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THE FUGITIVES: THE TYRANT QUEEN OF MADAGASCAR

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Содержание

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Preface

It is almost allowable, I think, to say that this is a true story, for fiction has only been introduced for the purpose of piecing together and making a symmetrical whole of a number of most interesting facts in regard to Madagascar and the terrible persecutions that took place there in the early part and middle of the present century.

I have ventured to modify time and place somewhat, as well as to mix my characters and their deeds a little, in order to suit the conditions of my tale; but in doing so I have striven to avoid exaggeration and to produce a true picture of the state of affairs, at the period treated of, in what may be styled one of the most interesting and progressive islands of the world.

I take this opportunity of thanking the Rev. George Cousins, of the London Missionary Society, and formerly of Madagascar, for kindly supplying me with much valuable information, and of acknowledging myself indebted, among others, to the works of Messrs Sibree, Ellis, and Shaw.

R M Ballantyne.

Harrow-on-the-Hill, 1887.

Chapter One.
Introduces the Chief Actors and a Few Mysteries

Intense action is at all times an interesting object of contemplation to mankind. We therefore make no apology to the reader for dragging him unceremoniously into the middle of a grand primeval forest, and presenting to his view the curious and stirring spectacle of two white men and a negro running at their utmost possible speed, with flashing eyes and labouring chests—evidently running for their lives.

Though very different in aspect and condition, those men were pretty equally matched as runners, for there was no apparent difference in the vigour with which they maintained the pace.

The track or footpath along which they ran was so narrow as to compel them to advance in single file. He who led was a tall agile youth of nineteen or thereabouts, in knickerbocker shooting-garb, with short curly black hair, pleasantly expressive features, and sinewy frame. The second was obviously a true-blue tar—a regular sea-dog—about thirty years of age, of Samsonian mould, and, albeit running for very life, with grand indignation gleaming in his eyes. He wore a blue shirt on his broad back, white ducks on his active legs, and a straw hat on his head, besides a mass of shaggy hair, which, apparently, not finding enough of room on his cranium, overflowed in two brown cataracts down his cheeks, and terminated in a voluminous beard.

The third fugitive was also a young man, and a negro, short, thickset, square, tough as india-rubber, and black as the Emperor of Zahara. Good-humour wrinkled the corners of his eyes, the milk of human kindness played on his thick lips and rippled his sable brow, and intense sincerity, like a sunbeam, suffused his entire visage.

James Ginger—for that was his name, though his friends preferred to call him Ebony—scorned a hat of any kind; his simple costume consisting merely of two garments—canvas trousers and a guernsey shirt.

The sailor wore a cutlass in his belt. Ebony was unarmed. The youthful leader carried a short fowling-piece.

A yell in the far distance, as if from a hundred fiends, told that the pursuers had discovered the trail of the fugitives, and were gaining on them.

“We’ll have to fight for it, doctor,” growled the sailor in a savage tone, “better stop while we’ve got some wind left.”

“The wood seems more open ahead,” replied the youth, “let’s push on a bit further.”

“Hi!” exclaimed the negro in surprise, not unmingled with alarm, as they suddenly emerged on an open space and found themselves on the edge of a stupendous precipice.

The formation of the region was curious. There was a drop in the land, as it were, to a lower level. From their elevated position the three men could see a turbulent river rushing far below, at the base of the cliffs on the edge of which they stood. Beyond lay a magnificent and varied stretch of forest scenery, extending away to the horizon, where the prospect terminated in a blue range of hills. No path was at first visible by which the fugitives could reach the plain below. The precipice was almost perpendicular. They were about to leap recklessly over, and trust to descending by means of an occasional bush or shrub which grew on the rocky face, when the negro uttered one of his falsetto exclamations.

“Hi! here am a track.”

He dashed aside the branches of an overhanging bush, and ran along a narrow path, or ledge, which sloped gently downwards. It was a fearfully giddy position, but this in the circumstances, and to men accustomed to mast-heads and yard-arms, was of small moment. On they ran, at a more cautious pace indeed, but still with anxious haste, until about a quarter of the distance down the face of the

precipice, when, to their horror, they came to a turn in the path where it suddenly ended. A mass of rock, apparently detached from the cliff by recent rains, had fallen from above, and in its thundering descent had carried away fully ten yards of the path into the stream below, where they could see its shattered fragments in the rushing river. The gap in front of them was absolutely impassable. On the right, the cliff rose sheer upwards. On the left, it went sheer down.

A sort of groan escaped from the doctor.

"What's to be done now, Hockins?" he asked sharply, turning to the sailor.

"Die!" replied Hockins, in a tone of savage bitterness.

"Stuff an' nonsense! we no' die yit," said the negro, pointing to the snake-like branches of a climbing plant which, spreading over the naked face of the cliff, turned into a crevice and disappeared round a jutting point.

"Will it bear our weight, lad?" asked the sailor doubtfully.

"It leads to nothing that I can see," said the young doctor, "and would only ensure our being dashed to pieces instead of speared."

"Nebber fear, massa Breezy. Dis not de fus' time I's hoed troo de forests. If you stop here you die. James Gingah he go on an' lib."

"Go on then, Ebony; we will follow," returned Breezy, slinging his gun on his shoulder so as to leave his hands free.

A yell of disappointment on the cliffs above accelerated their movements. It was evident that the pursuers had come out on the open plateau, but had not observed the path by which they descended. As it was certain, however, that they would find it in a few minutes, Ebony sprang upon the creeping plant and clambered along its tortuous limbs like a monkey. Young Breezy followed, and Hockins came last.

The plant was tough. It stood the strain well. If it had given way, death on the jagged rocks below would have been the result. But death by savage spears was behind them, so they did not hesitate. A few seconds and all three had passed round the jutting rock and into the crevice, where they were completely hidden from the view of any one standing on the path they had just left.

In the crevice they found a ledge or platform sufficiently large to admit of their standing together. They had scarcely obtained a footing on it when another shout announced that the pursuer had traced their trail to the head of the track.

We know not, reader, whether you have ever experienced that heart-melting qualm which comes over one at the sudden and unexpected approach of what, at least, appears to be death. If you have, you will be able to understand the intense relief and thankfulness felt by the fugitives when, safe from immediate danger, they listened to their pursuers as they held excited conversation at the end of the broken track. Not knowing the language they could not, of course, understand what was said, and being just beyond the range of vision—owing to the jutting cliff that concealed them—they could not see what their pursuers were doing, but they heard a suggestive crash and a sharp exclamation.

Had they been able to see, they would have understood the situation well enough without the aid of language.

Two of the natives, who were dark-skinned and almost naked savages, had come to the place where the track had been broken away. They gazed at the profound depths on the left and the inaccessible cliffs on the right, and then glanced at each other in solemn surprise.

No doubt the creeping plant would in a few seconds have attracted special attention, had not an incident turned their minds in another direction. While the foremost savage was craning his neck so as to see as far round the projecting cliff as possible, the piece of rock on which his advanced foot was dislodged, and he had the narrowest possible escape from plunging headlong after the rock, which went bounding and crashing into the gulf below.

Instantly the faces of the two men gleamed with intelligence; they nodded with energy, grinned with satisfaction, and pointed to the abyss in front of them with the air of men who had no doubt that their enemies were lying down there in quivering fragments.

Something of this James Ginger did indeed manage to see. Curiosity was so powerfully developed in that sable spirit, that, at the imminent risk of his life, he reached out by means of a branch, and so elongated his black neck that he got one of his brilliant eyes to bear for a moment upon his foes. He appreciated the situation instantly, and drew back to indulge in a smothered laugh which shut up both his eyes and appeared to gash his face from ear to ear.

"What's wrong with you, Ebony?" whispered Mark Breezy, who was in anything but a laughing mood just then.

"Oh! nuffin', nuffin', massa; only dem brown niggers are sitch asses dat dey b'lieve a'most anyting. Black niggers ain't so easy putt off de scent. Dey tinks we's tumble ober de precipis an' busted ourselbes."

"Lucky for us that they think so," said Hockins, in a soft tone of satisfaction. "But now, what are we to do? It was bad enough clamberin' up here in blazin' excitement to save our lives, but it will be ten times worse gettin' down again in cold blood when they're gone."

"Time enough to consider that when they *are* gone," muttered Breezy. "Hush! Listen!"

The sounds that reached their place of concealment told clearly enough that a number of the savages had descended the cliffs, presumably to look at the place over which the white men had fallen. Then there was much eager conversation in an unknown tongue, mingled with occasional bursts of laughter—on hearing which latter the huge mouth of our negro enlarged in silent sympathy. After a while the voices were heard to retire up the narrow track and become fainter until they died away altogether, leaving no sound save the murmur of the rushing river to fill the ears of the anxious listeners who stood like three statues in a niche on the face of that mighty precipice.

"Now, you know," said Breezy, with a sigh of relief, "this is very satisfactory as far as it goes, and we have reason to be thankful that we are neither speared nor dashed to pieces; nevertheless, we are in an uncomfortable fix here, for night is approaching, and we must retrace our steps somehow or other, unless we make up our minds to sleep standing."

"That's so, doctor. There's not room to lie down here," assented the sailor, glancing slowly round; "an', to tell 'ee the plain truth, I feel as funky about trustin' myself again to that serpent-like creeper as I felt the first time I went up through the lubber-hole the year I went to sea."

"What you's 'fraid ob, Mr 'Ockins?" asked Ebony.

"Afraid o' the nasty thing givin' way under my weight. If it was a good stout rope, now, I wouldn't mind, but every crack it gave when I was comin' aloft made my heart jump a'most out o' my mouth."

"What have 'ee found there, doctor?" asked the seaman, on observing that his companion was groping behind a mass of herbage at the back part of the niche in which they stood.

"There's a big hole here, Hockins. Perhaps we may find room to stay where we are, after all, till morning. Come here, Ebony, you've got something of the eel about you. Try if you can wriggle in."

The negro at once thrust his head and shoulders into the hole, but could not advance.

"Bery strange!" he said, drawing out his head, and snorting once or twice like a dog that has half-choked himself in a rabbit-hole. "Seems to me dere's a big block o' wood dere stoppin' de way."

"Strange indeed, Ebony. A block of wood could not have grown there. Are you sure it is not a big root?"

"Sartin' sure, massa. I hab studied roots since I was a babby. Hold on, I try again."

The negro tried again, and with such vigour that he not only displaced the block of wood, but burst in several planks which concealed the entrance to a cavern. They fell on the stone floor with a crash that aroused a multitude of echoes in the dark interior. At the same moment something like a faint shriek or wail was heard within, causing the hearts of the three listeners to beat faster.

"Did you hear that, Hockins?"

"Ay, I heard it sure enough. What is it, think 'ee, lad!" said the seaman to the negro.

Ebony, who was gazing into the dark cavern with glaring eyeballs and distended nostrils, replied —

"My advice to you is, let's go back de way we come. Dis no place for 'spectable Christians."

"Do you fear ghosts?" asked Mark, smiling, yet at the same time bringing his gun into a convenient position, with his finger ready on the trigger.

"I fears nuffin," returned the negro with a proud look, while beads of perspiration stood on his brow.

"Then ye're a braver man than I am, Ebony, for I fear that climbin' plant worse than a ghost; so here goes to find out what it is."

Although the sailor spoke thus boldly, and tried to look cool, it is certain that he also was afflicted with sensations of an unusual description, which, of course, he would have scorned to admit were the result of fear! His power of will, however, was stronger than his fears. Drawing his cutlass, he was about to enter the cavern, when Mark laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Come, Hockins, you have accepted my lead hitherto. It is not fair to take it out of my hands at this critical point."

So saying he glided past his comrade, and was almost lost to sight immediately in the deep gloom.

"Softly, softly, doctor," whispered the seaman, as he followed, "there may be holes or pits within—"

"All right; I'm feeling my way carefully. Keep close."

As he spoke a slight, indescribable sound was heard—almost like a sigh.

"Hist! Did 'ee hear that?" said Hockins in the lowest possible whisper.

"Oh! massa, let's go back de way we come," urged Ebony, in the same low but earnest tone.

Mark Breezy did not reply, but the click of his gun as he cocked it showed that he was on the alert.

For nearly a minute the three men stood in absolute silence, listening for a repetition of the mysterious sound, and, though it did not recur, there was an indescribable feeling in the heart of each that they were not alone in that cavern.

"Have you not flint and steel?" asked Mark.

"Yes; but to strike a light would only show our whereabouts if there *is* any one here."

The seaman accidentally touched Ebony on the elbow as he spoke, and sent that worthy's heart, or something like it, into his throat with such violence as nearly to choke him.

"Git along, massa," he said in a gaspy whisper, when able to articulate, "we's got to go troo wid it *now*."

Acting on this advice the young man continued to advance cautiously, feeling his way step by step and fully expecting every moment to reach the inner wall of the cavern.

Presently the explorers were again brought to a stand by the sudden appearance of a light in the far distance. As, however, it did not move, they continued to advance, and soon were convinced that it was daylight shining through an opening in that direction. Every step convinced them more and more that they were right, and their spirits rose with the hope of escaping, though the light made no appreciable difference as yet in the darkness that surrounded them.

Suddenly a sharp, loud, short cry filled the cavern for an instant, and almost froze their blood! The loudness and abrupt stoppage of the cry left the impression that the creature which uttered it had been suddenly and effectively killed, for it ended in a sharp gasp or gurgle, and then all was still,—but only for a moment, for the shock to Mark's nerves was such that his finger inadvertently pressed the trigger of his gun, which exploded with a deafening crash, and awoke shrieks and cries that were not to be accounted for by mere echoes.

This was too much for ordinary human beings. Fabled knights of old in armour of proof might have stood it, but the two white men and the black, being ordinary heroes, regardless of pride and honour, went in for a regular stampede, and it is but simple justice to say that Ebony won, for he reached the outlet of the cavern first, and sprang through it into daylight like a black thunderbolt. It is also due to his comrades to add that they were not far behind him.

Their courage, however, was soon restored. Daylight has a celebrated power of restoring courage. On clearing the bushes which concealed the entrance to the cave they simultaneously stopped, turned round, and resolutely faced their foe!

But no foe was to be seen! Once again all was still as death. After glaring for a few seconds at the spot whence the expected enemy should have issued, the three fugitives relaxed their frowning brows and turned inquiring eyes on each other.

"Dis beats cockfightin' a'most," said Ebony, with a sigh of intense relief.

"Ay, an' every other sort o' fightin' as I ever heard on," responded Hockins.

"Come, friends," said their young leader, "whatever it may have been, it behoves us to get as far away from this spot as possible, and that as fast as we can."

Chapter Two.
Harks back a little

The spot where our adventurers found themselves on issuing from the mysterious cave was a peculiarly rugged one. It formed a sort of hollow or depression in the forest-land in which we introduced the three men as fugitives. From this hollow there descended a narrow track or pathway to the extensive valley which had been seen from the summit of the precipice that barred their flight, and had so nearly proved fatal.

So confused was the nature of the ground here, and so intricate were the tracks—originally formed no doubt by wild animals, though made use of by wandering men—that it became impossible for Mark Breezy to know in what direction he was leading his comrades as he wound in and out among large rocks and fallen trees. In fact it was more by chance than guidance that they ultimately hit upon the path which finally led them to the lower region or plateau of forest-land; and it is certain that they would have found it impossible to find their way back to the cave, even had they desired to do so.

Their chief object, however, was to put as much space as possible between themselves and their late pursuers, and to this end they pushed forward at their best speed, until they reached a small river which appeared to be a tributary to, or a branch of, that which they had seen from the heights earlier in the day.

"'Come to a ribber—couldn't git across,
Gib a couple o' dollars for an' old blind hoss,'"

murmured Ebony, quoting an ancient ditty.

"We shall have to swim it, I fear," remarked Breezy, "for there is no horse here, blind or otherwise. Perhaps that fallen tree may prove strong enough to serve as a bridge."

He pointed to a slender tree which had evidently been placed there, with several others, for the purpose of forming a rough and ready bridge; but its companions had been removed by floods, for they lay tossed on the bank further down among other wreckage.

"It'll be somethin' like tight-rope dancin'," said the sailor. "We'll have to repair the bridge."

"Nuffin' ob de sort! Look here."

Ebony ran to the tree referred to, and skipped over with admirable agility, though it bent under him not unlike a tight-rope.

"But *I* can't do that," said Hockins, "not bein' a black monkey, d'ee see?"

With a sudden expression of intense pity the negro exclaimed—

"Oh! I beg pardin'. Didn't I forgot; you's on'y a white man. But stop; I come ober agin an' took you on my back."

He pretended to be on the point of recrossing, but the sailor had already got upon the bridge, and, with much balancing and waving of his long arms, passed over in safety. Mark was about to follow, when Hockins called out, "Better pitch over the powder-flask in case you fall in."

"That's true, for I mayn't be as good as you or Ebony on the tight-rope. Look out!"

He pulled the powder-flask out of his pocket and threw it towards his comrades. Unfortunately the branch of an overhanging bush had touched his hand. The touch was slight, but it sufficed to divert the flask from its proper course, and sent it into the middle of the stream.

Ebony followed it head first like an otter, but soon reappeared, gasping and unsuccessful. Again and again he dived, but failed to find the flask, without which, of course, their gun was useless, and at last they were obliged to continue their flight without it.

This was a very serious loss, for they had not an ounce of provisions with them, and were in a land the character and resources of which were utterly unknown at least to two of them, while the youth who had become their leader knew very little more than the fact that it was the island of Madagascar, that it lay about 300 miles off the eastern shores of Africa, and that the tribes by whom they were surrounded were little if at all better than savages.

That day they wandered far into the depths of a dark and tangled forest, intentionally seeking its gloomiest recesses in order to avoid the natives, and at night went supperless to rest among the branches of an umbrageous tree, not knowing what danger from man or beast might assail them if they should venture to sleep on the ground.

Although possessed of flint and steel, as well as tinder, they did not use them for fear of attracting attention. As they had nothing to cook, the deprivation was not great. Fortunately the weather at the time was pleasantly warm, so that beyond the discomfort of not being able to stretch out at full length, the occasional poking of awkward knots and branches into their ribs, and the constant necessity of holding on lest they should fall off, their circumstances were not insufferable, and might have been worse.

While they are enjoying their repose, we will tell in a few sentences who they were and how they got there.

When Mark Breezy, in the closing years of his medical-student career, got leave to go on a voyage to China in one of his father's ships, the *Eastern Star*, for the benefit of his health and the enlargement of his understanding, he had no more idea that that voyage would culminate in a bed up a tree in the forests of Madagascar than you, reader, have that you will ultimately become an inhabitant of the moon! The same remark may with equal truth be made of John Hockins when he joined the *Eastern Star* as an able seaman, and of James Ginger—alias Ebony—when he shipped as cook. If the captain of the *Eastern Star* had introduced those three,—who had never seen each other before—and told them that they would spend many months together among savages in the midst of terrestrial beauty, surrounded by mingled human depravity and goodness, self-denial and cruelty, fun and tragedy such as few men are fated to experience, they would have smiled at each other with good-natured scepticism and regarded their captain as a facetious lunatic.

Yet so it turned out, though the captain prophesied it not—and this was the way of it.

Becalmed off the coast of Madagascar, and having, through leakage in one of the tanks, run short of water, the captain ordered a boat with casks to be got ready to go ashore for water. The young doctor got leave to land and take his gun for the purpose of procuring specimens—for he was something of a naturalist—and having a ramble.

"Don't get out of hail, Doctor," said the captain, as the boat shoved off.

"All right, sir, I won't."

"An' take a couple o' the men into the bush with you in case of accidents."

"Ay ay, sir," responded Mark, waving his hand in acknowledgment.

And that was the last that Mark Breezy and the captain of the *Eastern Star* saw of each other for many a day.

"Who will go with me?" asked Mark, when the boat touched the shore.

"Me, massa," eagerly answered the negro cook, who had gone ashore in the hope of being able to get some fresh vegetables from the natives if any were to be found living there. "Seems to me dere's no black mans here, so may's well try de woods for wild wegibles."

"No no, Ebony," said the first mate, who had charge of the boat, "you'll be sure to desert if we let you go—unless we send Hockins to look after you. He's the only man that can keep you in order."

"Well, I'll take Hockins also," said Mark, "you heard the captain say I was to have two men. Will you go, Hockins?"

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the seaman, sedately, but with a wrinkle or two on his visage which proved that the proposal was quite to his taste.

All the men of the boat's crew were armed either with cutlass or carbine—in some cases with both; for although the natives were understood to be friendly at that part of the coast it was deemed prudent to be prepared for the reverse. Thus John Hockins carried a cutlass in his belt, but no fire-arm, and the young doctor had his double-barrelled gun, with powder-flask and shot-belt, but Ebony —being a free-and-easy, jovial sort of nigger—went unarmed, saying he "didn't want to carry no harms, seein' he would need all harms he had to carry back de fresh wegibles wid."

Thus those three went into the bush, promising to keep well within ear-shot, and to return instantly at the first summons.

That summons came—not as a shout, as had been expected, but as a shot—about an hour after the landing. Our explorers ran to the top of a neighbouring mound in some surprise, not unmixed with anxiety. Before they reached the summit a volley from the direction of the sea, followed by fierce yells, told that some sort of evil was going on. Another moment, and they reached the eminence just in time to behold their boat's crew pulling off shore while a band of at least a hundred savages attacked them —some rushing into the water chest-deep in order to seize the boat. Cutlass and carbine, however, proved more than a match for stone and spear.

The fight had scarce lasted a minute, and our trio were on the point of rushing down to the rescue, when a white cloud burst from the side of the *Eastern Star*, the woods and cliffs echoed with the roar of a big gun, and a shot, plunging into the crowd of natives, cut down many of them and went crashing into the bushes.

It was enough. The natives turned and fled while the boat pulled to the ship.

Uncertainty as to what should be done kept Mark Breezy and his companions rooted for a few seconds to the spot. Indecision was banished, however, when they suddenly perceived a band of thirty or forty natives moving stealthily towards them by a circuitous route, evidently with the intention of taking them in rear and preventing them from finding shelter in the woods.

It was the first time that the young student's manhood had been put severely to the test. There was a rush of hot blood to his forehead, and his heart beat powerfully as he saw and realised the hopelessness of their case with such tremendous odds against them.

"We can die but once," he said with forced calmness, as he cocked his gun and prepared to defend himself.

"I's not a-goin' to die at all," said the negro, hastily tightening his belt, "I's a-goin' to squatilate."

"And you?" said Mark, turning to the seaman.

"Run, says I, of coorse," replied Hockins, with something between a grin and a scowl; "ye know the old song—him wot fights an' runs away, may live to fight another day!"

"Come along, then!" cried Mark, who felt that whether they fought or ran he was bound to retain the leadership of his little party.

As we have seen, they ran to some purpose. No doubt if they had started on equal terms, the lithe, hardy, and almost naked savages would have soon overtaken them, but fortunately a deep gully lay between them and the party of natives who had first observed them. Before this was crossed the fugitives were over the second ridge of rolling land that lay between the thick woods and the sea, and when the savages at last got upon their track and began steadily to overhaul them, the white men had got fairly into the forest.

Still there would have been no chance of ultimate escape if they had not come upon the footpath down the precipice which we have described as having been partly carried away by falling rocks, thus enabling Hockins and his companions to make a scramble for life which no one but a sailor, a monkey, or a hero, would have dared, and the impossibility of even attempting which never occurred to the pursuers, who concluded, as we have seen, that the white men had been dashed to pieces on the rocks far below.

Whether they afterwards found out their mistake or not we cannot tell.

The reason—long afterwards ascertained—of this unprovoked attack on the boat's crew, was the old story. A party of godless white men had previously visited that part of the coast and treated the poor natives with great barbarity, thus stirring up feelings of hatred and revenge against *all* white men—at least for the time being. In this way the innocent are too often made to suffer for the guilty.

We will now return to our friends in the tree.

Chapter Three.
Describes the Deed of an Amateur Matador and the Work of a Rough-and-Ready Shoemaker

When the day began to break Hockins awoke, and his first impulse was to shout "hold on!" Ebony's first action was to let go, thereby bringing himself to the ground with an awful thud, which would have told severely on any one less akin to india-rubber.

For a few minutes Mark Breezy, holding tight to his particular branch, looked down at his companions, yawned heavily, and smiled a little. Then a sudden impulse of memory caused him to look grave.

"Come," he said, dropping lightly from his perch, "these natives may have been searching for us all night, and are perhaps nearer than we suppose. I vote that we push on at once."

"Agreed," said Hockins, stretching himself.

"No fear, Massa," remarked the negro. "If it wur moonlight dey might 'ave search, but whar de nights am dark dey knows better. De niggahs in dis yer island hab got skins an' eyes an' noses. If dey was to go troo such woods in de dark, dey hab no skins or eyes or noses in de mornin'—leas'wise nuffin' wuth mentionin'. Cause why? Dey'd all git knocked into a sorter mush. Plenty ob time for breakfast 'fore we start."

"That's true, boy," said Hockins, "but where's the breakfast to come from?"

"What! you no bringed nuffin' in your pockits?" asked the negro with a look of visible anxiety on his expressive face.

Hockins turned his various pockets inside out by way of reply.

"I am equally destitute," said Mark.

The negro groaned as he slowly drew from his breeches pockets two sea-biscuits and a cold sausage.

"I meant dat," he said, "as a light lunch for *one* yisterday."

"It'll have to do dooty, then, as a heavy breakfast for three this morning, Ebony. Come, divide, and let's have fair play."

"Here, massa," said Ebony, handing the food to Mark, "you divide, I ain't got de moral courage to do it fair. Number one is too strong in me when I's hungry!"

With a laugh at this candid admission the youth did his best at a fair division. In a few minutes the scanty meal was finished, and the fugitives proceeded straight into the interior of the country at the utmost speed which was compatible with sustained exertion.

They could see the faint outlines of a mountain range in the far distance, and towards that they directed their steps, knowing that in the event of sustained pursuit they had a much better chance of escaping among the rugged fastnesses of a mountain region than in the forests or on the plains. But they saw plainly that there was many a weary mile to traverse before the sheltering mountains could be reached.

At first they walked rapidly and in silence, one behind the other—Mark leading—but as time passed, and the danger of being overtaken decreased, they fell more into line and began to talk of their plans and prospects.

Of course they thought about the *Eastern Star*, and the possibility of her hanging about the coast in the hope of picking them up; but as there was no certainty upon that point, and a return to the coast would be like rushing into the very jaws of the lion from which they were fleeing, they soon dismissed the idea as untenable.

"Now then, the question is, sir, Wot are we a-goin' for to do?" said Hockins.

"Ay, dat's de question," added Ebony with much force, and more than Shakespearean brevity.

"Well now, lads," said Mark, "I've been thinking over that, and it seems to me that there's not much to choose between. Unfortunately, I know uncommonly little about this island—not that my geographical education has been neglected, but the class-books I have used did not give much information about Madagascar. I know, however, that the Mozambique Channel, which divides us from Africa, is a little too wide to swim. I also know that there is a capital somewhere near the middle of the island, the name of which begins with an 'Ant,' and ends with a 'rivo.' There are some syllables between, I believe, but how many, is more than I can tell. There's a government in it, however, and a queen, and some Christian missionaries. Now, it strikes me that where there's a government, a queen, and Christian missionaries, there must be more or less of civilisation and safety, so I would advise that we make straight for the capital."

"Right you are, sir," said Hockins. "As I know nothin' whotsomever about the place, I'll take my sailin' orders from you, captain, an' steer a straight course for Anty—whatever-she-is—arivo, where I hope we'll arrive O!—'all alive O!' in the course o' time. What say you, Ebony?"

"I's agreeable; don't care much for nuffin' when it don't trouble me. But I's gettin' awful hungry, an' I don't see nuffin' to eat in dis yer forest—not even fruit—dough it's pritty enough to look at."

The scenery through which they were passing at the time was indeed more than pretty. It was gorgeous, and would certainly have claimed more attention from the travellers had they been less anxious to advance, and, perhaps, less hungry.

By that time—near mid-day—they had got through the densest part of the woods, and were come to a part where occasional openings in the foliage lighted them up. They had also discovered a narrow track or footpath, which they gladly followed; for although by so doing they ran the risk of coming suddenly upon natives, who might be foes just as well as friends, the comparative ease of travelling was too great to be neglected. This path struck over hill and down dale in a somewhat dogged and straightforward manner, scorning to go round hillocks, save when too precipitous for unwinged animals. At times it wound in and out among trees of great beauty and variety, and of tropical aspect. Elsewhere it plunged into denser stretches of forest, where the profusion of vegetable life was extraordinary—here, a dense undergrowth of shrubs, tree-ferns, and dwarf-palms; there, trees of higher growth, and, shooting high above them all, the slender trunks of many varieties of palms, whose graceful crowns and feathery leaves were pictured vividly on the blue sky. Elsewhere, innumerable creeping plants interlaced the branches, producing a wild and beautiful net-work, their tendrils crossing in all directions, and producing a green twilight in places. The whole was enriched by orchids, the abundant pink and white wax-like flowers of which contrasted well with other wild-flowers innumerable, and with many large and gorgeous flowering trees.

Different species of bamboos gave quite a peculiar aspect to the scenery in some places, and still greater variety was secured by long pendant masses of feathery grey moss and lichens. Some of the trees were of enormous height; one palm, with a straight stem, in particular, being estimated as not less than a hundred feet high to the spot where the leaves sprouted.

"'Tis a perfect paradise!" exclaimed Mark, stopping suddenly and looking around with admiration.

"Yes, massa," murmured Ebony, with solemn looks, "if dere was on'y a few wegibles—cooked! Flowers is all bery well to look at, but we can't heat him."

"Well, if we can't eat, we can, at all events, sleep," returned Mark. "I believe it is usually thought wise in tropical countries to cease work and rest about noon, so, as I feel rather tired, I'll have a snooze. What say you?"

No objection being made, the party again climbed into the branches of a low spreading tree, in order to avoid snakes, scorpions, or any other noxious creatures, though they knew not at the time whether such existed on the island. In less than five minutes they were sound asleep.

Awaking after about two hours' repose, they descended, wished for something to eat, sighed, put a bold heart on it, tightened their belts to suit diminishing waists, and continued their journey.

Perseverance is sure to be rewarded. If that is not a proverb, it ought to be! At all events the perseverance of our travellers was rewarded at this time by their coming suddenly out of the woods into a wide grassy plain on which was browsing a herd of wild cattle—at least they judged them to be wild from the fact of their being discovered in such a wild place, and resolved to treat them as wild because of the "wolves" inside of them, which clamoured so wildly for food.

"Beef!" exclaimed Hockins in some excitement, as he pointed to the animal nearest to them, which happened to be a black, sleek, fat young bull, with slender limbs and fierce eyes.

"Neber mind the wegibles, massa; shot 'un!" exclaimed Ebony in an excited whisper, as he turned his glaring eyeballs on his leader.

"Hush! don't speak," returned Mark, drawing quietly back into cover—for the animal had not observed them. "We must consult what is to be done, because, you know, we have lost our powder-flask, the two charges in my gun are all I have got, and these are only small shot—I have no bullets!"

Grave concern overspread the face of the sturdy seaman—blank dismay that of the sea-cook!

"Might as well blaze at the beast wi' sand," said Hockins.

"Or wid nuffin'," sighed Ebony.

"Nevertheless, I will try," said Mark, quickly. "We shall be starved to death at this rate. Yonder is a line of bushes that runs close out to the brute. I'll stalk it. When close I will make a dash at it, get as near as I can, clap the muzzle against its ribs if possible, and—well, we shall see! You two had better stop here and look on."

"No, massa," said the negro, firmly, "I go wid you. If you *is* to die, we die togidder!"

"What are you thinking of, Hockins?" asked the youth, observing that the seaman stood staring at the ground with knitted brows, as if in deep thought.

"I'll go with you too," he replied, drawing his cutlass and feeling its point with his finger. "You may need help. Heave ahead, sir."

Mark could not avoid smiling at the way in which this was said, although he was sufficiently impressed with the hopelessness, it might even be the danger, of the attempt he was about to make.

They found no difficulty in approaching to within about thirty yards of the animal, being well concealed by the line of bushes before mentioned, but beyond that point there was no cover. Here therefore Mark cocked his gun and gathered himself up for a rush, and Hockins drew his cutlass. So agile was our young doctor that he actually reduced the thirty yards to ten before the astonished bull turned to fly. Another moment and the contents of both barrels were lodged in its flank. The effect was to produce a bellow of rage, a toss-up of the hindquarters, and a wild flourish of the tail, as the animal scurried away after the rest of the herd, which was in full flight.

Poor Breezy stopped at once, with a feeling of mingled disgust and despair. Ebony also stopped, and looked with wide sympathetic eyes in his leader's face, as though to say, "Well, massa, you's done your best."

But Hockins ran on with persistent vigour, although the creature was leaving him further behind at every stride.

"Absurd!" murmured Mark, as he gazed at him.

"No use wassomiver," said Ebony.

It did indeed seem as if the seaman's exertions would prove abortive, but something in the spirit of the wounded bull suddenly changed the aspect of affairs. Whether it was the stinging pain of the small shot in its flank, or the indignation in its breast that influenced it we cannot tell, but in a moment it wheeled round with a furious roar and charged its pursuer.

Hockins stopped at once, and his comrades fully expected to see him turn and run; but our seaman was made of better stuff than they gave him credit for, and the situation was not so new to him as they imagined. In the course of his voyaging to many lands, Hockins had been to a bull-fight in South America. He had seen with fascination and some surprise the risks run by the footmen in the arena; he had beheld with mingled anger and disgust the action of the picadors, who allowed their

poor horses to be gored to death by the infuriated bulls; and he had watched with thrilling anxiety, not unmingled with admiration, the cool courage of the matadors, as they calmly stood up to the maddened and charging bulls and received them on the points of their swords, stepping lightly aside at the same moment so as to avoid the dangerous horns.

The seaman's purpose now was to act the part of a matador. He knew that he possessed coolness and nerve sufficient for the deed; he hoped that he had the skill; he felt that hunger could no longer remain unsatisfied; he feared that death by starvation might be the lot of himself and his companions, and he preferred to meet death in action—if meet it he must. All things considered, he resolved to face the bovine thunderbolt with unflinching front, like a true-blue British tar!

His coolness in the circumstances was evinced by the remarks muttered to himself in a growly tone as the bull approached.

"Three futt—that'll be enough. I don't rightly remember how near them mattydoors let him come before they putt their helms hard down an' let him go by, but I think three futt'll do."

This decision was barely reached when the bull was upon him with lowered head and erect tail. It was an awful rush, but Hockins stood like a rock with the cutlass pointed. At the pre-arranged moment he stepped to one side, but instead of letting the momentum of the animal do the work, he could not resist the impulse to drive the cutlass deeper into the bull's neck. The result was that, though he escaped the creature's horn by a very narrow shave, the cutlass was wrenched violently from his grasp, and he was sent head over heels upon the plain!

Seeing this, Mark and the negro ran to the rescue, the one howling like a maniac, the other clubbing his gun; but their aid was not required, for the work of the amateur matador had been effectively done. After receiving the deadly thrust the bull plunged forward a few paces, and then fell dying upon the ground, while Hockins got up and began to feel himself all over to make sure that no bones were broken.

It need scarcely be told that they rejoiced greatly over their success, and that they cut off some of the flesh immediately, with which they returned to the forest to enjoy a much-needed meal.

"We must kindle a fire now," said Mark, stopping at an open space in the midst of a very secluded spot at the foot of a magnificent palm-tree. "You see I'm not prepared to act like a cannibal or Eskimo, and eat the meat raw."

"There won't be much fear now," said Hockins, "especially if we make the fire of dry wood an' keep it small. Just look at that, Doctor."

He held out his cutlass for inspection. It had been seriously bent in the recent encounter.

"Ain't that a cryin' shame to the owners, now, to send us poor fellows to the eastern seas, where we may meet pirates any day, with tin cutlashes like that."

"You kin put him straight de next bull you kills," said Ebony, as he prepared some touchwood; "you've on'y got to stick 'im on the *left* side an' he'll twis' it all right. Now, massa, I's ready, bring de gun an' snap de flints ober dat."

Hockins straightened his weapon between the branches of a tree, his comrades managed to capture a spark in a mass of dry combustibles, which soon burst into a flame. As the seaman had recommended, only the driest wood was used, and just enough of that to enable them to half-roast what food they required. Then they returned to the carcass of the bull, and cut off a large quantity of meat, using the cutlass as well as their clasp-knives in the operation.

"Cut the meat in thin slices," said Mark Breezy, when they began this work.

"Why you so 'ticklar, massa?" asked Ebony. "I's fond o' t'ick slices—w'en him's not too tough."

"Because then we can dry the meat in the sun or over a slow fire, and so be able to keep it longer without spoiling. We must spend the night here for the purpose, and perhaps part of to-morrow.—Why, Hockins, what are you about?"

"Makin' a pair o' shoes, sir; you see them old dancin' pumps as I left the ship with wouldn't hold out another day o' this rough travellin', so I'm makin' a noo pair of shoes when I've got the chance."

"They will be a primitive pair," observed Mark.

"If that means a good pair, you're right, sir. They are after the pattern first made by Adam for Eve—leas'wise it's supposed her first pair o' dancin' pumps was made this fashion. I'll make a sim'lar pair for you, sir, w'en your boots give out."

In case the reader should ever be reduced to extremities in the matter of foot-gear we may explain the seaman's method.

Selecting what he believed to be the thickest part of the bull's hide, he cut off a small portion about eighteen inches square. Spreading this on the ground with the hair upwards, he planted his naked foot on it and marked the shape thereon. Then with his knife he cut away the hide all round the foot-mark at four inches or so from the outline of the foot. Next, he bored little holes all round the margin, through which he ran a line, or lace, also made of raw hide. Then, planting his foot again in the middle of the hide, he drew the line tight, causing the edges to rise all round the foot and almost cover it.

"There you are, sir," he said, stretching out his limb and admiring the contrivance; "rough-an'-ready, you see, but soon finished. It ain't recorded in ancient history what Eve said when Adam presented her wi' the little testimonial of his affection, but if I might ventur' a guess I should opine that she said 'puckery.'"

"H'm! Dey ain't a tight fit," observed Ebony. "I's ob opinion dat your corns are quite safe in 'em."

Having completed his shoe-making work, the ingenious seaman assisted his companions to prepare the dried meat, which they afterwards tied up in three convenient little parcels to be slung on their backs.

That night they found a more commodious tree to sleep in. Under the pleasant influence of a good supper they enjoyed unbroken rest, and awoke the following morning greatly refreshed. They were thus, both physically and mentally, prepared for the events of that day, to which, as they afterwards had a most important bearing on their fortunes in the island, we will devote a separate chapter.

Chapter Four.
The Doctor finds Unexpected Work in the Wilderness, and a Mysterious Stranger is Introduced

It has been said that the travellers—for we cannot now appropriately style them fugitives—had reached a more open country, and that Hockins's fight with the wild bull had taken place on the margin of a wide grassy plain.

This plain, however, was limited. In front of them the scenery was undulating and beautifully varied—almost park-like in its character, and only in one direction—to the right—did it extend like a sea of waving grass to the horizon. Behind them lay the dense forest through which they had passed. The forest also curved round to their left, and stretched away, apparently unbroken, on to still far-off mountains.

After they had breakfasted, packed their dried meat, and sallied forth on the journey of another day, they walked in silence until they reached the edge of the plain, where there was room to walk abreast.

"Now, comrades," said Mark Breezy, "we will go to the top of yon mound, see how the land lies, and hold a council of war."

"Just so, cap'n; take our bearin's an' lay our course," assented Hockins.

They soon reached the spot, and found the view from it unexpectedly beautiful. The whole landscape was clothed with tropical verdure. Past the foot of the mound ran a considerable stream, which opened out into a series of lakelets in the hollows beyond, the waters of which seemed to be the home of considerable numbers of wild-fowl,—but there was no sign of the presence of man.

"Strange," said Mark, in a low voice, "that such a lovely scene should have been created a solitude, with no one to profit by or enjoy it."

"Well now, sir," remarked the sailor, "d'ee know that same thought has puzzled me now an' again; for although my purfession is the sea, I've travelled a good bit on the land—specially in South America—and I've seen miles on miles o' splendid country, that made me think of Adam an' Eve in paradise, with never a soul, as you say, to make use of or enjoy it. I've often wondered what it was all made for!"

"Don't you tink," said Ebony, with his head a little on one side, and his earnest eyes betraying the sincerity of his nature, "don't you tink dat p'r'aps de ducks an' geese, an' sitch-like, makes use ob an' enjoys it? to say nuffin' oh de beasts, hinsects, an' fishes."

"You may be right, Ebony," returned Hockins, with an approving nod; "we human being's is apt to think too much of ourselves. Moreover, it has come into my mind that Great Britain was a solitood once—or much about it—an' it's anything but that now; so mayhap them lands will be swarmin' wi' towns an' villages some day or other. What d'ee think, Doctor?"

But the young doctor said nothing, for while his companions were thus indulging in speculations, he was anxiously considering what course they should pursue.

"You see, comrades," he said, turning to them abruptly, "if we go to the right and traverse this fine country we may very likely fall in with villages, but the villagers may be savages, like those we met on the coast. On the other hand, if we go to the left, we shall have to traverse the somewhat dark and difficult forests, but then we shall be making for the mountains and table-lands of the interior; and as the capital, Ant— Ant—"

"Anty-all-alive-O!" suggested Hockins.

"No, 's not dat. It ends wid 'arrive O!' w'ich is just what we wants."

"Well, whatever may be its name, I know that it is in the centre of the island somewhere, and the centre of any land always means the mountains; so I think we had better decide to go to the left, and—"

"Hallo! look yonder, sir," said Hockins, pointing towards a low cliff which rose in front of them not a quarter of a mile from the spot where they stood.

Turning in the direction indicated, they observed a man running swiftly, as if in pursuit of something. They could see that he was clothed, and that he carried several spears, from which they judged that he was a hunter. Coming to the foot of the cliff before mentioned, the man ascended the face of it with wonderful agility, and had almost gained the top, when a treacherous root or stone gave way, causing him to lose his hold and roll violently to the bottom.

"Poor fellow, he's killed!" cried Mark, running towards the fallen hunter, who lay on the ground motionless.

He was not killed, however, though stunned and bleeding profusely from a deep wound in the arm, caused by one of his own spears while in the act of falling. When the three strangers suddenly appeared the hunter grasped one of the spears and made a vigorous attempt to rise, evidently under the impression that he was about to be attacked; but the fall and the loss of blood were too much for him. He sank back with a groan, yet there was a look of quiet dignity about him which showed that he gave way to no craven spirit.

Our young doctor, kneeling down beside him, proceeded at once to staunch the wound and bind up the arm with his pocket-handkerchief. While he was thus engaged, Hockins brought some water from a neighbouring stream in a cup which he had extemporised out of a piece of bark, and applied it to the man's lips. Ebony stood by, with a look of profound pity on his face, ready for whatever might be required of him.

The hunter showed by the expression of his handsome brown features that he was grateful for these attentions. Yet, at the same time, there seemed to be something of perplexity, if not surprise, in his looks as he gazed on the white men's faces. But he did not utter a word. When the dressing of the arm was completed—of course in a most businesslike manner—he again attempted to rise, but was so weak from loss of blood that he fell back fainting in the Doctor's arms.

"This is a most awkward business," said Mark, as he laid the man carefully on the ground, and put a bundle of grass under his head for a pillow. "It behoves us to push on our journey without delay, yet it will never do to leave him here alone, and we can't very well take him on with us. What *is* to be done!"

Both Hockins and the negro *looked* their incapacity to answer that question. Just then the answer came in the form they least expected, for a sound of many voices in clamorous talk suddenly broke on their ears. The speakers, whoever they might be, were still distant, and the formation of the ground prevented our travellers being seen by them.

"Savages!" exclaimed Mark and Hockins in the same breath.

"Hide!" cried Ebony, with a roll of his huge eyes, as he suited the action to the word, and leaped into the bushes. The others followed his example, and running about a hundred yards back into the woods, climbed into the branches of a lofty tree, from which outlook, well screened by leaves, they saw a band composed of some hundreds of natives walking smartly over the open plain. From the manner of their approach it was evident that they searched for some one, and as they made straight for the cliff where the wounded man lay, it seemed probable that they were following up his trail.

"We're done for," said Mark, in a tone of despair, as he noted this.

"Why d'ee think so, Doctor?" asked Hockins, who did not by any means seem to take such a gloomy view of their case.

"Don't you see? Savages can follow up people's trails almost as well as dogs. They'll easily trace us to the foot of this tree by our footprints, and then they've only to look up!"

"That's true. I had forgotten that."

"Dere's time to drop down yit, massa, and squatilate," suggested the negro, excitedly.

Mark shook his head.

"Might as well try to run from tigers as from savages," he returned, "unless you've got a good start."

"But they ain't all savages, sir," whispered Hockins, as the band drew nearer. "Some o' the naked black fellows look savage enough, no doubt, but there's a lot of 'em lightish brown in the skin, an' clothed in fine though queer garments. They carry themselves, too, like gentlemen. P'r'aps we'd better go for'ard an' trust them."

"Trust to 'em, 'Ockins!" said Ebony with a decided shake of the head, "trust men wid *brown* faces? Nebber!"

The whispered conversation ceased at this point for a loud shout of surprise mingled with alarm was raised as the band came to the foot of the cliff and found what appeared to be the dead body of the wounded man. Evidently they were friends, for while some of them kneeled down beside the injured hunter to examine him, others gave way to gestures and exclamations of grief.

Presently the watchers observed that one of those who kneeled beside the body looked up with a smile and a nod of satisfaction as he pointed to his chest.

"They've discovered that he's not dead," said Mark.

"Yes, massa, an' dey've diskivered de bandaged arm."

"Ay, an' it seems to puzzle 'em," added the seaman.

It did more than puzzle them. They had not observed it at first, because, just before running into the woods, Mark had covered it with a loose shawl—a sort of linen plaid—which the man had worn round his shoulders. When they removed this and saw the bandage which was wound round the limb in the most careful and perfect manner, they looked at each other in great surprise; then they looked solemn and spoke in low tones, glancing round now and then with saucer-like eyes, as if they expected to see something frightful.

"I do believe, Doctor," whispered the seaman, "that they think your work has been done by a goblin of some sort!"

It would indeed seem as if some such idea had entered the minds of the band, for instead of examining the ground for footprints and following them up—as was natural to have done—they silently constructed a litter of branches, covered it with some of their garments, and quietly bore the wounded and still unconscious man away in the direction of the plains.

With thankful hearts our travellers slid to the ground, and hurried off in the opposite direction towards the mountains.

That night they came to a deeply-shaded and rugged piece of ground in the heart of the forest where there were caverns of various sizes. Here the solitude seemed to be so profound that the fear of pursuit gradually left them, so they resolved to kindle a cheerful fire in one of the caves, cook a good supper, and enjoy themselves. Finding a cave that was small, dry, and well concealed, they soon had a bright fire blazing in it, round which they sat on a soft pile of branches—Mark and Hockins looking on with profound interest and expectation while the negro prepared supper.

"If I only had a quid o' baccy now," said Hockins, "I'd be as happy as a king."

"I have the advantage of you, friend, for I am as happy as a king without it," said the young doctor.

"Well, there's no denyin'," returned the seaman, "that you have the advantage o' me; but if I only had the baccy I'd enjoy my disadvantage. P'r'aps there's a bit left in some corner o'—"

He plunged his hands into each pocket in his garments, one after another, but without success until he came to the left breast-pocket of his coat. When he had searched that to its deepest recesses he stopped and looked up with a beaming countenance.

"Ho! got 'im?" asked Ebony, with interest.

Hockins did not reply, but, slowly and tenderly, drew forth—not a quid, but—a little piece of brown wood about five or six inches long.

"A penny whistle!" exclaimed Mark.

"Speak with reverence, Doctor," returned the sailor, with a quiet smile, "it ain't a penny whistle, it's a flageolet. I stuck it here the last time I was amoosin' the crew o' the *Eastern Star* an' forgot I hadn't putt it away. Wait a bit, you shall hear."

Saying this Hockins put the tiny instrument to his lips, and drew from it sounds so sweet, so soft, so melodious and tuneful, that his companions seemed to listen in a trance of delight, with eyes as well as with ears!

"Splendid!" exclaimed Mark, enthusiastically, when the sailor ceased to play. "Why, Hockins, I had no idea you could play like that! Of course I knew that you possessed musical powers to some extent, for I have heard the tooting of your flageolet through the bulkheads when at sea; but two or three inches of plank don't improve sweet sounds, I suppose."

"Ho! massa, didn't I tell you t'ree or four times dat he play mos' awrful well?"

"True, Ebony, so you did; but I used to think your energetic praise was due to your enthusiastic disposition, and so paid no attention to your invitations to go for'ard an' listen. Well, I confess I was a loser. You must have played the instrument a long time, surely?"—turning to the seaman.

"Yes, ever since I was a small boy. My father played it before me, and taught me how to finger it. He was a splendid player. He used sometimes to go to the back of the door when we had a small blow-out, an' astonish the company by playin' up unexpectedly. He was great at Scotch tunes—specially the slow ones, like this."

He put the little instrument to his lips again, and let it nestle, as it were, in his voluminous beard, as he drew from it the pathetic strains of "Wanderin' Willie," to the evidently intense enjoyment of Ebony, who regarded music as one of the chief joys of life—next, perhaps, to cooking!

But Mark and Ebony were not the only listeners to that sweet strain. Just outside the mouth of the cave there stood a man, who, to judge from the expression of his face, was as much affected by the music as the negro. Though he stood in such a position as to be effectually screened from the view of those within, a gleam of reflected light fell upon his figure, showing him to be a tall, handsome man in the prime of life. He was clothed in what may be styled a mixed European and native costume, and a gun on which he rested both hands seemed to indicate him a hunter. He carried no other weapon, except a long knife in his girdle. The mixed character of his garb extended also to his blood, for his skin, though dark and bronzed from exposure, was much lighter than that of most natives of the island, and his features were distinctly European. Quiet gravity was the chief characteristic of his countenance, and there was also an expression of profound sadness or pathos, which was probably caused by the music.

When Hockins finished his tune the three friends were almost petrified with astonishment—not unmingled with alarm—as they beheld this man walk coolly into the cave, rest his gun on the side of it, and sit gravely down on the opposite side of the fire.

The first impulse of our three friends, of course, was to spring up, but the action of the man was so prompt, and, withal, so peaceful, that they were constrained to sit still.

"Don't be alarmed. I come as a friend. May I sit by your fire?"

He spoke in good English, though with a decidedly foreign accent.

"You are welcome, since you come as a friend," said Mark, "though I must add that you have taken us by surprise."

"Well now, stranger," said Hockins, putting his musical instrument in his pocket, "how are we to know that you *are* a friend—except by the cut o' your jib, which, I admit, looks honest enough, and your actions, which, we can't deny, are peaceable like?"

The seaman put this question with a half-perplexed, half-amused air. The stranger received it without the slightest change in his grave aspect.

"You have no other means of knowing," he replied, "except by my 'jib' and my actions."

"Dat's a fact, anyhow," murmured Ebony.

"Who *are* you, and where do you come from?" asked Mark.

"I am an outlaw, and I come from the forest."

"That's plain-speakin', an' no mistake," said Hockins, with a laugh, "an' deserves as plain a return. We can't say exactly that *we* are outlaws, but we are out-an'-outers, an' we're going through the forest to—to—Anty-all-alive-O! or some such name—the capital, you know—"

"Antananarivo," suggested the outlaw.

"That's it! That's the name—I couldn't recall," said Mark, quickly. "We are going there, if we can only find the way."

"I know the way," returned the outlaw, "and my reason for coming here is to offer to show it you."

"Indeed! But how came you to know our intentions, and what makes you take so much interest in us?" asked Mark, with a look of suspicion.

"My reason for being interested in you," returned the stranger, "is a matter with which you have nothing to do. How I came to know your intentions it is easy to explain, for I have followed you from the sea-coast step by step. I saw you escape from the savages, saw you frightened out of the cave by my friends the outlaws, who dwell in it, followed you while you traversed the forest, listened to your conversations, witnessed your exploit with the bull, and observed you when you helped and bandaged the wounded native."

It would be difficult to describe the looks or feelings with which the three friends received this information. Ebony's eyes alone would have taken at least half-an-hour of the pencil to portray.

"But—but—why?" stammered Mark.

"Never mind the why," continued the outlaw, with a pleasant look. "You see that I know all about you—at least since you landed—and I also know that you have been several times in unseen danger, from which I have shielded you. Now, you have arrived at a part of the forest which is swarming with brigands, into whose hands you are sure to fall unless I am with you. I therefore come to offer myself as your guide. Will you have me?"

"It seems to me," returned Mark, with something of scorn in his tone, "that we have no choice, for you have us at your mercy—we cannot refuse. I suppose you are the brigand chief, and are guarding us for some sinister purpose of your own."

"I said not that I was a brigand," returned the stranger, quietly; "I said I was an outlaw. What else I am, and my motives of action, I choose not to tell. You say truly—I have you in my power. That is one reason why I would befriend you, if you will trust me." The outlaw rose up as he spoke.

There was such an air of quiet dignity and evident sincerity in the man that Mark was strongly impressed. Rising promptly, he stretched his hand across the fire, saying, "We will trust you, friend, even though we were *not* in your power."

The outlaw grasped the youth's hand with a gratified look.

"Now," he added, as he took up his gun, "I will go. In the morning at day-break I will return. Sleep well till then."

With something like a courtly salute, the mysterious stranger left them, and disappeared into the depths of the forest.

Chapter Five.
The Outlaw's Friends. Threatened Danger curiously Averted

As might be supposed, the unexpected appearance of the outlaw, as well as his sudden departure, tended somewhat to interfere with the sleep which he had wished the travellers at parting, and the night was far advanced before they grew tired of wondering who he could be, speculating as to where he came from, and commenting on his personal appearance. In short, at the close of their discourse, they came to the conclusion which was well embodied in the remark of Ebony, when he said, "It's my opinion, founded on obsarvashun, dat if we was to talk an tink de whole night long we would come no nearer de troot, so I'll turn in."

He did turn in accordingly, and, after exhausting the regions of conjecture, the powers of speculation, and the realms of fancy, Mark and Hockins followed his example.

One consequence of their mental dissipation was that they slept rather beyond the hour of day-break, and the first thing that recalled the two white men to consciousness was the voice of their black comrade exclaiming:—

"Ho! hi! hallo! I smells a smell!"

They lifted their three heads simultaneously and beheld the outlaw sitting calmly beside the fire roasting steaks.

For the first time the mysterious stranger smiled—and it was a peculiarly sweet half-grave sort of attractive smile, as far removed from the fiendish grin of the stage bandit as night is from day.

"I knew you would be hungry, and guessed you would be sleepy," he said, in a deep musical voice, "so I have prepared breakfast. Are you ready?"

"Ready!" repeated Hockins, rising with a mighty yawn, and stretching himself, as was his wont; "I just think we are. Leastwise *I* am. Good luck to 'ee Mister Outlaw, what have 'ee got there?"

"Beef, marrow-bones, and rice," replied the man. "You may call me Samuel if you like. It was my father's first name, but I'm best known among my friends as Ravoninohitriniony."

"Well, that *is* a jaw-breaker!" exclaimed Hockins, with a laugh, as they all sat down to breakfast. "Ra-vo—what did 'ee say?"

"Better not try it till arter breakfast," suggested Ebony.

"Couldn't we shorten it a bit?" said Mark, beginning to consult a marrow-bone. "What say you to the first half—Ravonino?"

"As you please," replied the outlaw, who was already too much absorbed with steaks to look up.

"Not a bad notion," said Hockins. "Sam'l Ravonino—I've heerd wuss; anyhow it's better than the entire complication—eh, Ebony?"

"Mush better," assented the negro; "dere's no use wotsomediver for de hitri—hitri-folderol-ony bit of it. Now, 'Ockins, fair play wid de marrow-bones. Hand me anoder."

"Is it far, Mr Ravonino," asked Mark, "from here to the capital—to Antananarivo?"

"You cleared 'im that time, Doctor!" murmured Hockins, wiping his mouth with a bunch of grass which he carried as a substitute for a pocket-handkerchief.

"Yes, it is a long way," said the outlaw; "many days' journey over mountain and plain."

"And are you going to guide us all the way there?"

"No, not all the way. You forget I am an outlaw. It would cost me my life if I were to appear in Antananarivo."

Mark was on the point of asking why, but, remembering the rebuff of the previous night, forbore to put questions relative to his new friend's personal affairs. Indeed he soon found that it was useless to do so, for whenever he approached the subject Ravonino became so abstracted and deaf that no reply could be drawn from him. As if to compensate for this, however, the man was exceedingly

communicative in regard to all other subjects, and there was a quiet urbanity in his manner which rendered his conversation exceedingly attractive. Moreover, to the surprise of Mark, this mysterious stranger gave evidence of a considerable amount of education. He also gratified Hockins by his evident delight in the flageolet, and his appreciation of nautical stories and "lingo," while he quite won the heart of Ebony by treating him with the same deference which he accorded to his companions. In short each of our travellers congratulated himself not a little on this pleasant acquisition to the party —the only drawback to their satisfaction being their inability to reconcile the existence of such good qualities with the condition of an outlaw!

"However," remarked Hockins, after a long talk with his comrades on this subject when Ravonino was absent, "it's none of our business what he's bin an' done to other people. What we've got to do with is the way he behaves to *us*, d'ee see?"

"He's a trump," said Ebony, with a nod of decision.

"I agree with you," said Mark; "and I only wish he was a little more communicative about himself. However, we must take him as we find him, and try to win his confidence."

During the whole of that first day their guide conducted them through such intricate and evidently unfrequented parts of the forest that their advance was comparatively slow and toilsome, but, being young and strong and well-fed, they did not mind that. In fact Mark Breezy enjoyed it, for the wilder and more tangled the scenery was through which they forced their way, the more did it accord with the feelings of romance which filled him, and the thought, too, of being guided through the woods by an outlaw tended rather to increase his satisfaction.

"Are all the roads in your island as bad as these?" he asked, after plumping up to the knees in a quagmire, out of which he scrambled with difficulty.

"No, many of them are worse and some better," answered the guide; "but I keep away from them, because the Queen's soldiers and spies are hunting about the land just now."

"Oho!" thought Mark, "I begin to see; you are a rebel." Then, aloud, "Your country, then, is governed by a queen?"

"Misgoverned," returned Ravonino in a tone of bitterness, which, however, he evidently tried to restrain.

Fearing to tread again on forbidden ground, Mark forbore to put questions about the guide's objections to his queen, but simply asked her name, and if she had reigned long.

"Her name," said Ravonino, "is Ranavalona. She has reigned for twenty-seven years—twenty-seven long and weary years! I was a little boy when she usurped the throne. Now my sun has reached its meridian, yet she is still there, a blight upon the land. But God knows what is best. He cannot err."

This was the first reference that Ravonino had made to the Creator, and Mark was about to push his inquiries further, when a confused sound of voices was heard not far in advance of them.

Ravonino, who had been walking with an easy nonchalant air ahead of the party, on a very narrow footpath, suddenly stopped to listen with a look of anxiety. A moment later and he entered the bush that fringed the path and overhung it.

"Come," he said in a low voice, "follow me, close!"

Without a word of explanation he strode into the dense undergrowth, through which he went with the agility of a panther and the sinuosity of a serpent. The others, being, as we have said, very active and strong, kept close at his heels, though not without difficulty. Coming at last to a place where the shrubbery was so intertwined that it was impossible to see more than a yard or two in advance, they suddenly found themselves stopped by a sheer precipice. Only for a few seconds, however, was their progress arrested, while their guide turned to explain.

"There is another and an easier way to the place I am making for, but it is much longer and more exposed. I take for granted that you have strong arms and steady heads, but if not, speak out, for I would not lead you into danger."

"Lead on," said Mark, promptly, "wherever you go, we will follow."

With something like an amused twinkle of the eye, Ravonino began to climb up the face of the precipice, holding on to roots and rope-like creepers like a monkey.

"If this here sort o' cordage was only a bit more taut I wouldn't mind it so much," growled Hockins, as he lost his footing at one place, and swung off the face of the precipice,—holding on to a stout creeper, however, with seaman-like grip and coolness. He quickly caught hold of another creeper, and drew himself again into comparative safety. A minute later and they all stood on a ledge, high up on the face of the cliff, and close to what appeared to be the mouth of a cavern.

"Look there," said their guide, pushing aside the bushes which overhung the cliff in all directions.

They looked, and through the opening beheld a band of men moving in single file along the track they had just left. They were most of them nearly naked, with only short calico breeches which did not quite reach to their knees, but all had muskets on their shoulders and cross-belts on their dark bodies, one of which belts sustained apparently a cartridge-box, the other a bayonet. Their own thick hair was all the cap they wore, excepting two or three men of superior rank, who wore cloths wrapped in turban fashion on their heads, and a voluminous plaid-like garment on their shoulders. These carried swords instead of muskets.

"The soldiers of the Queen," said Ravonino, in answer to Mark Breezy's look. "They are out hunting."

"What do they hunt for?" asked Mark.

"Men and women."

"By which I suppose you mean rebels."

"No, they are not rebels; they are the queen's most loyal subjects!"

"But loyal subjects do not usually fly from their rulers," objected Mark.

"True, but loyal subjects sometimes fly from tyranny," returned the guide. "Come, I will introduce you to some fugitives from tyranny."

He turned as he spoke and led the way into the cave before mentioned. Profound darkness did not prevent his advancing with a firm unhesitating step. As he led Mark by the hand, Hockins and Ebony held on to him and to each other, and had no difficulty in following. Presently they came to a wooden obstruction which proved to be a door. Voices in conversation were heard on the other side of it. A knock from the guide produced sudden silence. Another knock drew from those within an exclamation of surprise, and next moment the heavy door swung open on creaking hinges.

"Yes, it *is* Ravoninohitriniony! I knew his knock. He is come!" exclaimed a girlish voice, as a pair of arms were seen dimly to encircle the guide's neck.

Of course the girl spoke in the native tongue, which was quite incomprehensible to our travellers, but if we are to enlighten our readers we must needs translate as we go along.

"My sister, Ra-Ruth," said the guide, presenting her to his new friends. "She was a lady in the palace of the queen once. Now she is an outlaw, like myself—has fled from tyranny, and, perhaps, death. All in this cave are in the same case—fugitives from our tyrant queen."

They reached the interior of the place as he spoke, and Ravonino, pointing to a bundle of dried ferns, bade his companions rest there until he had explained some private matters to the people.

Nothing loth—for they were all somewhat fatigued by their recent exertions—our travellers flung themselves on what proved to be a luxurious couch, and observed what went on around them.

Truly it was a strange scene, romantic enough even to satisfy the longings of Mark Breezy!

The cavern itself was a curious one, being in the form of a vast hall, with three smaller chambers opening out of it. The central hall seemed to have no roof, for although brightly lighted by several torches fixed to its rugged walls the upper part was lost in profound obscurity.

This strange abode was peopled by a considerable number of men and women—natives of the island—who from the variety in their costume, features, and complexion, evidently belonged to different tribes. Some were strong, tall, and rather harsh-featured, others were more slender in build

and with refined countenances. A few were almost black, others of a light olive colour, and several made that approach to whiteness of skin which in England is known as brunette. All were more or less characterised by that quiet gentleness and gravity of demeanour which one is accustomed to associate with humbly borne misfortune.

It was evident from the appearance of the large chamber that its inhabitants were associated in groups or families, spaces being marked off by an arrangement of logs and household goods, etcetera, as if to indicate the habitation of each group, and, from certain indications in the smaller chambers, it was equally evident that these had been apportioned as the sleeping-places of the females. A larger space at the end of the cave, opposite to that on which Mark and his comrades reclined, seemed to be a general meeting-place.

To this spot it was that Ravonino went, leading his little sister Ra-Ruth by the hand, and followed by all the inmates of the place, who were eager to know what news he had brought. That the news was the reverse of good soon became evident, from the bowed heads and frequent sighs with which it was received.

Of course our travellers could make no use of their ears, but they made the best use of their eyes, and were deeply interested in the expressions and actions of the various members of the group who successively spoke after the guide had told his story. Poor little Ra-Ruth, whose age might have been about seventeen, was not one of the speakers. She was evidently a timid as well as a pretty little creature, for she clung to and nestled against her stout brother's arm while he was speaking, and hid her face now and then in the masses of her luxuriant brown hair.

Close to her sat a young woman whose appearance and manner formed a striking contrast. She was much darker in complexion, but her features were of classical beauty and her air calm and self-possessed. When she had occasion to speak, she arose, displaying a tall elegantly-formed figure, which moved with queen-like dignity while she gesticulated with graceful animation, and frequently pointed upwards as if appealing to. God. When she was speaking Ra-Ruth's timidity seemed to vanish, for she shook back her hair, and fixed her eyes on the other's face with a gaze that told of ardent love as well as admiration.

The next who spoke was a young man, who in face and figure so strongly resembled the last speaker, that it was impossible to resist the conclusion that they were brother and sister. There was the same tall commanding figure, of course on a larger scale, the same noble cast of feature and the same dignified mien. But in the man, more than in the woman, there was an air of gentle modesty which contrasted well with his powerful frame. He did not gesticulate much in speaking, and, judging from the brevity of his speech, he had not much to say, but what he said was listened to with profound respect by all.

After this youth, several others took part in the debate. Then they all stood up, and, to the surprise of their visitors, began to sing—very sweetly—an old familiar hymn!

"It minds me o' home," whispered Hockins, scarce able to restrain the tears that filled his eyes.

The hymn was nearly finished, when a rushing sound and a subdued cry were heard to issue from a dark passage, the mouth of which was close to the couch of our travellers. The singing ceased instantly. Next moment a man rushed into the chamber with labouring breath and flashing eyes. Springing towards Ravonino, he spoke several words eagerly, at the same time pointing in the direction of the passage just referred to.

"Lights out and silence!" cried the guide, authoritatively, in the native tongue.

Another moment and the cave was in total darkness, and a silence so profound reigned there that the three visitors could hardly persuade themselves the whole affair was not a strange dream. The voice of Ravonino, however, soon dispelled that idea.

"Be still!" whispered the guide, laying his hand on Mark's shoulder. "Our foes have discovered our retreat."

"There's a lot of stout fellows here," returned Mark, also in a whisper. "We will help you if you have to fight."

"We may not fight," replied Ravonino softly. "If it be God's will, we must die. Hush! They come."

Once more total silence prevailed in the cavern, and the sound of distant voices could be heard. In a few minutes a tiny light was seen at the end of the dark passage. It gradually increased in size, revealing a soldier who bore a torch. He advanced on tip-toe, and with slightly scared looks, into an outer cavern which formed a sort of vestibule to the large inner cave.

The soldier was brave, no doubt, and would have faced an army in the field, but he was extremely superstitious, and advanced with a palpitating heart, the torch held high above his head, and eyes glancing nervously from side to side. A crowd of comrades, similarly affected more or less, followed the torch-bearer and pushed him on.

"Nothing here," said the leading man, of course in Malagasy.

"Let us be gone, then," said one of his comrades.

"No," observed a third, who seemed bolder than the rest, "perhaps there is another cave beyond," (pointing to the dark passage, through which, though unseen, Mark and his companions with the guide were gazing anxiously at their foes). "Give me the torch."

The soldier seized the light and advanced quickly towards the opening. Another minute and all must have been revealed. A feeling of despair took possession of Ravonino's breast and he gave vent to an involuntary sigh.

The sound reached the ear of the soldier with the torch and for a moment arrested him, but, thinking probably that the sound was in his imagination, he again advanced. The case was now desperate. Just then a gleam of light flashed into the mind of Hockins. Next moment, to the consternation of his comrades and the guide, a strain of the sweetest music floated softly in the air!

The soldiers stood still—spell-bound. It was not an unfamiliar air, for they had often heard the hated Christians sing it, but the sweet, liquid—we might almost say tiny—tones in which it was conveyed, were such as had never before reached their ears or even entered their imaginations. It was evident from their countenances that the soldiers were awe-stricken. The seaman noted this. He played only a few bars, and allowed the last notes of his flageolet to grow faint until they died away into absolute silence.

For a minute or two the soldiers stood rooted to the spot, gazing up into the roof of the cave as if expecting a renewal of the sounds. Then they looked solemnly at each other. Without uttering a word they turned slowly round, retreated on tip-toe as they came, and finally disappeared.

We need hardly say that the astonishment of the people in the cave at the mode of their deliverance from the threatened danger was intense.

When the torches were relighted the men and women assembled round Ravonino with looks little less solemn than those of the soldiers who had just taken their departure.

"Surely," said the handsome young man whom we have already introduced, "surely God has wrought a miracle and sent an angel's voice for our deliverance."

"Not so, Laihova," replied Ravonino, with a slight smile. "We are too apt to count everything that we fail to understand a miracle. God has indeed sent the deliverance, but through a natural channel."

"Yet we see not the channel, Ravoninohitriniony," said Laihova's queen-like sister, Ramatoa.

"True, Ramatoa. Nevertheless I can show it to you. Come, Hockins," he added in English, "clear up the mystery to them."

Thus bidden, our seaman at once drew forth the little instrument and began to play the hymn they had just been singing, with the air of which, as we have said, he chanced to be well acquainted.

It would be hard to say whether surprise or pleasure predominated in the breasts of his audience. At last the latter feeling prevailed, and the whole assembly joined in singing the last verse of the hymn, which appropriately terminated in “Praise ye the Lord.”

“But our retreat is no longer safe,” said Ravonino, when the last echo of their thanksgiving had died away. “We must change our abode—and that without delay. Get ready. By the first light of morning I will lead you to a new home. These soldiers will not return, but they will tell what they have seen, and others less timorous will come here to search for us.”

Immediately the people set about collecting together and packing up what may be termed their household goods, leaving the guide and their visitors to enjoy supper and conversation in their own corner of the cave.

Chapter Six.
The Guide becomes Communicative, and tells of Terrible Doings

During the progress of supper, which consisted of cold dried meat and rice, the quartette seated on the ferns in the corner of the cave were unusually silent. Mark Breezy and Ravonino continued to eat for some time without speaking a word. Ebony, although earnestly absorbed in victuals, rolled his eyes about as he looked from time to time at his companions with unwonted solemnity, and John Hockins frowned at his food, and shook his shaggy head with an air of dissatisfied perplexity.

"Ravonino," at length said the last, looking up, and using his grass pocket-handkerchief, "it seems to me, bein' a plain straight-for'ard sort o' seaman, that there's somethin' not exactly fair an' above-board in all them proceedin's. Of course it's not for me to say what a independent man should do or say; but don't you think that w'en a man like you professes to be honest, an' asks other men to trust him, he should at least explain *some* o' the riddles that surround him? I'm a loyal man myself, an' I'll stand up for *my* Queen an' country, no matter what may be the circumstances in w'ich I'm placed; so that w'en I sees another man admittin' that he's a outlaw, an' finds the soldiers of *his* Queen a-huntin' all about the country arter him and his comrades—seems to me there's a screw loose somewheres."

"Dat's *my* sent'ments zactly," said the negro, with a decisive nod.

Mark took no notice of this speech, but silently continued his supper. For a few moments the guide did not speak or look up. Then, laying down his knife and clasping his hands over one of his knees, he looked earnestly into the seaman's face.

"You tell me you are loyal," he said.

Hockins nodded.

"If your queen," continued Ravonino, "were to tell you to give up the service of God and worship idols, would you do it?"

"Cer'nly not," replied the seaman, promptly, "for she has no right to rule over my soul. My duty to the King of Kings stands before my duty to the Queen of England."

Again the guide was silent for a few minutes. Then he said:—

"Hockins, by God's blessing you have saved the lives of all our party this day—at least it seemed so, for, another step, and that soldier would have discovered us if your little pipe had not stopped him. You are therefore entitled to expect some gratitude, and, from what I have seen of you and your comrades, I have reason to believe you will not betray us, even if you get the chance."

"Right you are, friend, I will never betray an honest man; an' I may speak for my comrades as well as self, for they're true-blue to the back-bone—"

"Furder nor dat," interposed Ebony, "troo-bloo to de marrow!"

"Don't you shove in your oar till you're ordered, you nigger! Well, as I was a-sayin', we'll never betray honest men, but I give you fair warnin' if you're *not* honest, we'll have nothin' to do wi' your secrets, an' if our duty to God an' man requires us to go against you, we'll do it without flinchin'."

"So be it. I am satisfied," returned Ravonino, calmly. "I will tell you as much as I think you are entitled to know. It may have reached your ears, perhaps, that there has been terrible persecution in this island for many years."

Here Mark Breezy took up the conversation.

"No," said he, with something of a deprecatory air, "we did not know it. For my part I am ashamed to say so; but I will say in excuse that the British empire is widely extended in every quarter of the globe, and her missions are so numerous that average men can scarcely hope to keep up with the details of all of the persecutions that occur. Rumours, indeed, I have heard of doings in

Madagascar that vie with the persecutions of the Scottish Covenanters; but more than this I know not, though of course there are men connected with our Missionary Societies—and many people, no doubt, interested in missions—who know all about the persecutions in Madagascar. Is it in connection with this that you have been outlawed?"

"It is. Ranavalona, the blood-stained usurper, our present queen, is filled with such bitter hatred of Christianity that she has for many years persecuted the native Christians who have been taught by white missionaries from your land. Hundreds of men and women have been murdered by her orders because they refused to forsake Christ; others have been banished to regions so unhealthy that they have died, and many have been sold into slavery."

The eyes of the guide gleamed for a moment, and his stern countenance flushed as he thus referred to the sorrows of his people, but by a strong effort he controlled his feelings, and his countenance resumed its habitual quietude.

"My mother and my sister and I," he continued, "were sold into slavery. My mother was a native lady, high in station, and a member of the court of King Radama the First, who was very favourable to Missionaries. I was an infant at that time; my little sister was not born. My father was an English trader, skilled in many handicrafts, and a great favourite with the king, who fostered the Christian religion and helped those who came to teach us. Our teachers learned our language; taught us the love of God, and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, brought many of us to the Saviour. But they were persevering and wise as well as good. Having learned our language—in which my father helped them much—they taught us to read; translated many parts of the Word of God into our tongue; sent home for presses and types, and had these printed, as well as the *Pilgrim's Progress* and other books.

"Peace, joy, and prosperity were spreading in our land. Idol-worship and cruel customs were being uprooted, and everything was going well when the king died—whether a Christian or not, who can tell? for, although favourable to, he never professed, Christianity. 'The Lord knoweth them that are His!' The rightful heir to the throne, according to our customs, was Rakotobe—a good young man who had been taught by the missionaries, and was nephew to the king; but Ranavalona, one of the king's wives, resolved to seize the opportunity. A bold bad woman, with a powerful will and no principle, she carried her point by reckless bloodshed. There were men at court as bad as herself who agreed to aid her. When she boldly claimed the throne, four loyal nobles asserted the claim of Rakotobe. They were instantly speared in the palace. The rightful heir was not present. Soldiers were sent to his residence to seize and kill him before he should hear of what was going on.

"Not content with shedding blood, the cruel monsters dug the poor youth's grave before his eyes. When they were thus engaged Rakotobe kneeled down to pray, and while he was in this position they speared him and cast him into his grave. Soon after the father and mother of Rakotobe were murdered—the last being starved to death. The brother of Radama was destroyed in like manner. He lingered eight days in agony before death came to his relief. Then Rakotobe's grandmother and other relations were slain by Ranavalona's orders, and thus the murderess waded through blood to the throne of Madagascar!

"Think you," continued the guide, with a passing gleam of the anger which he strove to restrain, "think you that I owe allegiance to *such* a queen?"

"Truly ye do not," answered the seaman, stoutly. "My only wonder is that the people suffer her to reign."

Scarce heeding the reply the guide continued, with suppressed excitement, "but she did not rest content. It was in the year 1829 that she usurped the throne. Since then she has persecuted the Christians for more than a quarter of a century, and at times blood has flowed like water in our land. Bad as she is, however, she would have been worse but for her love to her son. Ay, the woman whose heart is a stone to most people is soft towards the young prince Rakota, in spite of the fact that this youth is favourable to the Christians and has often stood between them and his mother.

"About nine years after the queen's coronation my little sister was born, and was secretly baptised—the name of Ruth being given to her. It is our custom to prefix Ra to many names—so she is Ra-Ruth. Look at her!" He pointed to a group not far-off, where the delicate and graceful girl was busily assisting an elderly woman in her packing arrangements. "See you the lady beside her, with the grey hair and the sad worn face? That is my mother. I have said she was high at the Court of Radama the First. She was young then. I was born the year that Radama died. Ranavalona was fond of her, though she loved not her Christianity, so she continued at the palace. The Queen also became very fond of my little sister when she began to grow to womanhood, but Ra-Ruth could not return the affection of one whose hands were stained so deeply with Christian blood. I was an officer in the palace at the time, but would gladly have left, only my doing so might have roused the queen's wrath against my father and mother.

"At last the missionaries were ordered to quit the capital. In 1849 a great persecution took place. The queen became furious because her people would not cease to love and serve Jesus. She ordered many men and women to be speared and burned and tossed over precipices, but all without avail, because 'greater is He who is for us than all who can be against us.'

"My father was away on a trading expedition at this time. One day in attempting to cross a lake he was drowned." The guide's voice deepened as he went on, "He was a good loving father to me. He taught me nearly all I know, and he was no mean scholar. He also sent me to the missionary schools. After his death the Queen hardened her heart against us; and as we refused to give up praying to God and singing His praise, we were cast out of the palace—my mother and sister and I, with several others, among whom were Laihova and his sister Ramatoa. We were sold into slavery in the public market.

"Our purchaser was cruel. He put us to the hardest menial work. We remained for several years with him. The health of my poor mother and sister began to give way. Then he sold me to another man, and we were separated. This was too much, I suppose, for the English blood in me to endure quietly. I made my escape. I went back to my old owner, and, in the night, induced my mother and sister to fly. Many persecuted Christians have fled since then and are now hiding in dens and caves like hunted beasts. We soon found some of these in the depths of the forests, and agreed to band together. They made me their leader, and I brought them here, where we have lived and worshipped God in peace; but, as you have seen, we are liable to be captured at any moment."

"And if captured," said Mark, "would the Queen really put you to death?"

"I fear she would; nay, I am certain of it, because one who recently escaped from Antananarivo has just brought the news that the Queen has been visited with a fresh burst of anger against the Christians, has thrown many into prison and sent out troops to scour the country in search of those who have fled."

"But if that is so," said Hockins, earnestly, "what's the use o' you riskin' your life by goin' with us to Ant—Ant—all-alive-O! (I'll never git that name into my head!) Why not just sketch us out a rough chart o' the island on a bit o' bark, give us the bearin's o' the capital, an' let us steer a straight course for it. I'll be bound that we'll make our port easy enough."

"Yes, Hockins speaks wisely," added Mark. "It is very kind of you to take so much trouble for us, but there is no need to run such great risk on our account."

"You do not consider," replied Ravonino, "that it is more difficult for sailors to cross the wild forest than to find their way on the trackless sea, and you forget also that the way is long, that Madagascar is larger than Great Britain and Ireland put together. There are many tribes, too, some of which are not so hospitable as others. You could not avoid the dangers of this wilderness easily without a guide. Besides, I do not mean to enter the capital. I will merely guide you to within sight of it and then leave you. Fortunately you require no assistance from natives, not being encumbered with this world's goods."

"Das troo; ha, ha–a!" cried Ebony, opening his portentous mouth and shutting his eyes, "we've got no luggidge."

"Well, we shall only be too glad of your company," said Mark, with some feeling, "and we thank you most heartily for your disinterested kindness."

"My conduct is not altogether disinterested," returned the guide. "The truth is, I had no intention at first of doing more than guiding you to the right pass in the mountains, but since I have been with you my feelings have been modified, and the news which we have just received has—has filled me with anxiety, and raised in my mind the idea that—that I may even make use of you!"

"That's right," exclaimed Mark, heartily, "I'm glad if there is the smallest chance of our serving you in any way. In what way can we do so?"

For some moments the guide displayed a degree of hesitancy which his friends had not before noticed in him. Then he spoke, slowly—

"Well, the truth is, that I have a friend in the palace who is, I have been told, in great danger, owing to the wrath of Ranavalona. I thought that somehow, perhaps, you might give warning to this friend, and say that Samuel Ravoninohitriniony is in the neighbouring forest, and—"

Here the guide stopped short, and seemed to be in some perplexity. Mark Breezy, whose young and romantic spirit was deeply stirred by the prospect of adventure which his words had opened up, assured him with enthusiasm that whatever was possible for man to accomplish he might depend upon being at least vigorously attempted. To which assurance John Hockins begged to "putt the word ditto," and the negro fervently added, "Das so—me too!"

"But how are we to find your friend," asked Mark, "seeing that we don't know him, and have never seen him?"

"My friend is not a man, but a—a woman, a young girl," said Ravonino, with the slightest possible symptom of confusion, which opened the eyes of Mark instantly, and still further stirred his sympathies.

"Ravonino," he exclaimed, suddenly grasping the guide's hand, "treat me as a friend and trust me. You love this young girl! Is it not so? Nay, man, don't be angry with me. I can't help sympathising. Why, I know something of your—your—a—condition myself. The morning I left England, the very last person I said good-bye to was a fair young girl, with golden hair, and a rosebud mouth, and such lovely blue—"

"Das right, Massa," burst in Ebony, with a crow of admiration. "It doos my bery heart good to see a man as is proud ob his sweet'art. I's got one too, bress you! but *she* ain't fair! No, she's black as de kitchen chimbly, wid a bootiful flat nose, a mout' like a coal-scuttle, an' *such* eyes—oh!"

"Hold your tongue, Ebony! Now, am I not right, Ravonino?"

"You are right," answered the guide, gravely, yet without displeasure. "My Rafaravavy is in danger, and I must save her from this murderess at all hazards. It is right, however, to tell you that if you attempt to aid me you will encounter both difficulty and danger."

"Don't mention that, friend. No true man would shrink from either in a good cause," said Mark. "But when must we set out on this expedition?"

"By day-break to-morrow. Our new hiding-place is on our way, so the change will not delay us; and from what the fugitives have told us, I hope—indeed I feel sure—that the Queen will do no further mischief for some weeks to come. But now, comrades," said the guide, rising, "we must rest if we would work to-morrow. Follow me."

He led them into one of the side caves, when the whole of the people followed, as if by preconcerted arrangement. Here a much-soiled book in a leathern cover was produced. It was a portion of the Bible in the Malagasy language. A few verses were reverently read by the guide; a brief earnest prayer was offered by a very old man; a hymn was sung, and then the people dispersed to their several sections of the cave. Finally the lights were extinguished, and the place was left in silence and darkness profound.

Chapter Seven.
Describes a Meek Mother and Crocodile-Son. Journey Resumed and Strange Treatment of the King of the Waters

Dawn was still struggling to assert itself in the far east and the depths of the forest were still shrouded in almost midnight gloom, when the strange band of outlaws emerged from their cave, and, led by Ravonino, went forth to search for a safer dwelling-place in the still more inaccessible fastnesses of the wilderness.

They had not much difficulty in finding a suitable spot, for the particular region to which they had fled from persecution was exceedingly wild and broken in form, and abounded with concealed caverns having outlets in several directions, so that pursuit and discovery were alike difficult.

We may not delay here, however, to tell of their wanderings. Like the Christians of other lands and, more ancient times, they were hunted like wild beasts, though their only crime was a desire to serve and worship God according to the dictates of their consciences. It is the old familiar story, and comment is needless to those who understand it—

> "Man's inhumanity to man
> Makes countless thousands mourn."

There is only one other member of the party of whom we will make mention just now, because she appears again somewhat prominently in our tale. This was a little elderly female who seemed utterly destitute of the very common human attribute of self-assertion, and in whose amiable, almost comical, countenance, one expression seemed to overbear and obliterate all others, namely that of gushing good-will to man and beast! Those who did not know Réni-Mamba thought her an amiable imbecile. Those who knew her well loved her with peculiar tenderness. Her modesty and self-abnegation were not, so far as any one knew, the result of principle. She was too unassertive to lay claim to principle! We are not sure that she understood the meaning of principle.

Before Christianity in its doctrinal form reached her she had only one source of discomfort in life, and that was, that in *everything* she failed! Failed to do as much as she wanted to do for other people; failed to express herself always as affectionately as she felt; failed to avoid giving slight occasions of offence, although she "never, *never* meant to do it!" In short she was, strange to say, a victim to self-condemnation. When the Gospel of Jesus came to her, telling, as it does, that "God is Love," that Christ came to sweep away for ever the very sins that troubled her, and that His Holy Spirit would fight for and *in* her, so as to make her "more than conqueror," she caught it to her heart as the very thing she needed.

She did not indeed condemn herself less—nay, she rather condemned herself more than formerly—but the joy of being on the winning side, of knowing that all sin was pardoned for His sake, of feeling assured of progressive victory now and complete victory in the end, thoroughly scattered her old troubles to the winds.

Her very name was characteristic. It is a common and curious custom in Madagascar for parents sometimes to drop their own names and take the name of their eldest child with the word *raini*, "father of," or *réni*, "mother of," prefixed. Now this amiable little elderly woman had been married young, and it so happened that her husband was away on an expedition to the coast when the first and only son was born. One of the first things that the child did after opening its black eyes on this life was to open its uncommonly large mouth, with the intention, no doubt, of howling. But circumstances apparently induced it to change its mind, for it shut its mouth without howling.

The effect of the gape on the mother was to remind her of one class of inhabitants of her native rivers—the crocodile—and cause her laughingly to style the child her "young crocodile." The Malagasy word for crocodile is *mamba*, and thus the child came by his name, with the usual prefix, Ra-Mamba. After a time his mother became so proud of her young crocodile that she dropped her own name entirely—congenially, as it were, obliterated herself—and ever after was known as Réni-Mamba, "mother of the crocodile."

At the time we write of, Mamba, (we will drop the "Ra"), was a stalwart handsome youth of over twenty, with no resemblance whatever to his namesake except a goodly-sized mouth and an amazing strength of appetite.

Need we say that his mother's gushing powers were expended upon him with the force of a Norwegian mill-race? It is gratifying to be able to add that the crocodile was keenly responsive!

The father of little Mamba—Andrianivo—had returned to the capital soon after his son's birth. He was a man in good position among the aristocracy of the land, and occupied a post of trust in the Queen's service. At that time the first great persecution of the Christians had begun. It was known that Andrianivo favoured the Christians. On the question being put to him, he frankly admitted that he was one of them. He was therefore despoiled of all he possessed, and banished into perpetual exile and slavery. He was sent in chains to a pestilential part of the island, with the intention that toil and disease should end his life. So secretly and promptly was he spirited away that no one could tell the precise locality to which he had been banished. His heart-broken wife and child were also sold, but were taken to a more healthy region, where the child grew and became a stout boy; his little mother, meanwhile, acting the part of a meek and faithful slave. She would probably have lived and died in this condition had not her stout son, when he grew up, resolved to become free. His mother had taught him what she knew of the Christian religion. From Ravonino he learned more, and heard of the escaped Christians who found a refuge in forests and mountains. Finally he persuaded his mother to run away with him, and thus it came about that we find them with the band of which Ravonino was leader—Laihova being lieutenant of the band.

An occasion for the display of his affectionate nature was afforded to Mamba on the morning we write of. Active as a kitten, though middle-aged, Réni-Mamba was skipping from rock to rock in a very rugged part of their route, when, her foot slipping, she fell and sprained her ankle badly.

Mamba was close to her.

"Mother!" he exclaimed, hurrying forward and raising her carefully, "why jump about like the squirrel? Are you hurt?"

"My son, help me to rise."

Gently the youth lifted her, and set her on her feet, whereupon she sank down again with a little shriek, and looked up with an expression of mingled humour and pain.

"My leg, I think, is broken!" said Réni. For the sake of brevity we will drop the "Mamba."

"Surely not, mother; it has been too tough and strong to break ever since I knew it."

Mamba spoke encouragingly; nevertheless, he examined the limb with anxious care. Being ignorant of surgery his examination was not of much use, but, fortunately, just then Mark Breezy, who had lingered behind to gather some plants, arrived on the scene. He found the injury to be a bad sprain, and did the best he could for the poor woman in the circumstances.

"Now, we must carry her," he said to the guide, "for she won't be able to walk for many days."

On this being translated, Mamba gathered his mother up as if she had been a bundle of clothes, or a baby, and marched away with her.

"Stop, stop!" cried Ravonino, "you can't carry her more than a few miles on such ground as I shall soon lead you over. We must arrange for her a *filanzana*."

The guide here referred to the sort of palanquin used by travellers in a country where there were no roads. It consisted of a shallow, oblong basket, with light wooden framework, filled in with plaited strips of sheepskin, and hung between two light poles or bamboos. As several such machines

were used by some of the party to carry their few household necessaries, one of them was at once emptied and Réni put therein by her affectionate son. Four stout young men put the ends of the poles on their shoulders, and the party once more advanced, Mamba walking by the side of the *filanzana* to be ready to assist in cases of difficulty or danger, and to relieve the bearers occasionally.

That afternoon they arrived at their new abode—a large, dry cavern—the entrance to which was not only well concealed on the face of a cliff in the heart of a dense jungle, but so difficult of access that a mere handful of men might easily have maintained it against a host.

Here Ravonino made no further delay than was necessary to see the party fairly settled. Then he left them, but not before receiving many an earnest and affectionate message to friends and kindred of the fugitives still at the capital, but who had, as yet, managed to elude the vigilance and escape the malignity of Queen Ranavalona and her spies. Some of the women even wept as they bade the guide farewell, saying that they felt sure he would at last fall a victim to the relentless fury of the Queen, and that they should see his face no more.

With these the guide gently remonstrated.

"Think you not," he said, "that God is as able to protect me in Antananarivo as here in the wilderness? I go because I think that duty calls me. I expect no miracle in my behalf. I will take all possible precautions. Farewell."

Once more our three travellers found themselves advancing rapidly in single file through the forest, with the guide in advance. Before the sinking sun compelled them to encamp under the trees that night they had put many miles between them and the hiding-place of the outlawed Christians.

Next day, as they were about to resume their journey, Ravonino told them that about noon they would come to a large river, on the other side of which there was a village where they could spend the night, for the people and their chief were friendly.

"Are they Christians?" asked Mark.

"No—at least the most of them are not, though there may be a few secret converts among them; for this hot persecution at the capital has scattered the Christians far and wide through the land, so that the knowledge of the blessed Gospel spreads. Thus our God makes the wrath of man to praise Him. The remainder of wrath He has promised to restrain. If He wills it otherwise, are we not prepared to die at His bidding? Many of our people have died already under the bloody reign of Ranavalona the usurper. How many more shall perish, who can tell?"

"But how do it come about," asked Hockins, "that this here chief is friendly?"

"Because I had occasion to render him good service at one time, and he is grateful."

"Good! Das allers de right way," remarked Ebony, with an approving nod. "W'en a man's grateful he's safe—you's sure ob 'im. Is dat de ribber you refur to jes' now?"

He pointed to an opening among the trees ahead, through which the sheen of water glittering in the sunlight could be seen.

Before the guide could reply a loud shout startled them, and next moment they were surrounded by half-naked savages, who brandished their spears threateningly.

Quick as lightning, according to a pre-arranged plan in case of sudden attack, Mark, Hockins, and the negro stood back-to-back, facing in all directions—the first with his gun advanced, the seaman pointing his cutlass at the foe, and Ebony levelling a spear with which he had provided himself, little would their courage have availed them, however, if Ravonino had not been there, for a flight of spears would have ended their resistance in a moment.

"Voalavo, your chief, is my friend," said the guide, calmly, without putting himself in an attitude of defence, or showing the slightest symptom of alarm. "Is Voalavo with you?"

"Voalavo comes," they replied, at once lowering their weapons and pointing in the direction of the river, whence proceeded sounds as of the lowing of cattle.

"We have been to visit our enemies," said one of the party, who, from his tones and bearing, appeared to be a leader. "We have smitten them, and we have brought away their cattle."

As he spoke another native was seen approaching. He was a large burly jovial-looking man, somewhere about forty years of age, armed with a spear and enveloped in the native *lamba*, a garment used much in the same way as the Scottish plaid, which it resembled in form, though of much lighter material. The ornamentation of this garment proclaimed the wearer a person of distinction, and the evident satisfaction that beamed on his broad jovial countenance when he recognised and greeted Ravonino showed that it was Voalavo himself—the chief of the village they were approaching.

"I'm sorry to see," said the guide, after the first few words of salutation, "that my friend still delights in war and robbery."

"Don't be sorry, friend, don't be sorry," returned the chief with a hearty laugh, as he gave the other a slap on the shoulder. "Sorrow does no good. It only puts water in the eyes and makes them red. Look at me—just returned from 'war and robbery,' and as happy as a squirrel. If a man does not delight in war and robbery, what is there in the world to delight in? If *I* am not sorry why should *you* be? If you can't help it—then laugh at it and try to enjoy your sorrow. That's the way *I* do. It suits me. I grow fat on it!"

He certainly did grow fat—if not on laughing at sorrow, certainly on something else—and his followers, although respectfully silent, showed by their smiling faces that they sympathised with their chief's hilarious mood.

"But where did you fall in with the white men?" asked Voalavo, turning suddenly towards Mark and Hockins, who stood listening with interest and curiosity to the rapid flow of his unintelligible talk. "Such pale flowers do not grow in *our* forests!"

In a few words Ravonino explained the history of our adventurers as far as he knew it, and the chief, on learning that they were his friend's friends, bade them welcome, and shook hands heartily in the European fashion—a mode of expressing friendship which had probably been learned from the missionaries, who, after spending many years in Madagascar, had, about the time we write of, been all banished from the island.

"Come now," cried the chief, "the rice will soon be ready—that won't make you sorry, Ravonino, will it?—and we have yet to cross the river with the cattle in the face of the hungry crocodiles—which won't make *them* sorry! Come."

Turning impulsively, in the brusque careless manner which characterised him, Voalavo led the way to the banks of the river—a considerable stream—where the cattle were assembled and guarded by a band of over a hundred warriors.

"Cattle seem to be plentiful in these parts," said Mark to the guide as they walked along.

"They are numerous everywhere in Madagascar. In truth a large part of our exports to the Mauritius and elsewhere consists of cattle.—Look! the chief was right when he said the crocodiles would not be sorry to see the cattle crossing."

He pointed to a ripple on the water caused by the ugly snout of one of the creatures referred to. It seemed by the activity of its movements to be already anticipating a feast.

"Crocodiles," continued the guide, "are numerous in many of our lakes and rivers, and dangerous too, though they are naturally timid, and can be easily frightened away. I remember a curious instance of this kind happening on the east coast, where a European trader was cleverly imposed on—deceived, or, what you call—"

"Humbugged," suggested Hockins.

"Well, yes—humbugged! He was a big ignorant fellow, this trader; strong and energetic enough, but full of conceit—thought he knew almost everything, but in reality knew next to nothing, yet self-willed and obstinate enough to—to— You know the sort of man?"

"Yes, yes; a stoopid cockscomb," said Hockins. "I know the breed well—lots of 'em everywhere."

"Jus' so—a born idjit; go on, massa," said Ebony, who was always charmed at the prospect of a story or anecdote.

"Well, this trader," continued the guide, "was on his way from Antananarivo to the coast with cattle for exportation, and one day they came to a place where they had to cross a narrow part of a lake. The natives of that place advised him not to venture without trying the effect of their *ody*, or charms, on the crocodiles. These they said, and believed, would protect the cattle in crossing. But the trader scouted the idea, and, laughing at their superstitions, gave orders to drive the bullocks into the water. He quickly repented his obstinacy, for no sooner were they in than the crocodiles seized nine of them and dragged them down. 'Oh! bring the ody—work the ody—quick!' cried the anxious man, fearing lest all the cattle should be seized. The *ody* was worked instantly, and to his astonishment, as well as the triumph of the natives, the rest of the cattle crossed in safety. Even those that had been nearly drowned escaped and passed over."

"But how was dat?" asked Ebony, with a perplexed air. "If de *ody* was nuffin', how could it do suffin'?"

"Simply enough," returned the guide. "The charm consisted merely in noise. The natives, in canoes and on both sides of the lake, shouted furiously and beat the water with branches of trees, so that the poor crocodiles were scared away. See—there is something of the same sort going to be performed just now."

Previous to this process, however, the chief Voalavo went through a singular ceremony to propitiate the crocodiles. The Malagasy, like the ancient Egyptians, regard the crocodile with superstitious veneration. They esteem him the king of the waters, and to dispute his right to reign would, they believe, expose them to his vengeance. Hence they seldom kill crocodiles, and rather avoid whatever is likely to provoke them. It is their custom, also, sometimes to make solemn speeches and vows to the crocodiles when about to cross rivers.

Voalavo, who was unusually reckless, free-and-easy, and regardless in ordinary affairs, was nevertheless remarkably superstitious. Before giving orders to cross the river, therefore, he advanced to the water's edge and mumbled incantations or made vows in a low tone for nearly half-an-hour. Then, elevating his voice, so as to be heard across the river, he continued, addressing the crocodiles:—

"Now, I pray you, good mamba, to do me no injury, and particularly to spare my cattle, for you do not know what trouble I have had to get them. No doubt you know how anxious I and my people are to eat them, for you have much of the same desire; but I beseech you to exercise self-denial. You don't know how pleasant that will make you feel! Remember that I have never done your royal race any injury—never waged war with you or killed you. On the contrary I have always held you in the highest veneration. If you do not remember this, but forget it, I and my whole race and all my relatives will declare war and fight against you for ever more! So be good and do what I tell you!"

"Now, my men," he cried, turning round, "drive in the cattle, work the *ody*, and make all the dogs bark!"

In the midst of an indescribable hubbub the herds were then driven into the river, and the men —some in canoes and some on both banks—enacted the very scene which Ravonino had described. In a few minutes the whole herd was got over in safety.

Half-an-hour later and our travellers were seated in the chief's house regaling themselves with beef-steaks and marrow-bones, chickens and rice.

Chapter Eight.
A Friend appears unexpectedly, and our Travellers spend a Disturbed Night

Whatever ethereal persons may say to the contrary, there can be no doubt whatever that the consumption of food is an intellectual treat, inasmuch as it sets the body free from the cravings of appetite, and by stimulating those nervous influences which convey vigour and vitality to the brain, not only becomes the direct cause of physical gratification, but induces that state of mind which is most favourable to the development of the interesting creations of fancy and the brilliant coruscations of imagination.

We might pursue this subject further did time and space permit; but our objection to "skipping" is so great, that we shrink from giving the reader even a shadow of excuse for doing so. Moreover we dread the assault of the hypercritical reader, who will infallibly object that it is not "the consumption of food," but the resulting mental effect which is the "intellectual treat." As if we did not know that! "But," we would retort with scorn, "can any cause be separated from its effect without bringing about, so to speak, the condition of nonentity?"

Passing to the subject which gave rise to these erratic thoughts, we have to relate that the whole party, entertainers and entertained, did ample justice to the rice, beef, chicken and marrow-bones, after which Hockins wafted the natives to the seventh heaven of delight and wonder by means of his flageolet. It was very late that night before they retired to rest. It was later still before they went to sleep.

The native village at which our travellers had arrived was a rude, poor-looking place, inhabited by a brave and war-like tribe, who depended more for defence on their personal prowess and the difficulties presented by their forests, than upon ditches or ramparts. The village was, however, surrounded by a fence of trees growing so close together that it would have been almost impossible to carry the place by assault if resolutely defended from within.

The huts were roughly constructed of bamboos plastered with clay and lined with matting,—also with the large leaves of the "traveller's tree," and thatched with rushes.

The chief's hut, in which the white guests were feasted, was of course larger and somewhat better in construction than the others. Its floor, composed of hard-beaten clay, was covered with matting, clean pieces of which were spread for the visitors to squat upon, for there were no chairs, stools, or tables. In the north-west corner was the hearth—a square of between two and three feet, with a few large stones for supporting the cooking utensils, but without chimney of any kind. Smoke was allowed to find an exit as it best could by crevices in the roof and by a small window or hole in the north gable. A few cooking-pots, earthen jars, rice-baskets, some knives, a wooden chest, and several spears, completed the furniture.

Against the northern roof-post hung a small bottle-shaped basket, which contained the household *sampey*, or god, or charm. In Madagascar this usually consists of a meaningless stone; sometimes a chip of wood, the leaf of a tree, or a flower, and this is what the natives pray to and profess to trust in!

Our travellers found, after supper was over, that they were not to sleep in the chief's house, for they were led to that of a head-man of the village, and told they were to rest with him. This man was old, and seemed to have no wife or family, for the only person at home at the time, besides himself, was an old woman, perhaps his sister, who looked after the household. He was a hospitable old man, however, and made them heartily welcome to their beds of matting in the north end of the hut. Unfortunately the south end of it was usually occupied by pigs and poultry. These were expelled for the occasion, but they insisted several times on returning to their own abode, being unable, apparently,

to believe that their expulsion was really intended! As there were several openings in the hut, the difficulty of excluding the animals was great, for when expelled at one hole, amid remonstrative shrieks and screams, they quickly re-entered at another with defiant grunts and cacklings.

By stopping up the holes, however, the enemy was finally overcome. Then the old man, having retired to his corner, and the sister having departed, Mark Breezy, John Hockins, James Ginger, and Ravonino drew round the fire, heaped-on fresh logs, lay down at full length on their mats, and prepared to enjoy that sleepy chat which not unfrequently precedes, sometimes even postpones, repose.

"That was a curious speech that Voalavo made to the crocodile, Ravonino," said Mark. "Do you really think he believed it did any good?"

"Yes, truly, he believed it. This is a land of charms and superstition. Voalavo is of too honest and straightforward a nature to practise what he does not believe in."

"Does *you* b'lieve in charms an' soopistition?" asked Ebony, with expectant eyes.

"What need to ax that, you stoopid nigger?" said Hockins; "don't you know he's a Christian?"

"Das true, 'Ockins. I hoed an' forgot."

"But tell me, Ravonino, are de crokindiles awrful rampageous when dey're roused?"

"Yes, they are pretty bad," said the guide, clearing his throat, for he was fond of expatiating on the wonders and beauties of his native land! "And although they look sluggish enough when sprawling on mud-banks, half-asleep in the sun, you would be surprised to see them go after fish, which is their principal food. Their favourite haunts are the deep rugged banks of a river or lake overhung with trees, where they can hide themselves and watch for prey. It is not only in water that they are dangerous. They fasten their teeth, if they get the chance, on any animal that comes to the river to drink. They sometimes get hold of bullocks when drinking, and often do so when the cattle are swimming across. They are unnaturally ferocious, too, for they will devour their own young."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.