

Some warily dug pits, burying themselves out of sight in the yellow depths.

The flying hair of the women, the bloodshot eyes of the men, grew tinged with the golden hue.

Worn out with the struggle and riot, some sank down for a brief rest.

Others still sang, and danced, and fought.

Suddenly a far-away shout of many voices broke the seeming lull.

Ariadne raised her eyes. She looked in the direction from whence the sound had come.

She beheld, swiftly approaching along the western reef, what appeared to be a great mass of yellow cloud.

The cloud, as it rolled nearer, resolved itself into sparkling dust. In it could be faintly discerned the forms of many men, they gesticulating wildly as they ran. They pierced the air with their cries.

Whether of joy or grief, the dreamer could not tell.

On! on! rolled the glittering dust cloud.

It touched the outskirts of the golden city.

The roar of its voices startled the ear of the crowd of men and women in the streets.

They turned their eyes towards the west, from whence the crowd appeared.

Then a mighty madness seemed to fall upon them.

Wildly embracing one another, they clapped their hands in glee.

They shouted one and all—

“The Boom!

“The Boom!!

“The Boom!!!”

Ariadne looked again at the great cloud.

Lo! within its centre she beheld a wonderful vision.

Riding a monster chariot of gold, appeared a gigantic figure, half god, half man.

His naked body gleamed like polished gold.

Great wings of the same precious material towered above his shoulders, and enveloped in their lower ends his limbs and belly.

His face rivalled the sun in its glow.

A mane of hair, like spun gold, flowed from beneath the crown on his head.

In one hand he carried a sceptre, fashioned like unto a lash of a hundred tongues.

And every tongue dripped blood.

In the other hand he held the many reins of golden ribbons, guiding the steeds of his chariot.

The steeds that drew him were—Men!

The dreamer uttered a cry of horror as she

beheld their bleeding, crushed and broken bodies.

One fell in the traces. The great wheels of the chariot crushed his fallen body.

In an instant a hundred of the shouting crowd rushed forward, fighting, killing one another, in their struggle to take the place of the vanquished one.

Meanwhile the Rider laughed long and furiously, cutting and blinding his human steeds with the hundred tongues of his golden lash.

The great chariot was laden with gold.

It teemed over the sides. It fell along the road, to rise again in sparkling dust under the tramp of many feet. It was caught by the eager hands of the wildly-pursuing crowd.

For the sight of the golden treasure of the chariot blinded the maddened throng to the gold beneath their feet.

The farmer forsook his plough. The shepherd his flock.

The mines yielded up their diggers at the sound of the chariot wheels of the Spirit of the Boom.

Soon the dreamer beheld the cloud sweep through the streets of Johannesburg. The great Spirit of the Boom laughed furiously as

he cast his golden load among the multitude. He lashed all the while right and left with his flail. He goaded them on again and again to gather it up till the men and women were glutted with his treasure.

And then began a scene of fearful debauch.

Every sin and crime born in the lap of idle gold stalked forth.

The wine flowed, now red, now amber, in torrents wherein the multitude drank, and laved, and wallowed like swine.

Lust roamed forth, unchecked, and held high carnival.

Wilder and more furious, more hideously unlicensed, grew the whirlwind of debauch.

Finally an awful rage seized upon the multitude.

In their delirium they turned on each other, fighting one another with tooth and nail, till the streams of wine were tinged with blood, and the gold grew red beneath the flow.

And all the while the Spirit of the Boom laughed uproariously as he lashed them into fresh excesses.

His demoniac mirth shook the great chariot with peals of glee.

Turning her eyes from the dreadful fight of Lust and Gold, the dreamer beheld afar a swollen tide of waters.

Slowly the waves rose and fell, rolling one over the other, as they surged towards the unconscious city.

She saw the waters advance inch by inch, foot by foot, nearer and nearer still.

Black in the distance like the mouth of a pit. As the tide crept on, now red, now yellow, again gleaming silvery, phosphorescent, changing to a sea of varied hues as the waters swept the streets, enveloping in its embrace the feet of the multitude.

Its damp contact cooled their heated passions, cleared their brains, sodden with debauchery.

The Spirit of the Boom spread his great wings as the waters swept the city, and soared away.

Soon he and the chariot of gold was lost to view!

When the multitude beheld the flight of their God, a great silence fell upon them.

They gazed on one another in mute despair.

But their apathy was soon turned to horror as they beheld their treasures disappearing beneath the many-coloured flood of waters.

In an agony of terror they felt the rising waters envelop them.

Then they broke forth in wild cries of lamentation.

Higher, still higher surged the waters.

Frantically the men sought for escape, piling the bodies of the dead and helpless women one upon the other, as they had piled the gold.

Then they sprang upon the human mound in their frantic struggle for life.

But the water ruthlessly swept on and up. It swallowed them one after the other.

It stifled their prayers and shrieks.

It stiffened their frenzied bodies.

Soon the loathsome flood was seething with the dead and dying.

The tide insinuated its clammy fangs into the foundations of the Exchange. The dreamer beheld the glittering edifice totter, then slowly sink into the jaws of the rolling and surging waters.

Then a voice broke the silence hanging over the submerged city.

It fell on the ear of the dreamer.

In solemn tones it proclaimed—

“Behold! the river of Famine, Fever, and Death that shall sweep clean the garments of Sin and Greed that clothe yon hapless city.

“The lust of gold hath wrought its ruin.”

And then, as a wave of the hideous flood touched the feet of the dreamer, with a great cry for help, Ariadne awoke.

CHAPTER V

THE LITTLE BROWN HOUSE IN DOORNFONTEIN

IT was a simple little dwelling, the home of a bevy of the most popular bachelors in the camp. Despite its unassuming appearance, it attracted the attention and speculation of every young belle in Doornfontein.

It was located in the most modest quarter of that growing suburb, in a lane, not yet dignified by the name of street. Here was the newly-erected Doornfontein Club. A building which would have puzzled the brain of the wisest of architects in search of a name to catalogue its heterogeneous style. Cupola, minaret, and moresque-latticed portico, savoured of the Orient. Gable, belfry, and turreted windows imparted a flavour of Old English. A noble verandah spanning one side of the building gave the building just the necessary African aspect.

This fantastic structure was supposed to have been planned under the supervision of one of the club members, a wealthy Turk. He dressed

faultlessly in the European mode, looked like one of the better class of the Chosen People, and entertained lavishly in his mansion within a stone's throw of the club.

'The Harem,' as this quaint mansion was chaffingly dubbed, bore out the character of its *soubriquet* in the latticed windows, trellised porticoes, and domed minaret surmounted by the crescent. It might have been a wing of some palace transported from the shores of the Bosphorus and dropped haphazard on this unpretentious site.

Within easy walking distance of the Harem, another of the fine villas gracing this suburb might be seen. This was the abode of a genial but shrewd American. He retired on a fortune made in the palmy days of the Camp. A fortune made over the bar of the pioneer hotel of Johannesburg, chiefly through the thrifty business management of his dusky-skinned, brilliant-eyed wife.

This was a handsome building in the modern style. It was built of brick. Every inch of woodwork in the finishings, stairway, doors and windows was, as the owner proudly remarked, all of 'real American walnut,' and imported regardless of expense.

The site had been originally an old Dutch

farm. The primitive homestead was carefully preserved, while the grounds were rich in strawberry beds, graperies, orchards, and charming groves of fir and willow.

The majority of the villas being erected were on the conventional lines of South African architecture. Broad, one-storied structures, surrounded by the indispensable verandah.

Occasionally an exception occurred, thereby affording a pleasing if eccentric contrast. The owner of one charming-looking abode in other respects, had topped the whole by a thatched roof, more suitable to the wilds of Connemara than a would-be fashionable suburb of Johannesburg.

Another, said to be a lady who had accumulated a pretty fortune through running a canteen, finished off her neat dwelling by the erection of a steeple and clock, worthy of the most orthodox chapel. Probably a devout feeling of thankfulness to the Almighty for favours received, induced the ex-bar-lady to announce her retirement from public life by a fitting symbol of the change in her social and moral circumstances.

In fact, cupolas and steeples were decidedly at premium in the Camp. The very shops bristled with them. No building of any pre-

tension to beauty or prominence was considered perfect until a steeple or cupola was set on haphazard, like an Irishman's tile.

At the time of writing this sketch, Doornfontein was the nucleus of fashionable life in the Rand. A world in which the ambitious 'missis' of the successful broker or hotel-keeper ruled by right of wealth, dispensing hospitality with an indiscriminate lavishness suggestive of the ex-barmaid or housemaid.

Clad in the richest silks and laces, and blazing with diamonds, madame or the 'missis' shone resplendent in her box at the Theatre Royal. She was a perfect display of bad form in her dashing cart. A Kafir boy rigged out as a tiger posed on the box, drawn by a tandem of as pretty a pair of horses as money could procure. The fastidious Englishman, fresh to the Rand, in search of a fortune, rendered homage to the glittering, coarse goddess of the hour. He was glad to accept a patronage he would not have dared to receive at home.

But in the Rand all was quite different. What would have been impossible at home, was not only possible here, but oft-times necessary. The husband of the goddess reigned supreme on the Exchange. There he sent

stocks up and down as easily as a child tosses a ball. And if madame, with the freedom of the Golden City's moral code, found the newcomer a pleasing toy to dangle at her chain, there was ample compensation for his outraged sense of good taste and gentle breeding to be found in the way of valuable tips. The result set him up again, or helped to recompense his losses in the old home far away. There never an echo of the fast life of the Rand would be likely to penetrate.

It would be unjust to madame not to admit that nine times out of ten she understood all this. Her experience gained behind the bar had not left her without a keen insight into human nature. Consequently she held a tight rein and despotic whip over her temporary slaves. Sometimes she was lucky enough to curb the captive effectually by marrying him to a niece or dependent sister.

Curious as the blending of these many conflicting elements in Rand society may appear, it increased the charm. Continual reinforcements from Home society lent an ever-varied fascination to society. Every new arrival brought with it an impetus to amusement-giving. The new faces lent an excitement to every pleasure. Nights of feasting, dancing,

card-parties, followed days of hard work on Change, devoted to buying and selling.

Oft-times, when those were days of great anxiety, and fortunes were made and lost in an hour—the nights of revel and dissipation ran wilder riot than ever in the sumptuously appointed villa and bungalow of the broker and his missis.

At the very height of the crisis, when the biggest bear of the market went under, dragging with him scores of young speculators, and men saw their thousands slipping away—the Wanderers' Club was opened with a flourish of festivities. Its handsome hall, decorated with gorgeous display of bunting, was given over to dancing-bouts, amateur theatricals, concerts, and every conceivable amusement with which the fashionable world diverts itself.

In the gay ballroom and jolly bar of the Wanderers, many a smiling face covered a heart sick with dread of the future. Many a brimming glass and foaming beaker brought men forgetfulness of the ruin already upon them. Subsequent events have borne sad witness to this.

Let us now return to the little brown house in Doornfontein. It stood in a narrow lane, half street, half road, embellished here and

there with newly-planted young trees carefully boxed round to escape the encroachments of sundry stray and hungry cattle. Its pretty sitting-room, adorned with elegant trifles from the hand of many a fair one, was given over to a perfect orgie of smoke and excited debate.

Bad times had already fallen upon the heretofore jolly, free-and-easy *ménage* of the cricketers. An anxious if heated council was being held as to the future of the bachelor team.

"I say, Archie," remarked a smooth-faced chorister-looking youth, "there is no use in bringing up such arguments, they can never convince me. I tell you the Rand is going to pieces. We had better make tracks for some more profitable pastures, pretty quick."

Captain Archibald Achilles, to whom these sage remarks were addressed, rose excitedly and began to pace the room. He was a capital specimen of a stalwart young Englishman, lithe and sinewy, blonde as a Norse god. The deep-set blue eyes, that, at this moment, were sparkling with suppressed impatience.

"I tell you again it's for the best. Things must take a turn. Why not have patience a little longer? Why, there's the club only just completed, and shall we throw up the bat at such a time?"

“True, I never thought of that,” remarked another, “it would look shabby just now. The boys have all of them stood by us.”

“Oh, bosh!” exclaimed the first speaker, “they are too sensible to expect us to make sacrifices for their pleasure. There’s Crœsus, who told me only this morning, the breaking-up of the team was a sensible move. We can’t live on air; we are not bank managers and mine owners. I for one shall be off to Matabeleland within a fortnight.”

“I’ll join you, Gray,” eagerly cried another of the band.

The captain continued his pacing. He was nervously biting the end of his flaxen moustache.

One of the men, who had not spoken for some time, watched him narrowly. The two were partners in a stock-brokerage, and although openly on the most friendly footing, were nevertheless distrustful one of the other. The young man sitting or reclining in an easy chair smoked leisurely enough; his handsome face wore, if anything, a bored look of indifference. Slightly and elegantly built, his physique scarcely proclaimed him the capital athlete he was. The hands thrust into his smoking jacket were almost as delicate as a woman’s; but they held the

strength of steel, and would wield a bat with the power of a giant.

For some reason or other he was not popular with his fellow-cricketers. Whether it was that they resented his superior shrewdness or were jealous of his success with the women, would be hard to tell. Perhaps they would have been at a loss to define the cause if pressed for it. At all events, the young men waited to hear his opinion of the disbanding of the team. They had always been more or less guided by his decision in sporting matters.

But he said nothing as he smoked placidly on; until the captain at last challenged him as he ceased abruptly in his walk, and stood before him, saying—

“Well, Morrie, are we never to get a word from you? What’s the say?”

“I’ll take time to think over it,” he replied, warily. “You’re opening this rather suddenly on us, Archie. I’ll sleep over it before I decide.”

The captain seemed satisfied, and resumed his walk. He had not quite expected this young man of all others to come to an immediate decision, although he affected to think he would.

“As I was saying before, the wisest thing for all of us is to clear out of the Rand and at

the earliest day possible. That's my decision," said Gray, rising and stretching his legs. "Now I'm going for a ride. I'll see you at dinner at the 'National,' boys."

The Captain let him depart without answering his rather decided objection to the plan he had laid before the team. Gray was not the man essential to his object. It was the handsome, keen-eyed Morrie that absorbed his attention. To keep him by his side until the time was ripe for pulling up stakes and being off, was the point in view.

"Well, I think I'll be off too."

"So soon, Morrie? It's an hour before dinner. And we might as well talk over the next match, now we are alone."

"No, I think not. I'd rather take a little longer time to consider it."

"All right. By the way, did Jerrison take up those shares?"

"No, the rascal is getting chary of scrip. Well, I'm off."

As the door closed behind the cricketer, the captain strode to the window, and stared moodily out. A score of anxieties perplexed him. What was to be done? he thought. Why, by all that was damnable, had difficulties arisen over which he had no control?

Gnawing the end of his moustache, he let his mind wander back to the first months he had passed in the Rand. The boom had brought to him success—no failures in those good old days. He recalled the glorious round of pleasures when the team came fresh to the fields. That was a carnival of success which made the present state of affairs black and dismal beyond expression.

To some men these changes and reverses would have mattered little ; the spirit of adventure would have buoyed them up and rendered them eager for new fields to explore ; but to this man, selfish, vain, egotistical and ambitious, these reverses were crushing.

He had scarcely the strength to look them boldly in the face. His weakness endowed him with a certain cunning which resulted in subterfuge and underhand dealing. These things he would have preferred to avoid. It galled his sense of refinement, disturbed his easy conscientiousness to resort to them ; but his selfish ends must be gained at any cost.

While these cogitations were busy in his brain, a hand was laid on his shoulder, and a voice aroused him from his thoughts, saying,—

“Well, Archie, how goes it?”

“Hallo, Hector ! I didn't hear you come in.”

“No? I left the horse with Jim and came in the back way. Has Rob been here—I couldn’t see him about?”

“He has not come home yet. Have a whisky and soda, old man?”

“Thanks!” said Hector, as he filled a glass from a bottle on the table, and pouring in a plentiful supply of sparkling soda, drank it off at a draught. He sat down leisurely in a chair. From one of the numerous pockets of his jacket he produced a short briarwood pipe. He filled this indispensable companion of the digger with Transvaal tobacco. A fine article, by the way, and one which should be better known outside of South Africa. Strong, fragrant, and pure is the Boer tobacco.

The young man puffed vigorously. He gazed through the blue fumes of smoke at his friend.

Hector was a splendid specimen of manhood. His noble length of limb encased in brown knickerbockers, shapely calves covered with brown woollen hose, loose white silk shirt, and brown jacket-coat with rolling collar and sailor-knot of blue, set off the manly figure. The well-poised head, the long drooping blonde moustache shaded a mouth, beautiful as a woman’s. The strong chin redeemed the

mouth. Altogether the face under the broad-brimmed digger's hat was fascinating to both men and women.

A woman is always susceptible to a *souçon* of the rake in a man. Like all thoroughly well-bred Englishmen he could drink to any extent without showing in a vulgar manner the effect of his potations.

"Well," he began, "what news, Archie?"

"Bad, Hector," replied the other. "I'm awfully down on my luck. I can't seem to keep this beastly team together long enough to suit my purpose. There's Gray now, he is as stubborn as a bullock; you know he is our best pitcher. And as for Morrie—well, he is so decidedly non-committal, won't say anything as yet—and he is such a capital wicket that a game would be dead without him. I can manage Mosentien and the others, but those two—well, they are regular duffers."

"What's your idea of keeping them? I did not know you intended breaking up."

"Well, Hector, I'm going to leave the Rand. I have a very good offer at home, and I think I had better take it."

"Go on! this is news indeed!" he exclaimed, laying down his pipe in astonishment. "I am

sorry to hear it, but of course if it is for the best—go.”

“It is. But as my appointment does not begin for a couple of months I want to put in the time as profitably as possible. I am stoney-broke, but a few good matches would recoup me.”

“But Morrie and Gray are both hot to go to Matabeleland. Isn’t that better than counting sticks or catching ‘flies’ on ‘Change?’”

“Very true, but I must prevail on them to wait.”

“That would be a loss to them.”

Archie shrugged his shoulders expressively.

“I say that would be a little selfish on your part, eh?” persisted Hector.

“There are no secrets between us, Hector—I don’t mind telling you. I don’t care a rap for the others. I am going to consult my interests only.”

Hector listened with a frown. He did not like the utter selfishness and hardness of his friend. Intimate as they had been, he had never before realised the extent of that selfishness. His thoughts reverted to the judgment Ariadne had passed on this man. He was to have further proof. Archie said presently, as though reading his thoughts,—

"I suppose you have seen her to-day?"

"No, I have just come in from the Reef." A flush touched his bronzed cheek, as it always did when any allusion was made to Ariadne. At the same time something in the tone of his friend's remark made him fully prepared for an unpleasant talk. He tightened his lips on his pipe as the other continued,—

"How much longer are you going to keep up that infatuation, Hector?"

"As long as she loves me," he replied, doggedly. Archie knew the tone was hostile, but he had resolved to speak plainly and strongly on the subject. He had resolved to make a last effort to break it off between Hector and Ariadne. He loved Ariadne. She had repulsed him. But of this Hector knew nothing. Ariadne had kept her enemy's secret.

"Hector!" he began, stopping in his walk and looking down at his friend, "I wish to heavens I could influence you to give up this woman before I go away. Will you listen to reason? For God's sake take my advice before it is too late, before you are ruined."

"What is the use of talk, old man? I have told you again and again I love her. I shall never give her up."

"Love her? Don't call it by such a name,"

cried Archie, carried beyond prudence by his jealousy. "How can a man love a woman who has drained every passion of the soul, and lived in her short life the experience of a score of men like ourselves? A widow, and a woman of the world to her finger tips! If she is a woman of genius, all the more reason for not loving her. Those women are only fit to amuse men—not to be wives or the mothers of children."

"Stop, Archie!" cried Hector, springing from his chair, "I'll not hear you speak of her in such terms. It is unjust. Ariadne is one of the best women God ever made."

"I repeat, Hector, it is not love, it is wantonness that makes her use every charm to fascinate you."

"I don't care a hang what it is. I'll love the 'little one,' as long as she's the sweet true-hearted woman she has always been!"

"As long as she is true," repeated Archie, sneeringly. "Ha ha! well, we won't discuss her further to-day, old man. Let's go to dinner."

"What do you mean?—out with it!" cried Hector hoarsely, his face pale with anger. "You're a duffer to talk like that. You know you lie. I believe, by God, you love her yourself!"

They stood looking fiercely at each other. It was the first time in all the history of their friendship they had quarrelled. Archie's face grew white as death, and a faintness crept over him as he looked into the bloodshot eyes of Hector. A sort of pity crept over him. He had not thought Hector capable of such love. He supposed him to be the last man to yield to the fleeting weakness every man experiences some time or other for a woman and mistakes for love.

A new pang of jealousy shot through his heart, at the knowledge that this woman not only possessed his love but she had taken the first place in the affections of Hector; that he, the gentlest and softest of men to his friend, had suddenly turned on him like a lion at bay, ready to strike and defend.

"Forgive me, Hector," he said, masking the hypocrite by a show of regret, at the same time holding out his hand; "I did not think you were struck so hard."

Hector turned away abruptly for a moment. He came back to Archie, and, taking his hand, said, unsteadily,—

"That's all right."

But the seed had been sown.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRICE OF A SINGLE FLOWER

WHAT more interesting spot for the study of a certain phase of humanity than that of hotel life? The place *par excellence* to indulge such study is the *salle-à-manger*.

Given an intimate knowledge of the inner life of the heterogeneous mass of individuals collected therein for the indulgence of one of the first laws of nature, the study becomes too serious for pleasure. To know the man near you is a swindler, rogue or scoundrel—or that woman opposite a whitened sepulchre, is not always a pleasant appetiser—it is too like the death's head at a feast.

But where one has a *souçon* of knowledge anent the lives, character, and position of the people, there is a wide field for fancy. Psychological observations become intensely interesting. There the student has his subject, bland and happy, smiling and flippant, earnest or sensual, under the genial influence of a good dinner.

The care, wear, and tear of the day has been

for the nonce forgotten. People appear as they would if the world was one field of pleasure and self-indulgence.

The brilliantly-lighted dining-hall of the Grand National Hotel was crowded to excess. Two young men entered, and gazed round a moment in search of their party. They espied a hand at the far end of the room beckoning to them.

It was Morrie, making frantic signs to call their attention to the table where he and his companions were seated.

Archie led the way through the labyrinth of tables and scurrying waiters. He stopped now and then to exchange greeting with various friends. He was very popular, this clever young captain of the cricketers. Was he not charming as an actor? Could he not sing a negro song irresistibly, play an excellent game of billiards, and flirt, when need be, most discreetly and tenderly?

Occasionally his steps loitered as a pair of bright eyes levelled a flashing glance at him; but Hector's impatient whisper, "Go on," hurried him along, and the two were soon seated at the table.

A passing waiter was effectually bribed to attend to their wants. The charm of a half-

sovereign conjured dinner before them in a trice.

There was no ripple on the flow of gossip and chaff with which they enlivened the dinner, to indicate the under-current of worry and discontent.

Their chaff and attention were centred mostly on an adjoining table. It was unoccupied. Covers were laid for a number of persons. The centre was graced by a magnificent basket of flowers, the fragrance and beauty of which attracted general attention from the adjacent diners. An exquisite *boutonnière* of violets and roses was laid beside each cover. Clusters of pink-shaded candles adorned the corners of the table.

“I see the ‘Circus’ is decorated and lighted up to-night,” said Archie, as he gulped down his soup.

This witticism provoked a shout of laughter. Archie was not given usually to brilliant displays of wit. The covert sneer at the early career of the millionaire host for whom the table was prepared was one of Archie’s best attempts at wit.

“I wonder if the dog show will be on,” cried Morrie. This allusion was to the trio of splendid bull-pups that usually graced the table

with their master. It elicited fresh laughter that deepened into positive roars when Mosentiem gravely remarked—

“I’ll bet five to one there’ll be a full house, and a brave display of hook noses!”

Now, this was rather rough on Mosentiem, for was he not a son of the hooked-nosed brigade himself? But, strange to say, his laugh was the longest and loudest.

Hector forgot his troubles, and enjoyed the chaff of his companions, especially when it was turned on Mosentiem. He heartily disliked the *sang-froid* with which Mosentiem ridiculed his own people.

But time teaches many lessons, and Hector was yet to learn how true was the heart beneath that handsome Jewish face.

Hector turned his attention to the beauty of the flowers on the opposite table.

The sweet odour of the violets filled him with a voluptuous memory of Ariadne. They were her favourite flowers.

Amid the noisy talk of his companions he fell into a reverie, deepened by the generous Burgundy, over what yon table would be were he at one end and Ariadne at the other, dispensing hospitality in the happy character of man and wife.

How superbly she would grace that place!
He fancied her sweet face aglow with smiles.
He could hear her soft voice and mellow laugh.

"Oh, God!" he groaned, "will the damnable gold only come fast enough to accomplish that dream."

"I say, wake up; what are you groaning about?"

It was Archie's voice, as he gave Hector a vigorous nudge.

"I believe I was nodding," laughed Hector. "I almost fell asleep trying to estimate the cost of those flowers. The perfume is too strong; it induces a tendency to doze."

"The Burgundy is too strong; it induces a tendency to booze," exclaimed Morrie, chaffingly.

"Oh, go on," retorted Hector. "Come now, tell us how much that basket's worth."

"Yes!" chimed Archie, "you're a connoisseur, you know."

"Well," and Morrie looked at the basket critically, "I'd take a hundred pounds for it."

"Whew!" whistled Hector.

"Take another glass, Hector; you're dry," said Morrie, scornfully, who did not like being doubted.

“Morrie estimates at the rate that old Engleman paid him for a single rose; a fiver. Well, I have counted twenty roses in the basket.”

“Great Scot!” interrupted Morrie, “don’t talk like a duffer, Gray. That was an exceptional case. Old Engleman was dying to get a rose for a certain pretty actress; and as there was not another rose to be found in the camp but the one I was wearing, he would have it, and offered me a fiver for it. Of course I would have been a duffer if I refused.”

“No fool like an old fool,” interpolated Mosentiem, with a grin.

“He got it cheap at that,” continued Morrie, ignoring Mosentiem’s remark. “He would have had to send a man and cart all the way to Pretoria and back to fetch a flower; and then he would have been able to get only a few.”

“And the little girl’s vanity would not have been tickled by wearing the only rose in camp that night,” exclaimed Hector.

“Right you are! Look at those orchids in that basket,” resumed Morrie. “There’s only three, and I’ll bet my head they have brought a fiver each. There’s only one garden in Pretoria produces them, and I’ll bet there’s not another orchid to be found in the Rand to-night.

Why, the violets alone are worth a couple of tenners."

"Oh, rot!" impatiently exclaimed Gray.

"Rot, nothing," retorted Morrie. "There's somebody not far away who gave me two quid for a handful one day last week."

He gave a sly wink in the direction of Hector, who was gazing into his glass, while a blush worthy of a schoolboy spread over his face.

"Money thrown away," sneered Archie, as he frowned in the direction of the downcast eyes.

"No, by God!" cried Mosentiem, hotly. "There," pulling a banknote from his purse and thrusting it into Morrie's hand, "send her the finest basket of violets to be found in the Rand. Send it to-morrow with my compliments."

"Not if I can help it," said Hector, hoarsely, his face purple with jealous rage. "I'll——"

"I've as good a right to send her flowers as you have," interrupted Mosentiem.

"If you dare."

"Shan't I, though?" laughed the other.

"I must get out of this," said Hector, attempting to rise, "or I'll break the duffer's head."

But Archie held him down. "Don't be a fool!" he said, scornfully. "If you make a row here, it won't do her name any good."

Archie's words soothed and quieted the indignant man.

"It's all right, old boy ; let's shake hands, I won't interfere," said Mosentien, extending his hand across the table.

Hector glared at him, and the quarrel might have been serious, but at that moment Morrie cried—

"Here comes the circus."

CHAPTER VII

THE MILLIONAIRE'S DINNER

ALL eyes were turned towards the entrance of the dining-hall, where the head waiter stood obsequiously. Then bowing and walking backwards, he waved his hand in the direction of the flower-laden table.

He was followed by a slight, dapper little man, blonde-haired, blonde-moustached, and rosy-cheeked. His bright eyes smiled blandly behind gold-rimmed glasses. He wore his honours jauntily as he sauntered along with a self-conscious air which seemed to say—

“ Here I am ; look at me.

“ I am Cræsus. The great Johannesburg Cræsus, who made his millions out of nothing. You won't see such a sight twice in a lifetime. Look well while you have the chance. Behold a man that can teach you everything. From turning a somersault in the ring that will make the sawdust fly, to turning a somersault on 'Change that will make the gold-dust fly.

“ Here I am. Look at me well! I can teach

you to sing, to dance, to juggle, and to make speeches in the Assembly. I can teach you where to dig for gold, and where to find diamonds. I can teach you how to make money, and how to spend it.

“I’m a downright lucky little fellow, I am. Lucky to my friends. Lucky to my enemies. Lucky to the women, from the barmaid to the peeress. I’m the luckiest of lucky little fellows. Look at me well ; it will do you good.”

All this, and more, the little man’s swagger proclaimed.

Meantime the group of young men watched his approach in silence. Prejudiced as they were against him, the man commanded their involuntary respect.

Did he not represent success? There was not one of them but would have lorded it as a thoroughbred, had they been blessed with like success and fortune. They knew it well. They resented his prosperity by contemptuous chaff. Not one of them but knew in his heart he would not refuse the little man’s golden friendship, had it been offered.

The little man knew it. Who would blame him for an extra swagger as he passed their table? He knew they were swells, poor, but swells all the same, who would gladly use him,

had the opportunity presented itself. But the little man was true to himself. He helped only his kind.

While he swaggered after the cringing waiter, in his wake followed a lady recently elected to the enviable position of his better half.

She was a dark-haired, handsome woman. Her eyes had the brilliancy of the Creole. The dusky tones of brown in the full, round throat were deepened by the contrast of the necklace of flashing diamonds. Her figure, to which the robe of pale tinted satin, with draperies of flowing lace, lent an air of elegance, was generously proportioned. The rounded arms and well-poised bust gleamed like tinted ivory beneath the delicate lace. They might have served as the model of a sculptor's master-piece.

She was proud, this charming Mrs Crœsus. Her small head, with its graceful coils of jet-black hair, grew more haughtily erect. The straight brows met in a defiant frown. The angry flash of the brilliant eyes threw a scornful glance towards the cricketers. It proclaimed how intensely she resented their stare of cynical inspection.

She knew there was no admiration in those glances. Only contemptuous wonder and

satirical speculation on the turn in the wheel of Fate which had so gilded her fortune.

"Mrs Cræsus has got a gorgeous wedding present, I see," flippantly remarked Mosentiem as he sipped his Moselle.

"About time for both wedding and present, I should think." This from Archie, with a sneering laugh.

"That necklace must have cost a cool twenty thousand pounds," said Mosentiem, meditatively.

"All certified, let us hope," observed Archie.

"Not much, I'll bet!" broke in Gray; "although Cræsus is too clever to ever be caught."

"It's a long lane——" began Archie.

"Rot!" exclaimed Gray.

Hector suddenly roused himself from the reverie into which the magnificence of Mrs Cræsus had plunged him.

"What's this I hear about a wedding?" he queried. "When were they married, does anyone know?"

"Now you ask conundrums," said Mosentiem, laughing. "But the ceremony is rumoured to have taken place in London—a few weeks before Cræsus returned to the Rand."

"And why," interposed Gray, "this sudden hankering after fashionable life?"

"Well, you see," resumed Mosentiem, "Cræsus is fond of 'the missis,' in spite of his numerous other attachments, and proud of her beauty——"

"Beauty," interrupted Hector, staring through his glass at the unconscious Mrs Cræsus, now smiling and chatting with her guests.

"Where is it?" chimed in Gray.

"Yes, I said beauty," answered Mosentiem, "and I say it again."

"If quantity is a form of beauty, I agree with you."

"Oh, go on, Archie. Keep quiet!" cried Hector, impatiently.

"Well, beauty, as I was saying," resumed Mosentiem, lolling back in his chair, tugging his tiny black moustache with one hand and holding his glass up to the light with the other, while he surveyed the contents with a critical eye, "and fidelity."

As he uttered the last words he swallowed the wine and laid down his glass with a great air of impressment.

He paused before he resumed, apparently waiting for comment. But the boys were so struck with his declaration of Mrs Cræsus' fidelity, that they forgot their inclination to chaff in their astonishment.

“Yes, she had been faithful to him, through thick and thin. It was a long time to wait, eight years, for the small courtesy of a wedding-ring, and Crœsus wasn’t going to see her slighted and insulted for the lack of one. He had too good a memory to forget how she loved him when he was poor, and too good a heart to turn her off when he was a millionaire.

“Crœsus is the right sort. With all his little upstart airs, he has too good brains in that round cranium of his to be anything else; so he took the ‘missis’ to London and made her Mrs Crœsus. That effectually stopped the sneering gossip of the ladies of the Government House. They did not dare refuse the courtesy due the wife of Crœsus. She was at once received by the wives of his brother-Assembly members. So, she was received—coldly, it may be, but Crœsus had carried his point.”

There was silence for a few moments after this unusually long speech from Mosentien; he seemed secretly pleased with the effect of his words. He lifted the glass to his lips, and shot a friendly wink at Crœsus, who was regarding him with a smile, and tipped his glass to him as he tossed off his wine.

"I don't think you take the right view of the matter, Mosentiem," said Archie, launching into a tirade against Croesus.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" blurted Mosentiem, his face purple with indignation. "You are a fine one to preach in that style. The last man in the camp to set up as a saint. Ha ha!"

"You may laugh all you please. I'm no saint, I admit, and like a well set up girl, that is not too strait-laced, as well as the rest. But to marry such a girl—bah!"

"And suppose a girl should lose some of her strait-lacing through love of you—what then?"

"That's her own look-out. If she is weak enough to go wrong, she's not fit to marry."

"Well, thank God, we don't look at the matter in that way here in the Rand!" cried Mosentiem.

"No, we don't in the Rand," said Archie, coolly; "but at home it's very different."

"Yes, very different," echoed Mosentiem. "In the old country we think nothing of seduction and breach of promise; but here, by God! we do. Women are too scarce to treat in that style; we are only too glad to marry them if they'll have us."

"Don't talk like a brute, Archie!" muttered Hector.

Archie's only reply was a sneering laugh, as he arose from the table.

"Let's leave the women alone," he said, contemptuously. "You know we never agree there, Mosentien, and we never shall."

"Are you coming?" said Archie, as he cut off the end of the cigar.

"Yes, we are all coming," answered Hector. "I've a box at Fillis's. He has a new spectacular circus piece on to-night: 'Cigarette,' he calls it. It's bound to be a good show, like everything Frank does. Come along, boys."

Hector felt that it would be a mortal quarrel between them, if he and Archie were to go away alone, after the manner in which he had aired his views about women. His words had cut two ways with Hector, and the poor fellow felt very sore. He could not refrain from casting a kindly glance at Mrs Crœsus, as he passed her table together with his friends.

She felt the sympathy of his glance. Her eyes fell beneath the look, which she was too proud to return and too sensitive to ignore.

"That's a fine-looking lot of fellows," observed one of the guests. "Who are they?"

Mrs Crœsus' only answer was an indifferent shrug of her handsome shoulders.

"Oh, they are a lot of cricketers," answered

Crœsus. "They seemed a little excited. They are usually cool fellows, all swells in their way."

"So!" answered the guest, who was a newcomer. "I thought they were; now, they look it."

"They are not all members of the team," said Crœsus. "One's the manager of a main reef mine,—the one just going out, that well-set fellow with the long waxed moustache. Bernheim says he is a capital manager, but neglects the mine too much lately for the society of the cleverest woman in camp."

"So!" remarked the other. "I like clever women; introduce me, Crœsus."

"I haven't the honour of her acquaintance," replied Crœsus, as he hurried on to say, "the tall, slender chap with him is the captain of the team."

"So! the captain of the team," said the other, with German-like reiteration; "I like him; he would make the ladies' hearts beat, now, I should think."

"Yes," said Crœsus, with a laugh, "he was rather dotty on the pretty little barmaid at the Bodega, but he does not seem the same now the stocks are going down."

"So! then he's a stockbroker?"

“Well, yes and no,” said Cræsus. “When the team came first to the Rand, we set him and another cricketer up in brokering. They prospered for a few months, but were not smart enough to keep on their own legs. You must know it is necessary for shareholders to keep each other a little in the dark about the firms they buy and sell through. That necessitates a change of broker every few weeks. So the cricketers could not always count on their friends, and were not keen enough to know how to work the job. Achilles is only good for athletics or acting, and the other is nearly as bad. Well, the concern of B. & A. will not hold out many days. Poor boys, I’m sorry—but they’ll get a fresh chance in Matabeleland, if they take it.”

With these words Cræsus dismissed the subject of the cricketers. The dinner, to his mind, was the thing of the moment. After that he adjourned to the inner sanctum of his apartments, there to seek relaxation in the game of the green table, where stakes often ran into the thousands, and the hours into broad daylight.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LAST OF THE BOOM

THE sunshine bathed in warm blazing splendour the wide street. The fine red quartz-dust, lying inches deep in the unpaved roadway, glistened here and sparkled there beneath the golden rays. The many roofs of corrugated zinc glittered in the shafts of light till they shone like burnished opals. Above, the pale turquoise-tinted heavens was flecked by lightly floating pearly clouds. In the clear distance the low kopjes on the far-away edges of the great plateau could be plainly discerned. The morning wind, now tempered to a breeze, lightly swept the dust of the roadway into every crevice and corner of the Golden City.

Sunshine danced and sparkled everywhere, as only it can sparkle and dance in Africa. No fog dared rear its murky head. No chill spread its misty garments, no damp oozed its clammy breath in the face of that merry, brazen sunshine, rollicking in and out of every nook and cranny of the camp.

It shone with the same genial warmth on the polished backs of the natives as it shone on the lady driving her jaunty cart and ponies.

The sunshine slyly insinuated its way down shaft and lead. It trickled a tiny path of light into the far depths, catching an answering ray from the yellow quartz just turned out from its bed by the digger.

Those merry beams touched with tender tints the humble hut of the Kafir, brightened the arid veld, and reflected a myriad sparkles on the rough glasses decking the bar of the meanest canteen.

Its rays danced joyously through the dust-begrimed windows of the Exchange, lighting up a scene of bustle and activity therein.

High 'Change was on, and men of every age, clime, and complexion were shouting in every variation of voice and tone, according to the capacity of each individual's lungs and thorax.

The roar of this human menagerie, in which the Beast rampant with the lust of gold reigned, could be heard from one end of Commissioner Street to the other.

'The Exchange crowd,' as it was dubbed by the street-brokers, filled every inch of the spacious building. There was a regular row on. Through this could be heard now and

then the strident voice of the secretary going through the list of companies, and the scream of the buyer and seller.

Secretary :—" Auroras, any offer ? "

" I'll buy at twenty-four shillings!" came from a remote corner of the room.

" I'll sell at twenty-six!" cried a voice in the neighbourhood of the bar in the alcove.

" I'll buy at twenty-four and sixpence," shouted the first bidder.

" I'll sell at twenty-five shillings."

" How many?" cries the buyer.

" How many do you want?" answers the seller.

" I'll take five hundred," screams the buyer.

" They are yours."

That lot disposed of, the busy secretary promptly offers another.

" Sales at twenty-five shillings, any more buyers?" No answers forthcoming, he continues in loud tones: " Next—Auroras West—any buyers?" Still no answer.

" Of course," whispers the seller, who had pushed his way to the side of the buyer, " this sale was only *shlenter*."

" Certainly," replied the buyer, with a wink. " I would not think of buying even at twenty-five shillings."

"All right! Of course!" laughingly answers the seller.

"Any sellers of Cities?" continues the secretary, taking the next lot, in alphabetical order.

"I'll sell at ten pounds," shouts a jolly-looking Jew-boy.

"I'll buy at eight pounds," yells a young broker.

"I'll sell at nine pound ten," screams the Jew-boy.

"I'll sell to arrive at nine pound five." No answer.

"I'll sell here at nine pounds," persists the Jew-boy.

"How many?" shouts the young broker.

"Two shares," shouts back the Jew-boy.

"I'll take them," replies the broker, who straightway begins shouting.

"I'll buy now at nine pound five. At nine pound ten. At nine pound fifteen; are there any sellers at ten pound?" No answer.

"I thought so," he cries, and subsides while the market closes firm, buyers at ten pound ten, no sellers.

There had not been such a day of excitement in the market for many weeks. It was the last boom the ill-fated Exchange was to see again for many a day to come, and the wise ones knew it.

Meanwhile the unthinking rabble in and out of the Exchange, bought and sold with feverish recklessness, in their anxiety to take advantage of the unexpected boom.

Like hungry fish, they bit eagerly at the gilded bait thrown them by the many unscrupulous scrip - owners. These offered their shares through their brokers, regardless of the fact that what they knew to be bubbles blown on borrowed bank capital would in all likelihood burst before another twenty - four hours, and the unfortunate buyers and themselves minus money, and plus worthless scrip.

Such an eager, rollicking, rowdy crowd jostled round a little dark-browed man, dressed in a quiet suit of brown tweed, his wide-brimmed felt hat set well on the back of his head ; his twinkling black eyes sparkled with an unusual lustre, as the throng of boys pressed close to him in their desire to buy up the scrip he offered on behalf of one of the biggest bears of the market. If his hand trembled a bit as he jotted down their names in his notebook, the crowd saw it not.

He had always come out right, and they believed in him now as before ; for was he not one of the lucky brokers, aye, one of the luckiest ? whose record showed one day alone

which had brought his client, the big bear, a clear profit of sixty thousand pounds? Had not his tip turned the hundreds of more than one of the crowd to thousands?

They forgot the legend of the pitcher and the well. With good-humoured chaff they bought. He sold with indifference.

To be a leader in the share market, it was necessary to be a member of the Stock Exchange, although the formula of admission was strict, apparently, no one being admitted until his name, together with the names of his proposer and seconder, had been posted for weeks previous to the taking of the ballot which was to elect him.

The qualifications necessary for this honour were somewhat mystical. What they really were no man could specify. It might be to possess unlimited cheek, the conscience of a juggler, and a voice whose braying would have outbrayed Balaam's ass.

These brawlers were reinforced from the purlieus of Petticoat Lane. They lightened the dull days on 'Change with the fire of Clerkenwell fun and Whitechapel chaff. They made noisy the busy ones.

But it was the men of brain, principal, and interest, who worked the real business. They

kept in the rear of the blatant rowdy crowd.

Very curious and interesting a study was this phase of Johannesburg life; the stockbrokers of the London Exchange would have opened their eyes to see the class of men who were the ringleaders of the Exchange crowd in Commissioner Street. It was amazing, as it was amusing, to behold the rapid progress of some of the newly-arrived Jew boys. What though the newcomer was without a shilling in his pocket, he had young blood in him, a happy-go-lucky spirit ready and willing to fight for success, and he had indomitable good-humour.

Oh, that workers and thinkers would rightly value that inestimable quality of good-humour. A quality with which the Jew is blessed to a marvellous degree. It brings him success in the long-run. These newcomers inside the chains speedily found friends. There was Abrahams, who had changed his name to Richardson—why, I know not; Jacobs, who had adopted the pseudonym of Davis, both respected and successful brokers, ready to give their *koscher* young brethren a start.

One fine day these fledglings might be seen on the wing, flying all over the Exchange, offering with astounding cheek to sell and buy,

not hundreds, but thousands of pounds' worth of stock. Ready and eager to do business on a scale that would have astounded Throgmorton Street. The facility with which these rising speculators would create capital, and wriggle out of a transaction, was marvellous to a degree. It was a matter of little wonder to the older and shrewder brokers when these young birds found themselves snared, and posted for shares they had sold and were unable to deliver, and scrip they had bought and were unable to pay for.

That these daring young birds, finding their wings clipped, made no further attempts to fly, would be a false supposition. They lay low for a time. As soon as their feathers had sprouted anew, they were up and flying as high, if not higher, than ever.

The excitement at 'Change was at its height, the voice of the secretary at its loudest, the clamour of the crowd deafening, when two men entered and elbowed their way to the alcove at one end of the room, dedicated to the bar.

Now, this little bar was remarkable, if only for one thing, and that was the absence of that Johannesburg divinity, the pretty barmaid.

She could not rustle her silken skirts, clink

the glasses between her be-diamond fingers, nor rest her plump elbows on the marble counter in confidential gossip with some admirer.

No, the Exchange was an Holy of Holies, never yet desecrated by the frivolous voice and dainty step of the Johannesburg barmaid.

The men called for a bottle of champagne, and drank it between them.

One was the ever-smiling Cræsus, looking as calm and collected as a country parson while he drank his wine. The excitement seemed to have no effect whatever on him.

Not so his companion, a handsome Jew, whose dark eyes were flashing as he looked over the crowd : he was as great an optimist as the bland Cræsus was a pessimist. He believed in everything, but always with a shrewd eye for the needful, which with him meant the disposing of the many stocks in which he was interested. How many they were, no man could exactly tell ; but his principal stocks were known to be Main Reefs, Doornkepes, Auroras, and Knights.

He did not appear often on 'Change ; when he did, he had a knack of making mysterious remarks, all calculated to impress people favourably with the market.