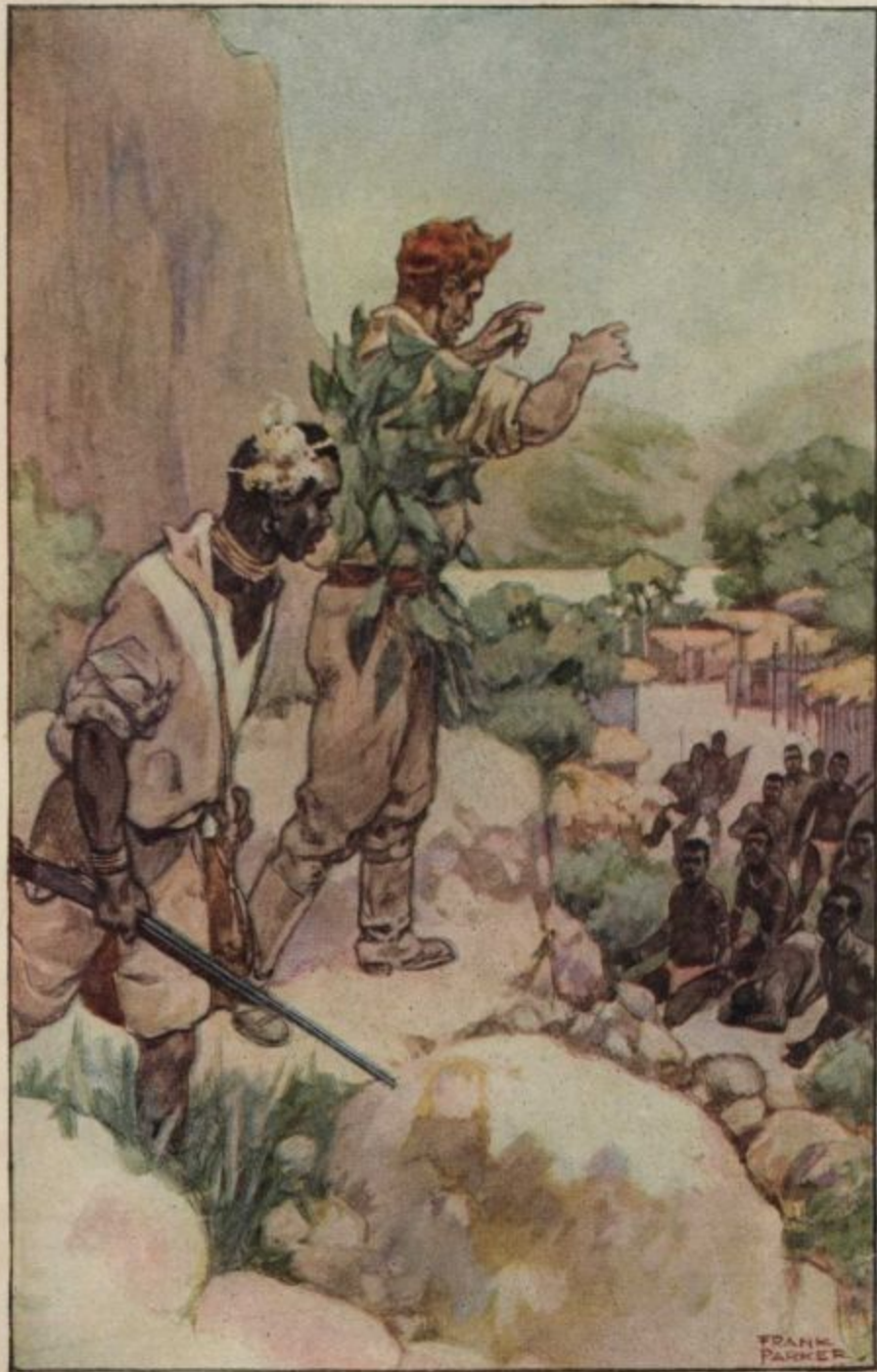


**CHARLES JOHN CUTCLIFFE WRIGHT HYNE**

**Kate Meredith**

**Financier**

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They explained in bold, clear tones that they were the chief ju-ju men of all Africa. Page 224.

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**were the chief ju-ju men of all Africa.**

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[He fired on and on with deadly speed and accuracy, till the heated barrels of the repeaters burned Laura Slade's hands](#)

Then, as the crocodile jumped once more, he threw up the rifle and shot it under the left foreleg, where the protective plates are absent

She gazed her fill on this very crude presentment of George Carter

(FACSIMILE PAGE OF MANUSCRIPT FROM KATE MEREDITH FINANCIER)

"Mighty bad beach today," Captain  
Lunge grumbled, shunted the binoculars  
across to the Purser.

M<sup>r</sup> Bulgaries tossed his cigarette  
over the lee rail, & tucked a sheet of  
paper into his mouth so as to have  
two spare hands. Day had ten minutes  
before glared up as an oily swell-wishing  
sea of bottle-green. Dew lay in fat  
gleamy spots on the deck-planks & highlight  
frames, foretelling in clear prophecy  
another spell of scalding wet African  
sunshine. Out a mile out from the bellowing  
cut on the beach, the M'poso buttocked

Sullen on the swell, with engines rmy off,  
e.g. Eclipse type.

**(Facsimile Page of Manuscript from KATE MEREDITH  
FINANCIER)**

## CHAPTER I

### A WEST COAST WELCOME

"Mighty beach to-day!" grumbled Captain Image, and handed binoculars across to the purser.

Mr. Balgarnie tossed his cigarette over the lee rail and tucked a sheaf of papers into his mouth so as to have two spare hands. Day had ten minutes before glared up over an oily swell-writhing sea of bottle-green; dew lay in fat greasy gouts on the deck planks and the skylight frames, foretelling in clear prophecy another spell of scalding West African sunshine; and a mile out from the crashing, bellowing surf that smoked along the beach, the S.S. *M'poso* buttocked sullenly over the swells, with engines rung off, and sweating firemen on the top of the fiddley, slewing ventilators to catch a flavor of the breeze.

"They've seen us, sir, at the factory," said Mr. Balgarnie. "All the boys are out working cargo, and there's old Swizzle-Stick Smith sucking his eternal pipe and hustling them with a chiquot. I can catch the glint of his eyeglass. Wonder how long that man's been out on the Coast? Must be a matter of twenty years now by all accounts since he had his last run home. He's found the right kind of ju-ju to dodge fever-palaver, anyhow. They say he's a lazy old beach-comber as a general thing, but he's up bright and early this morning."

"Wouldn't you rouse out in a hurry if you only saw a Christian steamboat once in three months at the oftenest? I told the second mate to make fast the whistle string to the bridge rail when he judged he was five miles off the old sinner's beach, and I guess Swizzle-Stick Smith jumped slap through his mosquito bar at the first toot. See those



pyjamas he's wearing? He bought them at the forecastle shop aboard here just six months ago."

"Blue, with a pink stripe, so they are. This is a rare good glass of yours, sir. Yes, I remember Chips telling me. Three pairs he got at nine bob a pair. Wouldn't pay a sixpence more. And tried to get a bottle of Eno thrown in as a make-weight. Phew! but this day's going to be a ringtailed scorcher. Look at the mist clearing away from those hills at the back already."

Captain Image stuffed a pipe and lit it. "It's a murdering bad beach to-day," he repeated. "Always is when there's a few tons of cargo waiting for me to get commission on."

The purser touched no cargo commission, and so had but small sympathy for cargo gathering. "I see old Swizzle-Stick's making his boys run down the oil casks into the surf. They'll never swim them through. Rather a pity, isn't it, sir, to stay on here and let them try? They're bound to get half of them stove at the very least."

"That's his palaver. I missed calling here last round. There was a swell like a cliff that day; but then there always is a bad beach along this run of the Coast; and so he should have double lot of cargo ready for me. There'll be oil and there'll be rubber, and I shouldn't wonder but what he's a few bags of kernels as well. I bet that factory on the beach there is just bulging with cargo. It ought to tally up to quite fifty tons, and I'm not going to have some other captain snapping up old Swizzle-Stick Smith's trade if I know it. Balgarnie, my lad, I'd the straight tip given me from O'Neill and Craven's in Liverpool when I was home. If we don't make it handy to call at their factories along this Coast, the Hamburg boats will. They've shipped a new director or something at O'Neill and Craven's—K. O'Neill

he signs himself—and that man intends to make things hum."

"My Whiskers!" said the Purser. "I clean forgot. We've a new clerk for O'Neill and Craven's here at Malla-Nulla. It's that red-haired young chap, Carter, in the second class."

"Last three red-haired passengers I knew all pegged out within three months of being put ashore. Color of the hair seems to counteract the effects of drugs. Purser, I'll bet you just two cocktails Carter's planted before we're here again next trip."

"It's on," said Mr. Balgarnie, "and I shall remember it. The young chap's made me a picture frame for my room as good as you could buy in a shop, and he's built the Doc some barbed arrows just like those Kasai ones the old chief brought along from the Congo when he was on the Antwerp run. He's a handy young fellow."

"That doesn't get over the red hair, Purser. You'll lose that cocktail. Bet you another cocktail, if you like, he gets spilt in the surf getting ashore."

Mr. Balgarnie winked pleasantly. "Then we'll consider that last one lost already." He put his head inside the chart-house and called out the captain's Krooboy steward—"Brass-Pan?"

"Yessar."

"We fit for two cocktail."

"Savvy."

"You lib for my room, you fetch dem gin-bottle, an' give him to bar steward."

"Savvy."

"Well, what are you waiting for? Get along, you bushman, one-time ... That's a poor boy I'm afraid you've got, Captain."

"Pipe-clays shoes very neatly," said Captain Image. "Oh, you've brought those papers for me to sign. Well, come into the chart-house, Purser, and we'll get them through. Hope that fool of a boy will bring the cocktails quick. These early morning chills are dangerous unless you take the proper preventives."

Meanwhile the brazen day had grown, and work proceeded at a forced speed both on the steamer and on the beach. Ashore, the lonely factory bustled with evil-scented negroes, who strained at huge white-ended palm oil puncheons. On the *M'poso* a crew of chattering Krooboys busied themselves aft, and presently under the guidance of a profane third mate a brace of surf-boats jerked down towards the water, the tackles squealing like a parcel of angry cats as they rendered through the blocks. The boats spurned away into the clear sea before the steamer's rusty iron side crashed down onto them: the Krooboys perched themselves ape-like on the gunwales, paddle in hand: and in the stern of each straddled a noisy headman, in billycock and trousers, straining and swaying at the steering oar.

The headman was in charge, and the well-spiced official English of ship-board ceased. The speech in the boats was one of the barbaric tongues of savage Africa. But the work they got through and the skill they showed exceeded by far that which could have been put forth by any crew of white men. Indeed, in his more pious moments, Captain Image, in common with other mariners of his kind, firmly believed

that God had invented certain of the West African Coast tribes for the sole purpose of handling the boats of the Liverpool oil tanks on surf-smitten beaches.

Now, Captain Image was not in the least degree a snob, and he did not take even first-class passengers on their face value. As he would explain to intimates, he was not out on the Coast for his health; he very much wished to be able some day to retire on a competency, and grow cabbages outside of Cardiff; and so he dispensed his affability on a nicely regulated scale. If a man could influence cargo in the direction of the *M'poso*, Captain Image was ready at all times to extend to him the rough red hand of friendship, and to supply gin cocktails and German champagne till conversation flowed into the desired commercial channel. He called this casting bread upon the waters, and could always rely on getting the prime cost back in commission. But he was no man to waste either his good liquor or his pearls of speech on a mere fifty-pound-a-year clerk, with a red head, who would very possibly be dead before the *M'poso's* next call, and who certainly could influence no cargo for the next two years to come. So from the day they left Liverpool to the day when the steamer's forefoot scraped at her cable off Malla-Nulla beach, Captain Image had not condescended to offer that particular second-class passenger so much as a morning nod.

But Captain Image was kindly enough in the West African way, and when he had drunk his morning cocktail and gone through the Purser's papers, he came out of the chart-house again and produced from his pyjama pocket a half-filled box of pills.

"There, my lad," he said to Carter, as he made the presentation, "you take one of those according to the directions on the lid, when required, and you'll have your

health kept in a repair that will surprise you. Now, mark me well; you'll be tempted with other brands of pills; old Swiz—I mean Mr. Smith, your boss, is a regular crank on drugs; but as sure as you tip other medicines down into your inside, my pills will get hindered at their proper work, and you'll be knocked over."

"Thanks," said Carter. "But I always understood——"

"I'm sure you did. Now there's one other thing I want to impress on you, my lad. Your duty is to get on, and the way to do that is to scratch up cargo and send it home by the *M'poso*. You see, my lad, I've got more influence with O'Neill and Craven than any other captain on the Coast (though you needn't go and stir up mischief by spreading that about), and if you keep yourself in my memory by the way Malla-Nulla ships cargo by me, I'll let them fully understand at the home office that services like yours want a big raise in salary. There, don't you bother to thank me, my lad, and just you stow that box of pills where they won't get lost if you're spilt going ashore through that surf. It's a mighty bad beach to-day."

"Ah, morning, Carter," said Mr. Balgarnie as he bustled up. "Got all your things up on deck? It's no concern of mine, of course, but if there are any little odds and ends you want, such as socks, or Florida water, or a mosquito bar, I believe Chips and the bos'n keep a sort of surreptitious shop somewhere in the fore-castle where you could fill up your stores."

"Much obliged," said the passenger, "but I think I've got all I want, or rather all I can afford."

"Remembered to bring donkey-clippers for hair-cutting? No? Well, just as you please. What I really wished to

mention to you was this: when your pay comes in, you'll naturally want little comforts sent out from home, and you won't care to worry any of your friends to get them for you. Now don't you have any qualms about making use of me. Just say what you want, and I'll get it and bring it out." Mr. Balgarnie winked most pleasantly. "I'm purser here, of course, and have to back up the Company's charges, but I can always make the rates reasonable to oblige a friend. There, good-by, old fellow. The boat's ready to take you off."

A surf boat swung dizzily up and down at the guess-warp alongside and the two yellow gladstone bags on its floor seemed ludicrously out of place beside the savage paddlers. Carter was conscious that his heart worked up to an unpleasant activity; but he carried a serene face, dropped to his knees in the gangway, and began with unaccustomed feet to clamber down the Jacob's ladder. He noted without disturbance that he was daubing coal dust and orange-colored palm oil onto his hands and white drill clothes in the process; but he had a mind now which entirely disregarded the trivial; all his interest was fixed upon the boat.

"Don't jump too soon."

"Take care you don't drop that new pith hat."

"Mind, don't let the boat come up and squash you."

"Don't flurry the man so. Put your feet in your pocket if you see a shark."

A stream of advice, much of it satirical, pelted him from above. Looking over his shoulder, he saw beneath him the leaping boat and a ring of negro grins. It was these last that stiffened him into action. The surf-boat swooped up sideways, and when it seemed to him that she had reached

the zenith of her leap, he let go the Jacob's ladder and sprang for her.

It is a matter of nice judgment, this determination of the psychological moment for a jump; and the amateur has it not. As a consequence Carter's foot slid on the wet gunwale; he buttocked painfully onto a thwart; and was saved from spinning overboard by rough and ready black fingers. The new pith helmet received its first crack, the white drill clothes were further soiled, and he was left to gather himself out of the slop of water on the bottom of the boat as best he pleased. Already the Krooboy crew were perched ape-like on the gunwales, and stabbing strenuously at the water with trident-headed paddles. The headman straddled in the stern with the muscles standing out in him like nuts, as he sculled with the steering oar.

It had all passed so quickly that the steamer had only accomplished one-half of a roll. The white faces that he had seen last beside him were now small and far away at the top of an enormously high iron wall, and to their shouts of farewell and fluttering of handkerchiefs he could not bring himself to return more than a curt hand-wave. It seemed to him that he was cut off entirely from white men and white man's territory, and was launched beyond release into West Africa with all its smells and accoutrements.

He settled himself in the mid thwart of the surf-boat with the water on the floor flowing merrily in and out of his pipe-clayed shoes. Whatever a white man may feel, he always assumes coolness and indifference before the black, and Carter picked up the instinct of his race.

His progress shoreward had two distinct phases. At one time he and the boat lay in a watery ravine with high sides towering above him, and no view save of sleek bottle-green

water and cobalt sky overhead. The next moment he was expressed upwards on to an eminence and there before him lay landscape and seascape of most pleasant qualities. At these last moments of exaltation, he saw a glaring beach set along the sea's edge, carrying white factory buildings, and backed in by an orderly wall of green.

He saw also palm-oil puncheons being brought off, and an interest in the work bit him immediately. Here was the commodity which (bar death) would for years to come be his chiefest intimate. Between eclipses of the rollers, he watched every stage of the work—the great white-ended barrels rolled down the glaring beach, naked savages swimming them through the surf with unimaginable skill, a green painted surf-boat at anchor outside the breakers making them fast to a buoyed hawser. He saw another hawser-load being heaved out to the steamer's winch, with the great casks popping about like a string of gigantic cherries. Already on the *M'poso* he had seen other puncheons howked on board by a steam-crane which was driven by a one-eared Krooboy.

He had grasped this much of his new trade when sight seemed to grow misty to him, and his body was chilled with an unpleasant perspiration. It is one thing to take one's regular meals on a fine-sized steamboat, whatever weather may befall; it is quite another to do one's voyaging in a leaping, lancing, dancing, wallowing surf-boat. Few men take their first surf-boat ride over a bad roll without being violently seasick, and Carter was no exception to the normal law.

In a hazy sort of way he noted that the paddlers had stopped their song and their monotonous effort, and he was seized with a tremendous desire to hurry them forward and get himself and his gladstone bags planted on the stable



beach. Ahead of them were roaring, spouting breakers, which it seemed impossible for any boat to live through; but waiting outside their fringe was even more intolerable.

"Oh, get on! For Heaven's sake, get on!" he wanted to shout, but almost to his astonishment pride of race kept him grimly silent. He had never felt before the whole debt that is owing to a white skin.

The headman in the stern-sheets sculled now and again with his oar to keep the boat head on to the roll, and between whiles chattered nervously. The Krooboy paddlers on the gunwales rested on their paddles and scratched themselves. Roller after roller went by, flinging the boat up towards heaven, sucking her back again to the sea grass below, with a rocking motion that was horrible beyond belief. Carter felt the color ebb from his cheeks; he wondered with a grisly humor if his head was paling also.

But at last the headman delivered himself of a shriek, and a galvanic activity seized the paddlers. They stabbed the water with their trident-shaped blades, and stabbed and stabbed again. The surf-boat was poised on the crest of a great mound of water, and they were straining every sinew to keep her there. But the water motion travelled more swiftly than the clumsy boat. She slid down the slope, still paddling frantically, and the following wave lifted her rudely by the tail. She reared dizzily almost to the vertical, the headman at the apex of the whole structure keeping his perch with an ape's dexterity.

She just missed being upset that time, and part of the water which she had shipped was flung over the gunwales as she righted. But she floated there half swamped: labor with what frenzy they choose, the iron-muscled Krooboys

could not keep her under command; and the next roller sent the whole company of them flying.

There is one piece of advice constantly dinned into a white man's ear on the West Coast. "If in a surf-boat you see the boat boys jump overboard, jump yourself also if you do not wish to have the boat on top of you." Profoundly sound advice it is. But it has the disadvantage of presupposing capability for obedience, and if (as frequently happens) the passenger is dizzy and weak from sudden seasickness, then the leap may be neither prompt nor well-aimed.

As to where Carter's fault occurred, I have no certain information. The headman shrieked an order in his own barbarous tongue; the boat boys took to water on either side like so many black frogs; the boat spilt, flinging far two yellow gladstone bags and one limp passenger in soiled white ducks; and, look how one would into that boiling hell of broken water, no red head appeared.

On the glaring beach Swizzle-Stick Smith broke off from his overseeing for a moment, and limped down into the smoke of the surf. He had a chiquot in his hand, which is a whip made of the most stinging part of the hippopotamus, and with it he slashed venomously at every black form that scrambled out of the brine.

He screamed at them in their own tongue. "Get back, you black swine! Get back, and fetch out my clerk. If you drown my clerk, I will drown you, too. My last clerk died a year ago, and they have got me no other out here since. I won't lose this one. Back, you bushmen!"

The chiquot had many terrors to the Krooboys, the water few. It was as much out of forgetfulness as anything else

that they had not brought their passenger to shore with them. Besides, how were they to know that he could not swim as well as themselves (that is, about as well as a seal can swim)? But they were not above striking a bargain for their services. A black head, served upon a white pother of creamy surf, gave tongue.

"Oh, Smith. You give cash, suppose we fit for catch 'im?"

"You lib for beach with my clerk, and I dash you one whole box of gin. Hurry up now, you thieves, or a shark will chop him, or else he'll drown."

Heads disappeared, and many pairs of black heels kicked upwards. The old man hitched together his shabby pyjamas, and stared industriously at the broken water through his eyeglass. "It's all very well for this K. O'Neill to send out letters that the firm is going to double its business," he grumbled, "but if they don't send me men that can get ashore in one piece, how this factory at Malla-Nulla is going to buck up, I can't see. By Jove, they've got him, the beggars. Red-headed chap, too. Well, I might have saved that dash, I'm thinking. Men with red heads never seem to stand the climate here for long. It will be a nuisance if the beggar pegs out within the month, after I've spent a case of gin on him."

It was a very limp and bedraggled Carter that was brought ashore presently by the Krooboys. He was held up by the heels, *more Africano*, to let the Atlantic drain from his inside back into its proper place, but he did not show any sign of consciousness till he had been lifted up and carried to the shelter of the retail store.

Swizzle-Stick Smith limped beside him, puffing at his briar. "Beggars got an arm broken," he commented. "Just

my luck. And K. O'Neill will expect the work to be done just the same. Oh"—he said when the dripping Krooboys had put down his guest on the counter—"so you've concluded to come to your senses again?"

Carter shuddered and slowly opened his eyes. A brown cockroach, horrible with dust, dropped from the rafter above onto his face.

"I'm afraid you've had rather a rough bout of it, landing, my lad. It's a very bad beach to-day. There, don't move. You're all right. You'll feel a bit queer yet."

"The boat upset——"

"It did, most thoroughly. But you're now at Malla-Nulla factory in West Africa, and I bid you welcome. I'm Mr. Smith, your commanding officer. You'd like to lie still for a bit, perhaps?"

"Yes."

"Well, buck up, and you'll soon be all right. You needn't fancy you'll be a candidate for a top-hat and a gun-case yet."

"For a which?"

The trader pointed with his pipe stem across the store to a wooden box full of flintlock trade guns. "That's a gun case. Man's usually too long to fit it comfortably, especially if he's as well-grown as you are. So we knock out one end, and nail on an old top-hat. Then you can plant him in style."

The patient's mouth twitched with the corner of a smile. "A most tidy custom," he said faintly. "But I say, could you

do anything for my arm? Sorry to trouble you, but it's most abominably painful."

"Your arm's broken, worse luck. I'll set it for you when I've got off this cargo."

"I'd rather have a doctor. Will you send off to the *M'poso* for the doctor there, please?"

The old man laughed and polished his eyeglass on a sleeve of his pyjamas. "My lad, you don't understand. You've left the steamer now, and her doctor's not the kind of fool to risk his own bones trying to get here with the beach as bad as it is to-day. I don't suppose he mistakes you for a millionaire. You came out in the second class, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Then there you are. His responsibility ended when you left the steamer, and ship's doctors don't come ashore on this Coast unless they're sure of touching a big fat fee. Now you must just lie quiet where you are, and bite on your teeth till I've some time for surgery. Trade comes first in West Africa."

With which naked truth, Swizzle-Stick Smith relit his pipe, and went out again into the brazen sunshine, and presently was hustling on the factory boys at their cargo work with his accustomed eloquence and dexterity.

## CHAPTER II INTRODUCES MISS LAURA SLADE

If a white man in a West African factory volunteers details of his previous history, all hearers are quite at liberty to believe or disbelieve, as suits their whim; but if, on the other hand, no word about previous record is offered, Coast etiquette strictly rules that none shall be asked for.

George Carter found even upon the surface of his superior officer at Malla-Nulla factory much that was mysterious. There were moments when Mr. Smith exhibited an unmistakable gentility; but these were rare; and they usually occurred when the pair of them lunched *en tête-à-tête* at 11 o'clock, and Smith had worked off his morning qualm, and had not commenced his afternoon refreshment. With a larger audience he was one part cynic and six parts ruffian; he was admitted to be the most skilful compounder of cocktails on all that section of the West African seaboard; and he sampled his own brews in such quantities, and with such impunity, as gave the lie to all text-books on topical medicine.

His head was bald, and the gray hair on his face and above his ears was either as short as clippers could make it, or else bristled with a two weeks' growth. Day and night he wore more or less shrunken pyjamas, from the neck buttonhole of which a single eyeglass dangled at the end of a piece of new black silk ribbon. Carter guessed his age as somewhere between fifty and fifty-five, and wondered why on earth Messrs. O'Neill and Craven kept such a disreputable old person as the head of what might have been a very prosperous factory.

Indeed, theories on this very point were already lodged in the older man's brain. "It's this new partner, K. O'Neill, that I don't like the sound of," he explained to Carter one day. "By the way, who is he?"

"Don't know. As I told you I was staying with my father at the vicarage, and I was engaged by wire the day before the *M'poso* sailed, and only caught her by the skin of my teeth. There was nobody there to see me off, and on the boat all they could tell me was that 'K.' came into the business when the late head died."

"Old Godfrey, that was"—Swizzle-Stick Smith sighed—"poor old Godfrey O'Neill! He was one of the best fellows going in the old days, not a bit like the usual cut of palm-oil ruffian as we used to call the traders then. And, my God! to think of my coming down to the grade of one of them myself."

Again the subject cropped up when one of their rare mails came in. "Here's expense!" grumbled Swizzle-Stick Smith. "Letters landed at our Monk River factory, and sent on to Mulla-Nulla by special runner. K. O'Neill's orders, the Monk River agent says. In the old days you could always bet on the beach being too bad for the steamer to call twice out of three times, and you weren't pestered with a mail more than once in six months. That's mainly why I've stuck by O'Neill and Craven all these years. Now this new man wants our output of kernels to be doubled by this time next year, and hopes I'll take steps to work up the rubber connection. If I can't see my way to do all this, will I kindly give my reasons in writing, and if necessary forward same by runner to a steamer's calling point, so that reply may be in Liverpool within six weeks at latest. What do you think of that?"

"Oh, I should say it was reasonable enough from the Liverpool point of view."

"Bah! There's not much of the Coast about you." He tore the letters into shreds, and folded these carefully into pipe-lights. "Dear old Godfrey trusted me up to the hilt, and this new fellow's got to learn to do the same, or I shall resign my commission. If he understood anything about running the office, he might know I should do all the work that was good for me."

"I'm sure you do," said Carter civilly. "I'm afraid I'm the slacker. You let me have such an easy time of it whilst my arm was getting well, that I've slid off into lazy ways. I must buck up, and if you'll load the work onto me, Mr. Smith, you'll find I can do a lot more."

Swizzle-Stick Smith dried the perspiration from his eye socket, fixed his glass into a firmer hold, and stared. "Well," he said at last, "*you are* a d—d fool." And there the talk ended.

It was that same day that Carter had his first introduction to Royalty. He was in the retail store—"feteesh," they call it on the Coast—weighing out baskets of palm kernels, measuring calabashes of orange-colored palm oil, judging as best he could the amount of adulterants the simple negro had added to increase the bulk, and apportioning the value in cotton cloth, powder, flintlock guns at twelve and six-pence apiece, and green cubical boxes of Holland gin. Trade proceeded slowly. The interior of the feteesh was a stew of heat and odors, and the white man's elaborate calculations were none of the most glib. To knock some idea of the fairness of these into the black man's skull was a work that required not only eloquence, but also athletic power. The simple savage who



did only one day's shopping per annum was willing always to let the delights of it linger out as long as possible, and all the white man's hustling could not drive the business along at more than a snail's pace.

By Coast custom, work for Europeans starts in those cool hours that know the daybreak, and switches off between eleven and twelve for breakfast; and thereafter siesta is the rule till the sun once more begins to throw a shadow. But on this particular day, when Swizzle-Stick Smith had knocked out his pipe and turned in under his mosquito bar, Carter sluiced a parrafin-can full of water over his red head by way of a final refreshment, and went down once more from the living rooms of the factory to the heat and the odors of the feteesh below.

The sweating customers saw him come and roused up out of the purple shadows, and presently the game of haggle was once more in full swing.

Carter had a natural gift for tongues, and was picking up the difficult Coast languages to the best of his ability, but his vocabulary was of necessity small, and a Krooboy stood by to translate intricate passages into idiom more likely to penetrate the harder skulls. The Krooboy wore trousers and singlet in token of his advanced civilization, and bore with pride the name of White-Man's-Trouble.

There was a glut of customers that baking afternoon. High-scented trade stuffs poured into the factory in pleasing abundance, and bundles of European produce were balanced upon woolly craniums for transportation through bush paths to that wild unknown Africa beyond the hinterland. The new law of K. O'Neill allowed no lingering in the feteesh. Once a customer had been delivered of his goods, and had accepted payment, White-Man's-Trouble

decanted him into the scalding sunshine outside, and bade him hasten upon his ways. K. O'Neill had stated very plainly, in a typewritten letter, that the leakage by theft was displeasing to the directorate in Liverpool, and must be stopped. K. O'Neill understood that the thefts took place after a customer had spent all his cash on legitimate purchase, as then all his savage intelligence was turned to pilfering. Carter, as the man on the spot, recognized the truth of all this, and carried out the instructions to the foot of the letter.

Mr. Smith warned him he would have trouble over it. "Ever since the first factory came down to blight this Coast," Smith explained, "the boys have been allowed to hang around the feteesh and steal what wasn't nailed down. They look upon it in the light of a legitimate discount, and it's grown up into a custom. Now in West Africa you may burn a forest, or blot out a nation, or start a new volcano, and nobody will say very much to you, but if you interfere with a recognized custom, you come in contact with the biggest kind of trouble."

"Still," Carter pointed out, "these orders are definite."

"And you are the kind of fool that goes on the principle of 'obeying orders if you break owners.' Well, go ahead and carry out instructions. I won't interfere with you. I'd rather like to see this cocksure K. O'Neill get a smack in the eye to cure his meddling. And for yourself, keep your weather eye lifting, or some indignant nigger will ram a foot of iron into you. It's the Okky-men I'd take especial care of if I were you. They've got their tails up a good deal more than's healthy just now. I'm told, too, that their head witch doctor wants his war drum redecorated." Mr. Smith grinned—"I don't want to be personal, of course."

"Oh, don't mind me. So far I rather fail to understand what I've got to do with the Okky City war drum."

"You see you carry round with you something that would make the very best kind of heap-too-good ju-ju."

"Still I don't understand."

Swizzle-Stick Smith got up and stretched, and limped across to the door. "It's that red head of yours, my lad," he said over his shoulder as he went out. "Every witch doctor in West Africa that sees it will just itch to have it amongst his ornaments. I'd dye it sky-blue if I were you, just for safety sake."

This of course might be Mr. Smith's delicate irony, or again it might be literally true. Carter had already been long enough in West Africa to know that very unusual and unpleasant things can happen there; but that made no change in his determination. K. O'Neill was perfectly right about the matter; this pilfering ought to be stopped; and he felt convinced that White-Man's-Trouble would help to see that justice was done. That particular Krooboy was thievish himself, certainly, but he had a short way with any fellow African who dared to be light-fingered.

So during all that hot morning, and all that sweltering afternoon, merchant after merchant was shown out into the sunshine, and those who chattered and would not go willingly were assisted by the strong right arm of White-Man's-Trouble.

Just upon the time when siestas generally ended, that is, about four o'clock, there came a burly Okky trader who swaggered up to the factory with five carriers in his train laden down with bags of rubber.

Carter examined the evil smelling stuff, and cut open two or three of the larger round lumps. The gentle savage had put in quite thirty per cent. of sticks, and sand, and alien gum by way of makeweight, and was as petulant as a child at having this simple fraud discovered. He still further disliked the price that was offered; and when it came to making his purchases, and he found that the particular spot-white-on-blue cotton cloth on which he had built up his fancy was out of stock, the remaining rags of his temper were frayed completely. For an unbroken ten minutes he cursed Carter, and Malla-Nulla factory, and an unknown Manchester skipper in fluent Okky, here and there embroidered with a few words of that slave-trader's Arabic, which is specially designed as a comfort for the impatient, and when he had accepted a roll of blue cloth spotted in another pattern, and was invited to leave the feteesh, he held himself to be one of the worst used Africans on the Dark Continent.

Carter, who was tired and hot, signed to his henchman. "Here, fire that ruffian out," he said.

But White-Man's-Trouble affected to hear a summons from outside. "Dat you, Smith? Yessar, I come one-time," said he, and bolted out through the doorway.

"Here you," said Carter to the big Okky-man, "you follow that Krooboy out of here. If I have to tell you a second time, there'll be trouble. Come, now, git."

Carter's command of the native might be faulty, but the grammar of his gestures was correct enough. What, go out of the feteesh before he chose? The Okky-man had no idea of doing such a thing. He lifted his walking spear threateningly, and snarled.

Simultaneously Carter put his right hand on the greasy counter and vaulted. He caught the upraised spear with his other hand before his feet had touched ground, and broke the blade close off by the socket; and a short instant later, when he had found a footing, he carried his weight forward in the same leap, and drove his right against the negro's left carotid, just beneath the ear. The man went down as if he had been pole-axed.

Carter went outside and beckoned to the Okky-man's carriers. "Here, you, come and carry your master outdoors"—the men hesitated—"or I'll start in to handle you next." They did as they were bidden. And thereupon Carter, with his blood now well warmed up, was left free to attend to another matter elsewhere.

A noise of voices in disagreement, and the intermittent sounds of scuffling had made themselves heard from the south side of the factory buildings, and now there were added to these a woman's voice calling in English for some one to help her, and then a sharp, shrill scream of unmistakable distress.

Now, Carter was no knight-errant. He had set up the unknown K. O'Neill as his model, and had told himself daily that he intended to meddle with nothing in West Africa, philanthropic or otherwise, which would not directly tend to the advancement of George Carter; but at the first moment when they were put to the test, all these academic resolutions broke to pieces. He picked up his feet and ran at speed through the sunshine, and as he went a mist seemed to rise up before his eyes which tinged everything red.

He felt somehow as he had never felt before; strangely exhilarated and strangely savage; and when he arrived on

the scene of the disturbance, he was little inclined to weigh the consequences of interference. There was a woman, white-faced and terror-stricken—he could not for the life of him tell whether she was handsome or hideous. Negroes were handling her. On the ground lay a pole hammock, in which presumably she had arrived. In front of her was a fat negro, over whose head a slave held a gaudy gold and red umbrella, and grouped around this fat one were eight or ten negro soldiers, with swords slung over their shoulders, and long flintlock trade guns in their hands.

The whole scene was, as I say, dished up to Carter's eyes in a red mist, and this thinned and thickened spasmodically so that sometimes he could see clearly what he was doing, and at other times he acted like a man bewitched. But presently the red cleared away altogether, and he found himself clutching the fat negro by a twist of the shoulder cloth, and threatening to split his skull with a sword recently carried by one of the man's own escort. The girl sat limp and white on a green case before them, clearly on the edge of a faint, and round them all stood negro carriers and Haûsa soldiery, frozen to inaction by the fat man's danger.

All human noises had ceased. Only the hot insect hum and the cool diapason of the Atlantic surf droned through the silence. From the dull upraised sword blade outrageous sunrays winked and flickered.

Upon this impasse came Swizzle-Stick Smith from the bush side of the white factory buildings, polishing his eyeglass, and limping along at his usual pace, and no faster. He removed his pipe, and wagged it at them.

"Upon my soul a most interesting picture! Just like a kid's fairy tale book. Gallant young knight rescuing