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SONGS OUT OF EXILE

Opinions of the Press.

"A new poet, Cullen Gouldsbury . . . has done for the white man in Africa what Adam Lindsay Gordon in a measure accomplished for the Commonwealth, and Kipling triumphantly for the British race."—*Referee*.

"Mr. Gouldsbury is already known as a writer of vigorous and picturesque verse."—*Spectator*.

"All who have read Mr. Gouldsbury's striking poems will expect a good deal."—*South Africa*.

"There are other poems from the same pen in this welcome volume (Mr. Crouch's Anthology of South African Verse), but none so strong, so tender as this ('The Pace of the Ox'). Mr. Cullen Gouldsbury, the writer, is to be welcomed among the poets who think."—*Liverpool Daily Post*.

SONGS OUT OF EXILE

BEING VERSES OF AFRICAN SUNSHINE,
SHADOW, AND BLACK MAN'S TWILIGHT

BY

CULLEN GOULDSBURY

AUTHOR OF "THE TREE OF BITTER FRUIT,"
"GOD'S OUTPOST," "CIRCE'S GARDEN," ETC.
AND JOINT AUTHOR OF "THE GREAT
PLATEAU OF NORTHERN RHODESIA"

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NOTE

MOST of the following verses have already appeared in a little volume "Rhodesian Rhymes," published by Messrs. Philpott and Collins, of Bulawayo. Some few were contributed to South African periodicals subsequently to the appearance of that volume—the remainder are now printed for the first time. Many of the verses in lighter vein and of more purely topical interest which were included in "Rhodesian Rhymes" have been omitted from this selection; they were, perhaps, amusing in their day, but that day is done, and they were hardly worth perpetuating.

I must repeat my acknowledgments to the editors of *The Rhodesian Times*, *The South African Magazine*, *The Rhodesian Advertiser*, *The Rhodesian*, *The African Monthly*, for permission to republish, and must also add my thanks to Messrs. Philpott and Collins for their courtesy in permitting the publication of this edition.

CULLEN GOULDSBURY.

LONDON,

April 17, 1912.

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SUNSHINE

THE NORTHERN LINE

YE who dwell in crowded cities, hold your hands
awhile,

Let the stamps hang idle for a time—

Let the mills go hungry ; ye have mostly made
your pile,

Spare me just a moment for my rhyme.

Northward out of Jo'burg City send your fancy
forth,

Heedless of the markets and the mails—

Drift on wings of dreaming to the silent, sombre
North,

Far beyond your gleaming line of rails.

Money works a potent magic—gold can sway the
globe—

Are there, then, no better things than these?

What of endless woodlands in their dainty autumn
robe,

And the whistle of the wind among the trees?

Come ye out of city bondage ! Listen for a space—
Other worlds lie none so far away
Where, to other markets, throng the men of alien
race,
Moulded from an elemental clay.

Ragged cliff and tangled jungle, swamp and dim
lagoon
(Are you homesick for the roaring of the mill ?)
Bush paths gleaming whitely in the radiance of
the moon
(Do you wish that you were back in Jo'burg
still ?).

Trampled tracks of mighty creatures, bleaching
bones of prey,
Tiny huts of simple, savage men—
Tragedies that hover 'twixt the dawning and the
day—
There are many things beyond the city ken !

Come ye out of city bondage !—take the Northern
line,
Never turning backward in regret—
Listen to my rhyming ; in the clatter of the mine
You'll be wishing you were out of Jo'burg yet !

A WINDOW IN PICCADILLY

ROAR of the east and roar of the west
Came echoing up and down—
The pauper jostled the peacock-dressed,
Rags and a Paquin gown ;
A girl and I, as the crowd went by,
Watched from a window with lazy eye
Years ago, when our hearts were high
And we lived in London Town.

Sweet was the hum of the hansoms then,
Sweet was the harness chink,
And the lust of life in a maze of men—
What if we'd paused to think ?
Think? why nay! 'twas a summer's day
Long ago, when the world was gay,
Long ago, ere I sailed away
Over the ocean's brink.

So down she sat in the wicker seat
Where the sunlight flecked her face,
And I placed a stool for her dainty feet
With their film of cobweb lace.

Little we knew of the Great Karoo,
Or African Kings of Bungaboo—
Naught we had in the world to do
 But dream for a moment's space.

She was a Chancery Ward—and I
 Hadn't a cent, alack—
Still, we made up our minds to fly,
 Wed, and—never come back—
But fate, or spite, or the devil's delight
Sent me a cablegram that night
And I sailed for Beira, vanishing quite
 Out of the beaten track,
So the lady married a Carpet Knight
 And I—got hitched to a black.

DREAMS, IDLE DREAMS

"There is a railroad now under construction in South-West Africa which will eventually shorten the journey between London and Pretoria or Bulawayo by three thousand miles . . . the Benguella Railway, which is to provide the direct communication between the west coast at Lobito Bay and the phenomenally rich copper deposits at Katanga . . . will form the first link in the chain."—*The Sketch*.

YE who designed the C.G.R.,
Ye who evolved the Train-de-luxe,
And planned the dainty dining car,
And chartered staffs of guards and cooks—
Take heed—for ye have had your day!
We much prefer Lobito Bay.

No longer, in the years in view,
We'll book our coupés to the Cape—
No longer in the dull Karoo
Sit somnolently on the gape—
Our route should be extremely gay
From Beira to Lobito Bay.

For elephants will gambol by,
And zebra flirt their gleesome tails,
And graceful hippopotami
Will play the devil with the rails,
And pigmy heathen, in dismay,
Will book from Congo to the Bay.

Meantime—the track is surveyed, true
And dotted lines define the dream,
And that's about as far as you
Or I can profit by the scheme—
Perhaps, in time, Rhodesians may
Reach Heaven by Lobito Bay.

VELD FANCIES

IN the depths of the night, there are visions that
come

When the stars are alight, and the veld is a-hum
With the musical murmur of beetles—and the
voices of daytime are dumb.

There are spirits that speak to my slumbering ear,
There are branches that creak—that are phantoms
that peer

Through the tangle of quivering grasses—and hosts
of the dead that can hear.

They are visions of days that have died—and a
train

In a flickering maze of the days that remain—
They are ghosts of the days that old destiny
chased, and caught up, and has slain.

For the fires are red, and the embers aglow,
And the boughs overhead, in their whisperings low
Sing songs of the Godless Forgotten—and lays of
the lost long-ago.

They sing of the sum of the years I have planned,
Of the tramp and the hum of the hurrying Strand—
Of the lesson of London—forgotten, alas! in a
heathenish land.

Of the revels to hold when the dawning was dim—
Of dames that were bold and of dames that were
prim,
Of hansom, and harpies, and so on—a hazy,
heretical hymn.

.

So, the stars are alight—and the moonbeams look
down
In the depths of the night—out of touch of the
town—
And the balance of cash in my pocket's a stamp
and a bad half-a-crown!

THE SONG OF THE SHIRT

“Rhodesians would appear to have no clothes but shirts and trousers.”—*Weekly Paper*.

LET those who will be in the mode—
Let those who can affect the swell—
For me, the veld is my abode,
With *daga* huts wherein to dwell—
I care not if the tailors tell
Of men with fearful fashions girt—
My present kit becomes me well—
A pair of trousers and a shirt.

The dainty dandy overseas
In purple and fine linen decked
May glance, perchance, askance at these,
And marvel at the quaint effect—
I lodge no claim to be correct,
Nor can his gibes my feelings hurt
So long as I may still select
A pair of trousers and a shirt.

Why should a man enslave his soul,
His self-respect—and e'en his purse
To garments that, upon the whole,
Induce the incidental curse?
The trim patrician still may nurse
His well-stocked wardrobe—for a cert.
I hold that I am none the worse
Arrayed in trousers and a shirt.

L'ENVOI.

So! Let me cling to decent togs
Lest, in the end, I wear a skirt,
And, flinging wisdom to the dogs,
Should pawn my trousers and my shirt!

FOR WOMEN ONLY

LAND SETTLEMENT IN RHODESIA. RIDER HAGGARD'S REPORT CONDEMNED.

LONDON, *June 20th.*

The Committee which is considering Mr. Rider Haggard's report upon the settlement of the surplus population of the British cities in the colonies condemns the report and recommends the Government to take no steps to further any scheme of colonisation just at present, but grants should be given to aid emigration. The Committee is unable to express an opinion on the prospects of emigration to Rhodesia, but to all appearances there is no opening in South Africa generally, except for women.

ADIEU, the dreams, the rosy schemes,
The plans of Mr. Rider Haggard
For bedding out the useless tout,
And shipping us the languid laggard—
"No opening can be found for Man,"—
No chance for sanguine emigration!—
Not sons of Earls—but, simply—Girls
Must be our staple importation.

And yet, the sphere of woman here
Is hardly more than ornamental—
To swish the skirt : to smile : to flirt,
To captivate the detrimental!—
To spend our cash, to cook our hash ;
To sew for us the sportive button,
To reign within the house of tin,
And coax our goat to taste like mutton.

Yet still, we fear, the day draws near
When Women will no longer heed us,
When beings in skirts will scorn our shirts,
And bid the heathen savage feed us :—
They may eject the present sect
Of Legislators (should we grudge it ?),
May deal us smacks in Income Tax,
And even re-adjust the budget !

Perhaps, we need not fear, indeed!—
This dim, mysterious committee
May plan to aid the Marriage Trade,
And, if they don't—well, more's the pity !
Perhaps they think to lessen drink,
To tame the Bachelor Colonial,
And callow youth may find, in truth,
The scheme is—purely matrimonial !

THE PACE OF THE OX

WHAT do we know (and what do we care) of
Time and his silver scythe?

Since there is always time to spare so long as a
man's alive :

The world may come, and the world may go, and
the world may whistle by,

But the Pace of the Ox is steady (and slow), and
life is a lullaby.

What do we know of the city's scorn, the hum of
the world amaze,

Hot-foot 'haste, and the fevered dawn, and forgot-
ten yesterdays?

Men may strain and women may strive in busier
lands to-day,

But the Pace of the Ox is the pace to thrive in
the land of veld and vlei.

Crimson dawn in the Eastern sky, purple glow in
the West,

Thus it is that the days go by, bringing their meed
of rest—

The future's hidden behind the veil, and the past
—is still the past—

But the Pace of the Ox is the sliding scale that
measures our work at last.

The song of the ships is far to hear, the hum of
the world is dead,

And lotus-life in a drowsy year our benison
instead ;

Why should we push the world along, live in a
whirl of flame,

When the Pace of the Ox is steady and strong
and the end is just the same ?

SUNDOWN

DIM desires of red and gold,
Shadowy fears on a floating air,
And never a soft white hand to hold,
Never a kiss like those of old,
Or a scent of woven hair.

Days that dawn in a mist of grey,
Nights that throb with a noisy hum,
Hours that trudge their leaden way,
And what does it boot to kneel, and pray
When the Gods themselves are dumb?

Out of the garden-land of dreams,
Down the paths that we knew so well,
Over the stones of the sleepy streams
I passed—alone, and for ever, it seems—
Into a haunted hell.

Out of the wide, warm world of things
 Into the wind-swept spaces here,
Where Death patrols with his sable wings,
And the very voice of the bird that sings
 Is harsh to an English ear.

God! (if ever a God there be)
 Look you down on the world of men—
Send me the woman oversea
To tarry awhile in Hell with me,
 And—Hell shall be Heaven then.

A REMINDER

ON the crest of the hills that are bitten
With outcrops of granite—and grey
With the shadows that spirits have smitten
In years that have stolen away—
In silence that teems with tradition,
A silence where ghosts glimmer forth
With forecasts of future fruition,
Lies he who once looked to the North.

'Twas his to have fashioned the valleys
In semblance of subsequent weal—
And, braving their ghosts and their malice,
To summon their spirits to heel—
'Twas his to have braved, in a measure,
The pulse of their primitive wrath,
To clutch from the silence the treasure,
En route for the Uttermost North.

'Twas his—as God willed it—to sicken,
While blood was still hot in his veins.
Surrendering questions that quicken,
To die—and relinquish the reins—
His still is the brain that can guide us
'Mid turmoil of fugitive froth—
He sleeps on a kopje beside us,
And—dreams of the Road to the North.

THE OUT-STATION

SHADOWS of delicate dawning are creeping beneath
the trees,

Mystical murmurs of morning are floating upon
the breeze—

There's joy in the City's clamour—pageants of
pleasure, and glamour,

But nevertheless, my masters, there are worthier
things than these !

Mellowed by dawning and distance the songs of
the women arise,

Zephyrs astir in the branches are fresh from the
glittering skies,

Lust, and the gold that has bought it—Gain, and
the men who have sought it—

These are as nothing, my masters, to dwellers in
Paradise.

Line upon line of lilies breaking the leafy screen,
And the ivory and the crimson of roses scattered
between—

You, who must buy your flowers, think of the
sunlit hours

Out on the Lonely Stations set in the deserts of
green.

What do you offer, truly, laying the counters
down?

A motor-car or a mansion? a yacht, or a Paris
gown?

What if we know your prices?—what if no bribe
entices

Those who may live at their leisure out of the
clutch of the Town?

THE VEERING OF THE VANE

Twinkle of lights in a wall of fog,
Rattle of horses' hoofs,
And a thousand window-panes agog
In the line of serried roofs—
The crowded town, with its streets a-roar,
The buzz, and the busy hum,
And it's oh! for dusk on the veld once more,
The pulse of the tribal drum!

We look for leave in the sweating days—
We save—and the years go by,
Till the heart cries out at the long delays
Under a copper sky—
Then—when the lank, lean years are dead,
And we come to our own again,
'Tis oh! for the bat's wing overhead,
The moon on the midnight plain!

84 THE VEERING OF THE VANE

We'll curse the Land that is cursed of Fate,
Rending it tooth and nail,
Till we come, at length, to the Open Gate,
The sea, where the tall ships sail—
We'll lift our heads—and we'll slip the yoke,
And — the vane will veer anew !
Twill be oh ! for the scent of the curling smoke
And the camping grounds we knew !

OF AN ENGLISH ROOM

I KNOW a room that seems to call to me,
A room in England, out across the sea,
A room where many golden hours have sped—
Four walls thick curtained with a thousand charms,
Hung with sweet memories of soft, clinging arms
Thronged with dim ghosts of kisses, cold and
dead.

I see it yet—its walls of flowered blue,
Its square-topped window—when the sun looked
through
It seemed like some blue cave beneath the sea ;
And he came often—came with sunbeams fond
To kiss your picture on the wall beyond—
I wonder if he used to envy me ?

How oft I've heard your footstep on the stair
And seen you standing on the lintel there
In crimson coat with sombre collar-hood !
A hood that hugged your cheeks and left them
pale
Yet softly gleaming through your gauzy veil
Like twin, white lilies in a midnight wood.

How often, too, when things were out of gear
And all the world seemed grey, I've sought you
here

And found you lying as I loved you best—
How oft you've slain my bogies with a smile,
Running dear fingers through my hair the while,
Or sighed, and pinned your flowers to my
breast!

Then, when the winds were cold and nights were
dark

I'd shut them out, and lean to catch the spark
That lit your eyes like glow-worms in the South;
And, as a bud late shaken from the dew,
You'd lift your face, whose every curve I knew,
To press your soft, warm kisses on my mouth.

Ah! that was long ago! and here am I
Living alone beneath an alien sky

While you lie far away across the sea—
But, in the nights, when all the world is gloom
My thoughts, like ghosts that cannot change their
doom,

Troop back again to haunt that silent room,
That little room where Heaven used to be.

REMEMBRANCE

You wrote in haste—a single, hurried page,
And yet, perhaps, more fit than close-packed reams
To guard, and garner up our golden dreams
And the high hopes of both our hearts to
gauge—

Dreams may be faint and fleeting phantoms—yet
Though sad to dream, 'tis sadder to forget.

It may be that the years will mock our ease—
My path may still lie here, in Southern lands
'Mid heathen peoples, over sun-parched sands,
And yours in your green garden of the seas—
Our smiles may fade in tears, and dim regret—
Must we, for that, turn craven and forget?

Do men rush forth to greet a hated guest?
Do evening shadows cloud the world at noon?
Sorrow may come—and will—and all too soon—
We'll stand our ground and meet it. For the
rest
We hold in pledge that year when first we met—
Let us dream on. We never need forget.

SHADOW

OF ANY PORT IN AFRICA

A BY-WAY on the highway of the sea,
A green-clad lane that leads to silent bays
And palm-crowned headlands, where the world is
free ·

To smile at peace amid the close-drawn maze
Of tropic foliage, and a thousand palms
Girdle the roadstead with their clinging arms.

'Twas thus I anchored, in a summer dawn,
Wind-tossed, and weary of the moaning deep—
Fitful, and sad of soul, and travel worn
Thus came I to the Citadel of Sleep,
And drew soft comfort from the languid breeze
Dowered with fragrance of the crested trees.

Tall, phantom dhows stood out against the green
Like gaunt, misshapen bats with drooping wings
Of brown and grey that jarred upon the scene
Like discord in the tune of one who sings
Of love, and life, and, pausing for a breath,
Finds that the Fates have sold his love to Death.

So, then, we rowed across the still lagoon
And climbed the tottering steps below the quay
Where dusky heathens strummed the endless tune
Of wistful woe that merges into glee
In eerie melody—so, gained a grove
That nested softly on the hills above.

Fronting us lay a patch of tenderest green
With tiny, dotted huts of sober grey—
Most quaintly Quaker-like amid a scene
Where all the rest wore Nature's fête array,
And girls with swaddled babies on their backs
Passed and repassed along the forest tracks.

ON PATROL

BLOTS of grey and yellow, tufts of sombre green,
Miles and miles of level stretching in between—
Purple hills behind me, purple hills before
And a sky ablaze with level rays,
And a parching scrub for floor,
 While the dawn starts up in the heavens,
 And the shadows are no more.

Downward to the river, upward to the hill,
Through the waving grasstops where the world is
 still,
Onward spin the pathways, winding off the reel
They twist and curl, till the head's a-whirl,
And cramped with bands of steel,
 And morning sits in the heavens
 Hell's secret to reveal.

The hills that were but shadows are looming near
 to hand,
But others have replaced them beyond the belt of
 sand ;

The trees that seemed to flicker upon the rim of
sky

Have taken wings, like living things,
And perched themselves anigh,
And noon is high in the heavens,
And all the world's a sigh.

Ah! for a stretch of cornfield, a drowsy Surrey
lane

To float across the vision of this accursed plain!
—I knew a bank of roses once, a garden of
delight

Where lilies grew, and pansies, too,
And marigolds alight—
But there's ne'er a cloud in the heavens,
And the past is shut from sight.

And so, at last the hut-tops peer out amid the
trees,

And heathen words of greeting come floating on
the breeze ;

Behind the belt of brushwood dark shadows come
and go,

Where swaddled shapes, like dancing apes,
Come forth to mouth and mow—

The twilight broods in the heavens,
And all the West's aglow.

Down in the crimson ashes the branches crack
and spit ;

Across the screen of fire the dusky shadows flit—

I heed them not, for others are crowding fast to
hand,

Ghosts in a maze of lamplit blaze

Along the crowded Strand—

But night is Queen of the heavens,

And this—is Heathen-Land !

THE SONG OF THE TRANSPORT RIDER

I HAVE sniffed the scent of the open vlei
When the sun climbed up the hill,
And I've heard the song of the new-born day
When all the world was still ;
I have trampled the copse at the river's brink
Where the dappled buck lie down,
But give me the lights and the harness-chink
And the glamour of London Town.

I have tramped to the hum of the wagon
wheels
When the span trudged up the plain,
And couched with things that the night reveals
When the twilight comes again ;
I have camped alone when the silent moon
Crept up in her silver gown,
But give me the whirl and the madding tune
And the hum of London Town.

SONG OF THE TRANSPORT RIDER 47

I have known the trek 'neath the burning sun
When the miles reel out on end,
And I've parched with fever with ne'er a one
To cool my brow as a friend ;
I have drunk the reek of the fœtid air,
And Despair, with her thorny crown,
Has press'd my brain—but my heart's still there
At the core of London Town.

I have supped with Death in a crazy hut
When a man went forth to hell—
(For he sold his soul to an inky slut
And the tale is ill to tell) ;
I have seen men drink till the serpents came
Speckled and green and brown,
And have heard them shriek in the devil's name
For the lusts of London Town.

I have seen dark kopjes that ran with blood
In the chill before the dawn,
When men lay down in the crimson mud
With their bodies rent and torn ;
I have cursed this land that was cursed of fate
Ere it earned the White Man's frown,
And fain, ere I come to the Narrow Gate,
Would I look on London Town.

THE WHITE KAFIR

ONCE I was known in the Big White Land,
In the come and go of Society's show ;
But most are dead that have grasped my hand,
And the rest—they care not, nor understand—
“Burton?” they say ; “gone in on the Rand—
A rolling stone, you know !”

But here I sit in M'bonga's kraal,
Free as the air, with devil a care,
Up in the thatch, where the shadows fall,
The lizards and spiders scurry and crawl
And snakes lie coiled in the crumbling wall
Under the *daga* there.

Up at the peep of the early dawn,
Down to the spring where the wildfowl sing :
Breakfast then, when the water's drawn,
And the wood is hewn and the mealies shorn
Of their outer husking of bearded corn :
Would I change with a crowned king ?

Nay! Not I!—'tis a gorgeous life!

The scent of the vlei at break of day,
A smooth-flanked, ebony girl for a wife
And naught of the din and scurry and strife
That reign where the noise of the world is rife—
Look where the piccanins play!

That one, chubby and shorn of pate,
Is Mambo's son—he can barely run—
The pot-bellied imp with the shambling gait
Was spawned, I fear, by a twist of fate,
For his mother had stolen a young girl's mate
And put out her eyes in fun!

Then when the moon climbs up the hill,
They bring my beer to the grass-mat here;
Heady and sour it is if you will,
But I sit and guzzle and smoke and swill,
And the mirth of the girls comes clear and shrill
And the cricket jars my ear.

How do I look and dress, you say?

A rug, once brown, from the stores in the town,
And a yard of limbo, gaudy and gay,
Cover my bones from the light of day—
As for the rest, I am growing grey,
And possibly tumble-down.

What! "do I fear the scorn of my race?"

What odds to me, if the life is free?
Must I dread the sneer on the swollen face
Of a drunken trader in evil case?—
And yet—I know of a bundle of lace
Whose scorn would be ill to see!

Still the devil must tend his own—what then?

I jibe and jest, and laugh with the best,
They feared me at first, these animal men,
For the ways of the white are beyond their ken,
And for one to choose to couch in their den
Was strange enough to digest.

But now we meet with a friendly grin,
Or a jovial grunt—out there in the front
Of my hut, by the gum-tree tall and thin,
I lay my meats and I stretch my skin
And the ebony swine come trooping in
To talk of the latest hunt.

So the months glide on with naught to quote
Save a jovial crime from time to time;
Last night a girl slit her lover's throat
From dread of the Witchman's luring note,
And Ndanda collared a neighbour's goat
And they buried him deep in slime.

Ha ! 'tis a golden life I wis ;

To snore and to drink—no need to think—
What can a man hold greater bliss ?
For fifteen years I have lived like this,
And all for the sake of the white girl's kiss
That thrust me over the brink.

Fifteen years !—'tis fifty, I swear,

Since I left the docks with a gaping box,
A letter or two, and a grim despair
And a faded ringlet of golden hair,
And little enough of cash to spare,
To shield me from fortune's knocks.

Fifteen years—and again to-night

The bats flit by in the crimson sky—
'Tis true she was fickle and cruelly light,
But fair—ay, fair, and wondrous white,
And I ?—I would grovel again in her sight
And crouch at her feet and lie.

Bah ! 'tis fever I've got no doubt,

Shakes again from yesterday's rain—
Is that old Jimmy, my College scout ?
M'koma, eh ?—You rotten old tout !
God ! the lamps in the sky are out !—
Well !—death is a cure for pain !

DINGES AND I

DINGES and I were trading once, up north by the
Zambesi ;
Kafir truck you must understand,
The things that "take" in this cursed land—
Beads of yellow and beads of blue,
Knives and matches and *limbo*, too,
To tickle the taste of a heathen crew
(Which isn't so blighted easy)—
Down by the store the river ran by,
And we used to watch it, Dinges and I.

Dinges (his name was really one well known in
Piccadilly),
Dinges, I say, was an Oxford man
Who'd spent his cash as a gentleman can
On various things, including Wine,
Women, and Wickedness, which combine
To ultimate bankruptcy—in fine,
His relatives soon grew chilly ;
Whereupon, Dinges said goodbye,
And we started trading, Dinges and I.

As for myself, no occupation could be too degrading ;

I'd planted nuts in the Solomon Isles,
And mixed with men who had made their piles
In Queensland, Java, and far Peru ;
I'd kept a store in the Great Karoo,
And, finding nothing better to do,
Had finally plumped for trading ;
The which accounts for the how and the why
Of the present position of Dinges and I.

Three round huts, where the rain came in serenely
by the bucket,

Lime within, and *daga* without,
And an old tin tub for a waterspout,
Gravel and sand and a cock-eyed gate
Composed the whole of our joint estate ;
I've often sat and marvelled of late
However it was we stuck it—
But still, we sat till the clouds rolled by
And murmured blasphemies, Dinges and I.

It wasn't the life that you would choose in cool
deliberation,

For a man gets most uncommonly thin
On bully-beef that hums in the tin—
When whisky's in it's a case of "snakes,"

And when it's out it's a matter of shakes,
And life on the whole resemblance takes
To premature damnation—
However, it wasn't much use to cry,
And so we stayed there, Dinges and I.

It chanced one night that Dinges was down with
fever pretty badly ;
Temperature up to a hundred and four
(You'll know the game if you've been there before),
Head like a stove, and mouth like a drain,
And a kind of a dull, all-overish pain,
While up on the roof that fiendish rain
Was beating a tattoo madly ;
We slept in the only hut that was dry,
The Fever Devil and Dinges and I.

Suddenly up sat Dinges in bed—his wits were a
trifle hazy,
Clutched my arm with a grip that burned,
Round in the cartel-bed he turned :
“Madge!” he cried, “you have come at last
Out of the dear old misty past?
God is good!” and his breath came fast—
I thought the fellow was crazy,
Until I turned with a sort of cry—
We *had* a companion, Dinges and I.

A slip of a girl she was, in grey, with a Bond
Street air about her,
Slender and tall with eyes of blue
That seemed to fix you and help you too,
The sort of a girl you meet in Town
With the Church Paraders up and down,
And turn to look at the cut of her gown ;
A regular out-and-outer.
An angel-girl, plump out of the sky,
We sat and looked at her, Dinges and I.

Down by the bed she knelt, and I—I didn't feel
keen on prying !
The hut was smoky and badly lit,
And somehow, things didn't seem to fit.
Suddenly up sat Dinges again,
There came a lull in the cursèd rain,
And I heard him speaking, quiet and plain,
"Ridiculous easy, dying !"
And down he sank with a bit of a sigh,
We'd parted for ever, Dinges and I.

Of all the rest of that night I have uncommonly
hazy notions ;
When sun-up came I was there alone,
With Dinges lying as cold as a stone ;
As for the girl, there wasn't a trace

Of her Bond Street gown or her angel face
(I reckon you'll say 'twas a flagrant case
Of superabundant potions ?
As a matter of fact for weeks gone by
We'd *seen* no liquor, Dinges and I).

As for myself, I don't pretend to proffer an ex-
planation—

I buried Dinges at dawn of day,
Packed up my traps and trekked away,
Somehow I didn't feel keen to stay
On that particular station ;
For, whatever he'd been in the days gone by,
We *had* been pally, Dinges and I.

Whether the girl was ghost or flesh is matter that
needs digestion ;

But a year or two after Dinges had died
I found a photograph, tucked inside
A smoking jacket he used to wear,
Wrapped with a twisted strand of hair—
The face was the face of the girl, I'd swear,
And the rest is beside the question.
I suppose he'd loved her and said goodbye,
And her soul had guessed where he came to die—
But we'd never discussed her, Dinges and I.

A BALLAD OF THE B.M.R.

Down in the land where heathens are,
Down in the swamps where white men
stew,
Amid the woods that stretch afar,
Amid the creepers dank with dew
The Line runs out—perchance, askew,
And drunkenly designed—but, ah!
In days gone by was work to do
Upon the lonely B.M.R.!

The Gates of Death were held ajar—
The pegs that mark the mileage too
Have stood for tombstones—near and far
Ghosts of a grimy, shrivelled crew,
The sun looked down from out the blue—
Out of the night looked down the star,
And marked where men had drifted through
The death-trap of the B.M.R.

A BALLAD OF THE B.M.R.

Each bolt, each nut, each metal bar,
 Could tell a story—grim but true—
And where the gangers' houses are
 Maybe are ghosts of dead men too—
Ghosts of the men who worked and knew—
 The fever-swamp, the sickening jar
That came when life was rusted through
 Upon the lonely B.M.R.

L'ENVOI.

Lo!—we may scoff—we often do—
 And jest at engine, truck, and car—
But—must we then forget the few
 Who made for us the B.M.R.?

DAWN IN THE HUT

DEAREST, the night fades into grey—
One little hour, and then the dawn
Will flaunt a face of flaming scorn
Into the hut wherein we lay ;
Deep in the burning heat of day
Our dreams will droop, all overborne
By mocking voices of the morn—
Come, kiss me, ere the night's away !

Up in the thatch the lizards play,
'Mid clatter of the crumbling walls ;
The filmy shadow creeps and falls
On grass and poles in disarray—
The Gods indeed have said their say,
And, through a silence that appals
The evil jackal slinks and calls—
So, kiss me, ere the night's away.

See where the sentry mealies sway
 Across the flimsy *limbo* pane,
 Hark, even now, the dim refrain
Of waking birds, alert and gay—
We cannot bid the shadows stay,
 We cannot claim the dark again,
 And love must needs be lost in vain—
Come, kiss me, ere the night's away.

AFRICAN AUTUMN

Look up, man! laugh! Why snivel and sigh
That Winter's due, and the leaf's at the fall?
Why shake your fist at the leaden sky,
And frown at the fate that mocks us all?

The Winter's due, and the leaf's at the fall,
The grasses droop as the wind stalks by,
And, sweet as wine, or bitter as gall,
The day must come when the cup runs dry.

Why shake your fist at the leaden sky,
And whine for the days beyond recall,
The dear, dead days that no gold can buy,
Our Hell being vast, our Heaven but small?

Why frown at the fate that mocks us all,
Or strive, or strain, till the pulse beats high,
Since Winter's due—and the leaf's at the fall,
And the end of it all is—a brief goodbye?

BY THE ROADSIDE

TATTERED, and torn, and rent, with ragged roof
 And poles awry,
The hut stood silent, sombre and aloof
 As I rode by.

Red cacti, too, twined out in fleshy bands
 About the place,
That might, I thought, have scarred with groping
 hands
 The dead man's face.

Through all the silence, there was ne'er a sound
 Of human life—
But rank, green grasses rioted around
 And weeds were rife.

Only—I knew that one had built the place
 With hopes afire,
Spurred by the memory of an absent face
 And young desire.

And thought to wrest a living from the wild,
 And, fancy free,
To call a woman—almost, then, a child,
 Across the sea.

But those dim ghosts that suck the souls of men
 Had drained him dry—
Had stretched his brain to snapping-point—and
 then
 Had let him lie.

Silent and still. And yet, the hut stood there
 In grim disdain
Of broken lives, and premature despair,
 And useless pain.

So, in a senseless fury at the thought,
 I set alight
The ragged thatch, and watched it, as 'twas caught
 Up in the night.

Red tongues of fire flickered overhead,
And forked, and shone—

"A funeral pile," I muttered, "for the dead,"
As I rode on.

THE RING-FENCE

(In Memory of a Dead Elephant-Hunter.)

AT first—in other worlds, it seemed—the wilderness
was free,

A man might go where'er he dreamed, nor pause
to pay the fee,

Out of the Herd might take his toll earned at the
risk of death,

Wander afar beyond control caressed by Nature's
breath—

The world was wide—the Herds were strong,
and killing was no sin,

No Law but sportsmanship he knew—no Ring-
Fence hemmed him in.

And so, he trod the wider ways far from the city
crowd

And threaded Nature's tropic maze, thinking his
thoughts aloud,

Followed the Herd from dawn to dusk, and slept
from dusk to dawn

Pillowed upon a gleaming tusk in tangled wastes
of thorn. . . .

But those who frame the Laws of Men were
plotting in his track

Till, east and west and south and north the
Ring-Fence turned him back.

Now, though the world is just as wide, though
Herds are still the same,

Though seas of grasses still divide before the rush
of game

From "British East" to "German West," from
Congo to Karoo,

There is no gap to fail the test and let the hunter
through.

"Thou shalt not kill the Elephant"—so runs
the Law to-day—

"Hang up thy battered bandolier! The Ring-
Fence bars the way!"

.

Hang up thy battered bandolier, and let the rifle
rust,

For now the dreams of yesteryear and all they
held in trust

Must take the place of strenuous days and starlit
nights of old,

Of morning mists, and noontide blaze, and weariness and cold—

No more the Tusker of those dreams shall charge, with trunk encurled,

No more, at dawn, thou'lt pace the paths with dancing dew empearled—

No more crouch low and test the wind—the Ring-Fence hems the world!

THE PLACE WHERE THE ELEPHANTS DIE

HIDDEN away from the haunts of men, west of
a widespread Lake
Out of the scope of human ken, in tangled thicket
and brake,
'Mid arching trees where a fœtid breeze ruffles
the ragged sky,
Is the sombre place where the vanishing race of
the Elephants come to die.

Many a mighty Lord of Herd, massive of tusk
and limb,
Has crept away at the whispered word that
signified death to him—
Driven by doom to the murky gloom where the
wheeling vultures fly,
Through buffet and blast he has come at last to
the Place where the Elephants die.

WHERE THE ELEPHANTS DIE 69

Pile upon pile of bleaching bone, and a foul,
miasmatic breath

With now and again a mighty moan to break on
the hush of death—

Sluggish streams, and the silver beams of a silent
moon on high—

God forbend I should meet *my* end in the Place
where the Elephants die !

.

Once, they say, in the olden days a venturesome
man set forth,

Threaded a path by devious ways, westward and
south and north,

Dallied with Death at every breath while many a
moon went by

Till he found the brake by the Silent Lake where
the Elephants come to die.

Tusk upon tusk lay whitely there, under a twisted
tree,

Wealth of the world, bleached stark and bare—
and he gazed upon his fee

Dreaming the dream of a mighty scheme—and
ambition fluttered high

Till he sank, and slept—and the rumour crept
through the Place where the Elephants die.

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But the Elephant Clan were close at heel—for
the place was theirs to hold,
Sacrosanct to the common weal, out of the mists
of old—
And the word went forth from south to north,
and the herds came thundering by
To kill the Man who had braved the Clan in the
Place where they came to die.

Only a native tale, you say, laughing in light
disdain?
Maybe so—but of what avail to jest when the
facts are plain?
Let him who has found on his camping ground
or under the open sky
One elephant dead *then* shake his head at “The
Place where the Elephants die!”

EXILE

DEAR, they are dead, the years that might have
been ;

Our lives burn low, like lamps at dawn of day,
And many an ocean depth lies dark between,
And many a mountain bars our right of way.

God knows, my prison land is fair and sweet,
A flower-fragrant garden of the South—
But flowers fade! My lips are faint to greet
The softness of the petals of your mouth.

What boots this land with all its subtle charms?
What use are flowers when the heart is dead?
Can sunbeams warm me like your soft, white arms,
Or birds bring back the music that has fled?

No—dawn may flood the world with golden rain,
And sunset spring to clasp the blushing air—
Only the pitying breezes waft again
The perfume of the tendrils of your hair.

Dear breezes! can it be that they have yearned
To learn our secret, and now stand confessed?
Can hot Sirocco once have flamed and burned
With love of some faint Zephyr of the West?

Sadly the day lags on—from far and near
Come heathen songs of men who still rejoice—
I sit apart in shadowland and hear
The echo of the music of your voice.

They say Love's ladder spans from Earth to Hell,
From Hell to Heaven, from Heaven back to
Earth—
Could it but bridge this yawning ocean-well
That gapes between our sorrow and our mirth!

When twilight comes, I seem to see your face
Framed in the hanging star-lamps of the skies,
And, through the gloom, I strive again to trace
The glamour of the lovelight in your eyes.

The days grind on, each grimmer than the last,
Each a red scourge, with thongs of molten lead,
Each thong a biting memory of the past,
And yet—I still thank God I am not dead.

For when Night hangs her curtains round the world
And all is silent save the moaning sea,
And all the cloud-ships' lacy sails are furled,
Then, sweetheart, in my dreams you come to me.

My senses reel, and all my pulses leap,
And all my sheaves of sorrows fall apart
Like petals of blown roses—for in sleep
I feel again the beating of your heart.

SOUVENIRS

THERE they lie on the table, all in a tumbled
heap,
And I turn them over and over, nights when the
world's asleep.

They bring a thousand fancies back to my mind
again,
Bitter-sweet in the turmoil of thunder and whistling
rain.

Here is a withered rosebud, plucked in an English
bower—
It lay on her breast one evening—would I had
been the flower !

There is a tattered ribbon that nestled amid her
hair,
And I would it had been my fortune to bury my
sorrows there.

A crumpled glove that often has fondled her little
hand—

A ring—and a faded letter—and this is a heathen
land!

She stands again before me as she did in that
golden year

When I gathered these pitiful relics and kept them
—*pour souvenir.*

HEIMLUST

To wake at nights and hear the jackals calling,
To lie and count the hours till the dawn,
To hearken to the dead, dry branches falling,
To curse the birds that waken with the morn—
And watch the lizards creep from pole to
pole—
That is the burden of the restless soul.

To fall asleep, worn out with fruitless longing,
And roam again in dreams through veld and
vlei,
Where endless, dusky, heathen hordes are throng-
ing—
And, waking, find again the arid day—
To loathe each bond that bars the far-off
goal—
This is the burden of the restless soul.

To hear a summons in each swaying flower,
To find a token in each stagnant stream,

To dread the clang of every new-born hour,
And barter substance for a golden dream,
To sit—and wait—and watch the cloud-ships
roll—
This is the burden of the restless soul.

To know each stick and stone that hems your
dwelling,
To hate the squalid hut that ranks as home,
To know that every whispered wind is telling
Tales of an Island set amid the foam—
To hear—in dreams—a quiet church-bell
toll—
This is the burden of the restless soul.

To welcome death itself as some new sorrow,
Cursing the granite hills, the open plain,
Building dream-castles for a phantom morrow,
To hurl them down, and pile them once again
With fevered pulse that beats beyond con-
trol—
This is the burden of the restless soul.

OUT OF THE VLEI

Out of the Vlei, when the veld is burning,
Out and away to the Northern lands
Where life's a-hum, and the wheels are
turning,
Souls stretch out with their shadow-hands—
Out of the Vlei, the heart, still sighing,
Turns from the dreary, dying day
Into the town where the fog is lying,
Out of the Vlei.

Out of the Vlei, when the sun is gazing
Down from a sky of burnished steel,
Scents rise up, and old lusts are blazing,
Things that summon our souls to heel.
Down in the Vlei we may still remember
Years that mock us in Memory's way,
Fan the spark from the glowing ember
Down in the Vlei.

Out of the Vlei, we may chance to wander
 Into the clutch of a teeming town,
Taste the sweets of a life beyond her,
 Drape the past in a dreary gown—
Though there be many a dream to daunt us,
 Many a future debt to pay,
Still, there are ghosts that rise to haunt us
 Out of the Vlei.

BLACK MAN'S TWILIGHT

THE DAHA-SMOKER

OVER across the river the world's asleep to-night,
With mealie-leaves a-quiver, and glow-worm lamps
alight ;

Hark to the jackals howling, and the tawny
lions prowling
And the old grey wolf a-growling, where the fire-
brands are bright.

Look where the white road wanders away beneath
the moon,

Look where the leafage squanders its wealth of
slumber-tune,

The drowsy Weed has sought me with dreams
that the Gods have taught me—
Dreams that the Daha's brought me, a drowsy,
dreamy boon.

Am I asleep or waking? I hardly know nor care,
Only the leaves are quaking up on the kopje
there ;

Fires are redly dying in huts where the men are
lying,
And over it all's the sighing of ghosts in the
haunted air.

Come ! let the glowing embers press down upon
the bowl !
What boots it to remember the striving and the
toll
Of tears the Gods require, of sacrificial fire
They neither dream nor tire ; and so, they hunt
the soul.

But I am old and weary, have buried many a
wife,
And winter-time is dreary, the winds as keen as
a knife ;
Never a soul comes nigh me, even the children
fly me,
Only the Daha's by me, to lend me a grip on life.

Nama is long forgotten ; Zushe the bride has
flown ;
The sons that I have begotten have taken wives
of their own ;

By day, I list to the clatter of women's pots,
and their chatter
By night—but what does it matter?—my pipe and
I are alone.

The huts of the kraal have vanished, caught up in
a web of space,
And the sentry trees are banished from round
about the place :
Through a belt of flame and fire, still hovering
ever higher,
On wings that will never tire, I circle the world
apace.

Even our Gods are dying, fading swiftly away,
And the White Man, peering and prying, teaches
us how to pray ;
The Spirits have lost their power, the blood in
our veins is sour
And the Goddess-Queen of the hour is Daha the
Weed, I say !

Daha, the great Dream-Mother, taking men to her
breast :
What should we want with other, when we can
creep to rest

With soft, green leaves to hold us, and the
curling smoke to enfold us?

But the white-faced Teacher told us his God and
his creed were best!

So, let me turn to slumber, shuttering out the
sight

Of the Ghost Trees none may number, and the
silver moon's pale might—

Redly the fire's gleaming, and my brain with
fancies teeming,

As I float in the Land of Dreaming on wings of
the World's Delight.

THE SHADOW-GIRL

Down by the well she stood, a Shadow-Girl
Carved out of ebony, against a sky
Of crimson, blue, dull gold, and soft grey pearl
Where baby clouds hung low and drifted by
Athwart the rising whiteness of the moon,
And ever came the cadence of the tune
That throbs at twilight when the world's
asigh.

Only a Shade amid the shadows, she,
Silent and slender, supple and serene—
A maiden from the Land of Used-to-Be.
A dusky, heathen goddess, that had been
Brought back by the forgotten hand of Fate,
Out of the World of Shadows, through the
gate
That frowns betwixt Man and Eternity.

Nude as a statue, save the strip that graced
Her woman's modesty—a dappled hide
Tricked out with gaudy beads, that clasped her
waist,

Gay bangles at her wrists, and naught beside—
Only a child, were she of lighter hue,
And yet, it seemed, one gazed at her, and
knew
That Grief and she had learnt what might betide.

Only a child—that is, as children go
Among the White Man's womankind—and still
Her fate was settled in the long ago—
Brought forth, and bought, and sold, she'd learnt
the will
Of some lean, blanket-swaddled, human
swine—
Weighed in the balance with the weight of
kine,
This Woman-child had learnt life's good—and ill.

Ah, well, her Gods have learnt their trade, no
doubt ;
What must be, must—and is—and there's an
end !

Only, it seems, perhaps that round about
In dusty corners, there is much to mend—
Down in the shadows of her dusky eyes
Methought I caught a glimpse of sacrifice,
A kind of dull, dumb yearning for a friend,

'Twas but an instant that I watched her so,
And then, the dim, soft twilight seemed to curl
Around about the place—the afterglow
Put off its robe of blue and gold and pearl—
The stars peeped out up in the distant sky,
And swinging up her brimming gourd on high,
Into the shadows fled my Shadow-Girl.

THE RIVER OF FATE

RIVER of Fate, thy banks are strewn with rushes,
And gleaming lilies float upon thy breast ;
Softly the murmur of the night-wind hushes
Thy insect-choirs into dreamy rest ;
Mother of Doom ! Tshadzire, we descry thee,
Proud Nyashano halts in silent awe,
Trembling, aghast, thy children draw anigh thee
To tempt the hidden fate that lies in store.
River of Fate ! Behold the Tribesmen greet
thee,
Bending the knee, beseechingly entreat thee !
Grant that the King, unscathed, may reach the
shore !

Raise we the King aloft upon our shoulders,
Binding his eyes to hide the faintest gleam ;
Picking a flimsy way across the boulders
To thwart the hidden magic of the stream ;
Let the dark Tribesmen raise their strident chorus,
Shouting and singing till the Heavens ring,
For weary ways and heavy lie before us,

And destiny draws close about the King.

River of Fate! behold, the Tribesmen greet
thee,

Bending the knee, beseechingly entreat thee!
Grant that the Gods may prize the gifts we
bring!

Old as the forests—older!—is the saying;

“The King shall neither gaze, nor step on stone,
But pass with songs of men and tom-toms braying,
Or, sightless, shall be driven from his throne.”

River of Fate! unwearied and unending,

Thy twisting streams wind onward silently,
Ever through veld and vlei their white way
wending

To where broad Sabi flashes to the sea—

River of Fate! behold the Tribesmen greet
thee,

Bending the knee beseechingly entreat thee!
Grant that no harm befall the King through
thee!

N.B.—Amongst Chief Nyashano's people a belief exists to this day that the Chief, when crossing the Tshadzire stream, must be blindfolded and carried across, amid shouting and singing, otherwise he will become blind and lose his chieftainship.

THE SONG OF THE CARRIERS

HAU ! my Brothers, the dawn is grey,
And the legs are stiff and the arms are sore,
So hitch the load on your back once more ;
There's many a blazing mile in store,
For you've got to travel to-day !

Pots and pans are the Carriers' dole,
And the little white hut that's swung on a pole ;
The tongue gets parched, and the throat gets dry,
And the thread of a path winds slowly by,
Ere the sun climbs over the edge of the sky,
Into the crimson bowl ;
But the gods have settled the business thus ;
It's nothing to do with the likes of us !
So bend your back and follow the track,
It's only the fool that makes a fuss,
And life is good—on the whole.

Hau ! my Brothers, the road is long,
 Come, sling up your bunch of mealie-cobs !
 Ah, you mumble, "Your temple throbs,
 And carrying isn't the best of jobs !"
 Was the beer last night too strong ?

Hau ! my Brothers, the road is rough,
 The ox is kraaled when the sun goes down,
 And the woman rests when the meat is brown,
 But the Carriers' meed is a kick and a frown,
 And a pinch and a half of snuff.

Hau ! my Brothers, the road is hot,
 And the White Man sits in his easy chair
 Atop of his horse, with his nose in the air,
 And looks around with a lordly stare,
 While the Carrier Boy—does not.

Hau ! my Brothers, the road is dry,
 And the sand makes White Men out of the Black,
 And the sun looks down on the world, alack,
 And there's many a thorn on the beaten track,
 But never a cloud in the sky.

.

Hau ! my Brothers, the kraal is near,
 The branches laugh in the evening breeze,

94 THE SONG OF THE CARRIERS

And the ghosts are grinning amid the trees ;
Come, shuffle it out, and brace your knees,
And think of the gourds of beer !

So dump ye down the Carriers' dole,
And clear the ground for the long, red pole,
And the pegs and the ropes it is balanced by,
And the little white hut astride on high
Like a broad-winged bird come down from the
sky,
And fill ye the porridge bowl.
Oh, the gods have ordered our journey thus,
They fashion the loads for the likes of us ;
So cast your pack, and flat on your back,
Be glad that the night has ended the fuss
And lodged ye safe at the goal.

THE TESTING OF THE 'MLIMO

(As related by Nengu, the Singer.)

IN the days of long ago,
Ere the White Man grasped the land,
Ere the crops were taught to grow
Or the men to reap and sow,
Came a strange-faced warrior band
Bringing death and woe.

Mambo was their Chieftain's name—
Feared he neither God nor man—
Mighty was this Mambo's fame—
Burning, spoiling, as they came.
Through the land his *impis* ran,
Putting us to shame.

And they jested at our creed,
Saying, "Are ye men, forsooth,
Sucklings of 'Mlimo's breed?
'Tis a sorry God, indeed,
This of yours!—to speak the truth,
But a broken reed!"

So, upon a certain day,
 Came each Tribesman from his kraal,
 Decked in all his war array—
 Openly they met to pray.

“Let Mlimo stand or fall
 By the test,” said they.

Forth came Mambo to the place,
 Jesting at the Tribesmen's prayer,
 Came the men of alien race
 With a sneer on every face
 Crying : “Let your God beware !
 Shame is His, and fell disgrace
 Should He risk the snare !”

Then stood Benyu from the crowd,
 Potent with the Spirits he—
 Stood erect, and cried aloud
 While each Tribesman's head was bowed,
 “'Mlimo ! Lo, we list to Thee,
 Strike confusion on the proud,
 Voice us Thy decree !”

Now it chanced a heifer grazed
 Near the kopje, sleek and tame—
 Swift she paused with head upraised,
 Pawed the ground ; her eyeballs blazed,
 From her throat the message came—
 “Let the God be praised !”

Leapt the heathens of the North,
 Swift as arrows from a bow ;
 Slew the heifer in their wrath,
 Dragged the steaming entrails forth,
 Searching high and searching low—
 Cried : “Your God shall make us broth !”
 Naught was there to show.

Then again the Witchman stood
 High upon a bevelled stone,
 Crying “Once the test is good !”
 From a stunted belt of wood
 Came 'Mlimo's answering tone
 Clear and clearly understood,
 “I am God alone !”

Straight they hewed the brushwood down,
 Rooted up the magic tree,
 Cleft it through from roof to crown,
 Probed each crevice with a frown,
 Strewed the branches angrily,
 Sifted every earth-clod brown—
 Naught was there to see.

Still the Mambos stood and scoffed,
 Once again old Benyu cried ;
 Came this answer clear and soft

From a boulder perched aloft
 On the kopje's rugged side—
 "Men, your faith, despised so oft,
 Shall be justified!"

Doubting, baffled once again,
 Mambo's men, in grim despair,
 Lit a fire on the plain,
 Split the solid rock in twain,
 Laid each nook and cranny bare :
 Whilst aloof in proud disdain
 We stood watching there.

Once again the God has flown—
 Thus 'Mlimo stood the test :
 Beast and tree and massive stone
 Gave us forth his silver tone
 At his bidding. For the rest
 Mambo's men would never own
 That our God was best.

Yet it chanced in years to come
 Mambo's pride was smitten low,
 Silenced was the tribal drum,
 Hushed the women's busy hum
 By a stronger, keener foe—
 Mambo's self was stricken dumb—
 'Mlimo willed it so!

ZAMA AND ZIRWA

YEA! I have blood—red blood upon my hands,
I, Zirwa, first-born daughter of the Chief ;
Shall I then weep and wring those hands in
grief ?

Not I! Let go the matter as it stands,
And let 'Mlimo judge—he understands ;
Zama, my sister's dead—and no relief
Can call her soul back from the shadow-lands.

'Twas in the hoeing time—so much I know—
That first our father noted aught amiss—
Old men, thou knowest, are but fools in this,
Forgetful that a youngster's heart may glow,
E'en as their own did in the long ago,
Or that a girl may barter for a kiss
More than her honour bids her to bestow.

Be that as may be, on a certain night,
Chancing to pass the hut where Zama slept,
Noting no sound of breathing, lo, I crept
Silently in to see that all was right—
Behold, the pretty bird had winged her flight,
Fleeing the watch that our suspicions kept,
And vanished, leaving ne'er a trace in sight.

Ah, but my father raved ! But one day more
And they had wed her fast to Vumbu. True,
Vumbu is old ; but what's a man to do
When hunger presses on a meagre store,
And gaping mouths still clamour at the door ?
Besides, a young girl's passion may renew
The fire of one whom age has smitten sore.

No matter ! in the dawning back she came
With guilt plain-written in her every glance,
Greeted me gaily, eyeing me askance,
New meaning in her eyes, her cheeks aflame,
And flaunting through the kraal her new-found
shame,
That very evening, through the merest chance,
I happened on her precious lover's name.

Bokosha ! Ay, Bokosha was the man ;
Simple Bokosha of the smiling face,
Slender Bokosha of the leopard's grace,
The features of a god. My heart's blood ran
Swift at the thought, my pulses beat apace
Hammering out the horror of the case ;
For lo, Bokosha, ere the rains began,
Had snared *me* too, and lured me to disgrace.

Pah! What a triple-tender fool was I
To deem he loved me. Nay! 'twas Zama's
smile

That set his heart a-dancing all the while,
Her laugh, not mine, that made the hours fly.
He waited for the love-light in *her* eye;
My task was but the waiting to beguile,
And help to speed the heavy hours by.

That night I hied me to the Witchman's kraal
(You know old Benyu?), sought his sage
advice.

He bade me trace a shallow furrow twice
Around Bokosha's hut at even-fall,
Sprinkle therein a pinch of snuff, and call
Upon the Spirits of the Lovers twice;
So should my vengeance be complete in all.

So later, when the drowsy sun had set
Behind the purple hills that fringe the vlei,
Swift to Bokosha's hut I took my way,
Shrouding my face from every soul I met,
Pausing at times to think, and so to whet
The edge of my dull anger, lest delay
Should whisper things 'twere better to forget.

'Twas silent at the hut—no laughing din,
No light to reach another eye but mine,
But, when the heart is mad, each sense is fine
And strung to tension—through a crack so thin
A lizard could not enter, from within
There came a glimmer, such a slender line,
To lend betrayal to their secret sin !

I traced the furrow, as the Witchman bade,
Carefully, slowly, lest their souls should flee
My vengeance, and escape their destiny—
Sprinkled the snuff, then loud and unafraid,
I called Bokosha's name, as Benyu said—
Straight through the moonlight came the twain
to me,
And lo, I stabbed them with the self-same blade !

THE POTS OF FULACHAMA

Down the vlei the Pots came tripping,
Tripping gaily, tripping lightly,
Through the moonlight glinting whitely
On the stones where waters dripping
Rippled on the Fulachama.

One was man and one was woman ;
Both of blackened clay were moulded,
Both with crimson stripes enfolded
Zebra-fashion, hardly human
As they tripped to Fulachama.

And the Woman-Pot was brimming
Overneck with beads that glistened ;
Had you seen them, had you listened
As the waters they were skimming
Down the stream of Fulachama,

Thus you might have heard them speaking—
“Lo, we are the Pots of Magic,
Pots of hidden Fate and tragic—
Every moon thus come we creaking
To the stream of Fulachama.

104 THE POTS OF FULACHAMA

“ From our cave upon the mountains
Came we thus when Time was breeding,
Wearing out a pathway leading
Downward to the crystal fountains
Of the stream of Fulachama.

“ Deity was our deviser,
Man and woman we are wedded,
And the name indeed is dreaded
Of the Chieftain's Chief Adviser *
Through the land of Fulachama.”

.

Down the vlei the Pots came tripping,
To the water, tripping lightly
Through the moonlight glinting whitely
On the stones where ripples, slipping,
Sped along to Fulachama.

Striped with red and black commingled
Like the zebra; woe betide him,
Any man, when they, beside him,
Turn to crimson! he is singled
Out for death at Fulachama!

* “Fuko ya Nebandge”—the name by which the natives designate the Male Pot.

Once a man of evil-living,
 Coveted the beads a-gleaming
 In the Woman-Pot, went dreaming,
 Dreamt the dream past all forgiving
 By the Gods of Fulachama.

When the night was dark and lonely,
 Crept he to the Cave of Slumber,
 Gazed upon the beads past number,
 Groped within to clutch them only
 From the Pots of Fulachama.

Straight the Pot closed round the fingers
 Of the wanton sacrilegious—
 Though he fought with might prodigious
 Still to-day the warning lingers
 In the mind of Fulachama.

Strove he fiercely, fear dissembling,
 But the Pot's grasp only tightened,
 Till at length, aghast and frightened,
 He must bear it homeward, trembling,
 To the kraal of Fulachama.

But his kinsmen would not greet him,
 Fearing that a curse was brewing,
 Left him there, their way pursuing,
 Till the Evil Ones should eat him
 On the veld of Fulachama.

After many days of waiting,
 Lo, the evil hand was withered,
 Dropped from off the stump, and slithered
 Down among the grasses, sating
 Thus the wrath of Fulachama.

And, they say, the evil-doer
 Lived a while, to die with cursing
 Of the dread disease, past nursing,
 Leaving thus one thief the fewer
 'Mid the men of Fulachama.

Then the people, terror-stricken,
 Thrust the corpse with tree-poles only
 In a cavern dread and lonely—
 Those who pass that way will sicken,
 Droop and die at Fulachama.

.

Still to-day the Pots come tripping,
Tripping gaily, tripping lightly
Through the moonlight glinting whitely
On the stones where waters, slipping,
Speed along to Fulachama.

THE WITCH-MAN

SCENE.—A kraal at sundown ; women and children busied in preparing the evening meal. The sun is sinking over low bush to the right of the kraal, and girls and boys pass to and fro, bearing gourds of water from the spruit hard by. The men lie round the half-open doors of their huts, and the hum of voices mingles with the shrill of the crickets.

Suddenly the women gather together at the entrance to the kraal, and welcome with whistling and clapping of hands an ancient native who enters. He walks feebly, leaning heavily upon a staff, and is clothed in a faded red and yellow blanket, with massive bangles of copper wire on his wrists and ankles. Round his neck is a string of blue beads, from which hang quaint shaped funnels and cylinders of blackened carved wood. The men at his entrance rise to their feet, the women and children shrink away, and, advancing slowly to the centre of the kraal, thus speaks Gufa, the witch-man :—

AH, HA ! Behold, behold, I come !
Forbear the dance, nor beat the drum ;
Swift to your huts, and mark, be dumb,
Or I will work ye harm !
Six moons have waned since I was here
Against the dawning of the year.
Go ! bring me meat and sour beer,
Ere I unloose my charm !

From North to South—from East to West
I've wandered on a thankless quest—
Fain would I sit awhile and rest
 Ere dawn has scaled the hill—
And you, Ziweshe, draw you nigh—
Nay, tremble not, girl! am not I
So supple and so stout of thigh
 As he that wrought you ill?

Ah, ha! that touched you? even so
You thought perchance I did not know
Of that dim night, two moons ago
 Beneath the izinga tree?
Fool! know you not that I can tell
The secrets of the nether hell,
And whether fate be ill or well
 In future destiny?

Obey me! or I cast the bones,
The mystic, magic throwing-stones;
Snake, Beetle, Lizard—naught atones
 For them that earn their bane—
These strips of bark and oil of palms,
Sweet honey, and a hundred balms
Shall fill your soul with wild alarms
 And rack your bones with pain.

This necklet, too; were I to glance
And cast it to the girls that dance,
Forthwith they'd stumble in a trance
 And die before the night.
But see, the stars begin to pale
And, ere my weary senses fail,
Have none of you some secret tale,
 Some wrong to set aright?

Ah, you Kuraba? hither, see
Behind that mlugulu tree;
But first—you've brought a goat in fee?
 'Tis well! Now tell your tale.
So! Mambo stole your wife away,
And you would have some drug to slay
Secretly, silently? Away!
 'Tis done! I shall not fail!

You, Tambudzayi, you quake and shake,
What ails you? Spirits bid you wake
And cause each nerve and bone to ache,
 And suck your blood in sleep?
So, take this blade of shrivelled grass,
This necklet, too, of twisted brass—
So shall the evil visions pass,
 But, mark! I claim a sheep!

Ah, well, the night is nearly done,
The stars slink homeward one by one
And yonder, see the rosy sun
 Climbs up atop the hill.
And so, adieu, good people all,
Fear not, abundant rains shall fall
And spirits circle round your kraal
 To guard your flocks from ill.

THE SONG OF THE REAPERS

BEND to it, my brothers, reap !
Gather up the speckled grain,
Pile the *daga*-bins a-heap,
Grain to brew and grain to keep,
Guerdon of the summer's rain.

.

Ay, the Gods have blessed the lands
Loosed their waters full and free,
Dealt their rains with open hands ;
Look ye where the *ibhe*¹ stands
Fragrant, fair and feathery.

Pumpkins, too, a goodly spoil,
Dark *rapoko*, overborne,
Sinking laden to the soil,
Melon tendrils, too, that coil
Twining in amid the corn.

¹ *ibhe*—sweet reed or sugar-cane.

Black Man's corn with purple tops
 Set like rushes, firm and square,
 Sentinels, to guard the crops,
 Decked with heavy leaf that drops
 Swinging in the burning air.

Mungu, ripened into seed,
 Mealies bursting on the stem ;
 Lo, the Gods have heard indeed,
 Shed their bounty on our need,
 Meed of thanks is due to them.

Weak the rivers, once so strong,
 Winter winds are driving by
 Hurrying the clouds along ;
 "Heaven's Birds"¹ have hushed their song,
 Thunder-Gods are dumb and dry.

Comes the time when veld, a-parch,
 Crackles with the hoofs of game,
 When the tribesmen on the march
 See the whole of Heaven's arch
 Bursting into sudden flame.

¹ *Inyoni yezulu*—lightning.

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Bend to it, my brothers, reap!

Pile the bins with speckled grain,

Fill the dusty beer-pots deep,

Drain them—and so fall asleep

Till the seedtime comes again.

A STUDY IN PHILANTHROPY

WHAT does he dream of, all the long day through,
This dusky, lank-limbed son of servitude?
What are his fancies, as he mumbles low,
Trailing his greasy blanket to and fro,
Groping and grovelling in the underwood,
Nibbling and gnawing as wild creatures do?
How should we know.

Has he indeed some dream of life—of love
Hidden away inside his shaggy pate
Bedecked with elfin tangles all a-smear?
Is his existence but a subtle sneer,
A jest of Them that sit enthroned above
Shrouded in fear?

What does he think, I wonder, when a storm
Bursts out in majesty upon the world
And lightning-serpents wriggle in the sky?
Has he no creed except that man must die,
No hint of blessing but to lie encurled
There in his frowsy hovel, snug and warm,
Sheltered and dry?

116 A STUDY IN PHILANTHROPY

Look where he stands—a human shape, indeed,
But apes are human, almost—in his eyes
No glimmer of that light we call the soul,
Even of instinct but the merest dole.
Think you this earth-worm can be taught to rise?
Faugh! 'Tis some creature that a man might
 breed
 For sacrifice!

MAROMO ON MORALS

A HEATHEN I—so said the 'Mfundis,
Stalking across the mealie-patch to-day
(To clutch new converts for his God, I lay),
But, what's a life for, but to take one's ease?

Why should a man run hot-foot through the land
Prating of Gods I know not, things divine?
I plague *him* not; his Spirits are not mine,
Why worry *me*? 'tis hard to understand.

And then, again, six wives I have, 'tis true,
And plan to take another, should the rain
Be kind, and fill my grain-bins up again;
But, look you, on *my* lands is work to do.

I know, among the Whites, the women all
Are feeble things, with hands as soft as whey,
Nor do the eager youths fat oxen pay
To lead them blushing from their father's kraal.

Well, what of that? I do not sally out
To preach dissension to the White Man's wife;
(I'faith, to do so were to court a knife
Plunged swiftly in betwixt my ribs, no doubt!)

But, none the less, I pay my oxen down
And take my womenkind, as men have done
Since first 'Mlimo set the flaming sun
Up in the sky—why should the teacher frown?

Ziweshe's old—her joints are stiff and sore,
The gourd's too heavy for her wagging head,
And Tambudzayi is comely—yet he said
His God would damn me for a wife the more.

Pah! I am old! too old to learn this creed;
Mine were the earlier days—when Mambo died
They buried two live kinsmen at his side
To chop his wood and hunt his meat at need.

Heathen, forsooth!—it may be so—ah well,
The heathen has the goodlier time, I trow;
No room for us in Heaven? even so—
We'll take our beer-pots and our goats to Hell!

MAMBO'S BURIAL SONG

TRIBESMEN! let the tom-toms call,
Gather here in Mambo's kraal—
Mambo, father of us all, dumbly lieth dead—
Let the girls take up the tale,
Clapping, whistling, till the pale
Shrieking spirits shrink and quail from his
funeral bed.

He was mighty in the land,
Hard of heart and hard of hand,
His the mighty brain that planned many a bloody
raid ;
Swift the laugh and swift the blow,
Ever would he have it so !
Twining snakelike round his foe, nimble, unafraid.

Still, though old and grey of beard,
His the voice the tribesmen feared ;
His the name that we revered—Mambo, art thou
gone ?

Yea, to where the shadows grey
Swing like mealie-leaves a-sway
Hiding from the light of day, leaving us alone.

Nay, it never shall be said
Mambo slumbers with the dead,
He who is of lions bred takes the lion's form ;
Sometime, when the moon is clear
We shall see him stalking near,
Hear his thunder in our ear, louder than the
storm.

Woe ! and treble woe to him,
Luckless one, whose eyes being dim
Shall, with fear in every limb, slay the lion then.
Mambo's soul shall pass again,
Claim anew a fresh domain,
But his slayer shall be ta'en from the land of
men.

Kinsmen ! bring the beer-pots forth !
Women, fetch the mealie-broth !
Dread ye not old Mambo's wrath, he would have
it so ;
Free of gift was Mambo, aye

Giving till the pot was dry :

Sure, he'd grin were he but by to watch the
liquor flow.

See, within the hut he lies

On the threshold, sentrywise,

Lest the spirits should devise means to snatch
his soul.

Mambo, list ! we drink to thee !

Pledge thy hospitality,

Once again, and finally—kinsmen, pass the bowl !

THE CHIEF

Down in the low dim lands where forest trees
Hung shadow curtains out across the sky,
And only branches whispering in the breeze
Awoke the echoes' sigh ;

Down through the gardens, where dark shadows pass
Unchallenged and unhindered year by year,
Tottering, past the tufts of yellow grass
He came—a Chief *pour rire!*

Lord of a land where famine lurked amid
The nibbled mealie-cobs that strewed the ground,
King of a realm where fell disease, half-hid,
Bred hideous shadows round.

Monarch, perhaps, of half a hundred huts,
One of the relics of a vanished day,
Hedged in with all the mockery that shuts
The king with feet of clay.

His garb? A blanket dragging in the sand
His kingly robes, a band of bark for crown,
Necklet of beads for royal insignia, and
A reim to belt his gown.

His retinue? A brother-relic strayed
Ten steps behind, bearing a gourd with care.
Some remnant of humanity decayed
With fat-anointed hair.

From shadows passing, shadow-wards they went,
Nor gave me greeting as I sat the while
Beside the looped-up doorway of my tent,
The tedium to beguile.

Only, it chanced, some tribesmen slouching by,
Stiffened their backs and turned to greet their
king,
With ceremonious clapping and a cry
That made the red rocks ring.

I turned and caught the pride that lit his face,
The sudden majesty that fired his brain;
Old and forgotten stories of his race
Glowed in his eyes again.

Then silence, and the eyes were veiled anew ;
Stiffly he hobbled onward as he came,
" Faith," said I, musing, as he sank from view,
" *Is Kingship but a name ?*"

THE POINT OF VIEW

WHITE Man, cease from your tales—your God
may be good for you,
But think you that aught avails to fashion *our*
creed anew?

We, who are born and bred in the fear of
'Mlimo's wrath,
Heirs to eternal dread, shall we cast our Witch-
men forth
To take as a load instead the creed of ye from
the North?

Lo, we are born in the fear of wild and unspeak-
able things;

Born in the Bushland here, where the souls of
the dead have wings.

Hovering high in the air when the shades of
even fall,

Shrieking in dim despair at the gate of each
lonely kraal—

Scoff not, White Man!—beware, when the ghosts
of the dead men call.

There are Spirits that walk by night with their
heads behind their backs—
There are Spirits that fade from sight in the
gloom of the forest tracks ;
There are ghosts of the babes that died in the
kraal long moons ago,
Ghosts of cripples that glide with shambling pace
and slow,
Ghosts of the new-made bride, and of many a
girl we know.

Yestereen, when the sun sank low in the western
sky,
And silently, one by one, the hovering bats flew
by,
Ziwa, pride of my heart, my youngest and best-
loved wife,
Drew me a pace apart, saying : " Husband, 'tis
done with life,
" Nay, friend, shriek not, nor start ! lend me your
hunting-knife ! "

Ay ! and she lies there dead—and the youths and
maidens mourn,
They bury her, so one said, in the cool of to-
morrow's dawn —

For the evil moor-hens keep a watch on this
kraal I know,
And perch when the world's asleep, on the hut-
tops there below.
See! I will kill a sheep to ward off a further
blow!

White Man, laugh if you will!—such tales are for
babes, you say?
Have *you* no God of Ill? Do not *you* cringe and
pray?
Offering sacrifice in a temple built of stone?
Do you not seek advice from a Priestman of your
own?
Do you not pay a price? are *we* the heathen
alone?

THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL

SCENE.—A Mashona kraal. Enter Peter, a “highly-educated” kafir, on a visit to his home. His costume bears witness to the completeness of his civilisation—it consists of two odd boots, one black, one brown, a pair of khaki putties, riding breeches that may, in a previous incarnation, have been white, a tail-coat, obviously in mourning for its departed glory, and a tweed cap. His relatives greet him effusively. Peter, striking an attitude, eyes them distastefully.

His Brother :

BROTHER of mine, where hast thou been
Since the time when the crops were green ?

Peter :

Brother me not, thou lazy swine !
In sooth I am no brother of thine :
Since the crops were green I have lived indeed,
And learnt the hang of the White Man's creed.

His Father :

Child of mine, thou art welcome here—
Make thee merry on goats and beer !

THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL 129

Peter :

Goats and beer!—'tis a dainty meal!
Go, feed the pigs—they will grunt and squeal—
And push their greasy snouts in the trough,
But *I* have lived on the White Man's *skoff*!

His Mother :

Surely thou wilt for a little stay?
What hast thou done since thou wert away?

Peter :

First I learnt in a Mission school
To read and write and cipher by rule—
I learnt of the countries over the sea,
And the tale of the White Man's history.

His Sister :

Brother of mine, such things are vain—
Come you back to the kraal again!

Peter :

Back to the kraal, forsooth? To swill
Your filthy beer and your lands to till?
I am the White Man's brother—lo,
The Mfundisi has told me so.

An Old Man :

'Tis ever thus with the Mission bred,
Friend, thou hast gotten a swollen head !

Peter :

Pah ! Ye are dogs, Mashonas all—
What do I in a nigger's kraal ?
Back I go to the White Man's life
To take a white-faced girl for a wife.

His Father :

Son, thou art but a fool for thy pains :
Cast thy skin—but the taint remains !
Black is black, though the sky should fall,
And the Black Man's place is the Black Man's
kraal.

THE BELLOWS OF BUNGU THE
BLACKSMITH

NDANDA!—pick me twenty goats,
Fat, and sleek of hide,
Slip a reim around their throats,
Bind them side by side ;
When the red-hot embers glow
Gaily shall the bellows blow !

Take the goats without the kraal,
Bind them in the sun,
Skin them gaily, one and all—
So—the task is done !
Irons shall be hot and bright
When the moon is full to-night.

Hang the skins upon a tree,
Swinging to and fro,
Come, now, set the captives free,
Look you, there they go !
Raw and bleeding down the vlei—
Sure, they cannot last the day.

See that tough old he-goat there,
 Scampering along,
 Bleating as he goes. I swear
 'Tis a pretty song!
 Should he live till eventide
 His will be a famous hide!

Cruel, you call it?—well, and then?
 What is that to me?
 Goats were made to profit men,
 And the Gods decree
 Ere I mould an assegai
 Many, many goats must die.

Ah!—'tis even as I said—
 See, they writhe and fall!
 All except the ram are dead,
 Drag them to the kraal—
 Goats must live till night, you know,
 Or the bellows will not blow!

[The above describes what was, till recently, a common native custom.]

DEAD MEN'S CLOTHES

'FATTERED and torn, with withered strings of braid,
And lining gaping sadly from within ;
Below, a pair of spindle-shanks displayed,
Above, a shock of wool that framed—a grin !
Thus, in the wilderness where brute men
are
I found the relic of my dead Hussar.

There came to me a fit of wrath, alack—
It seemed a sacrilege to chill the blood ;
I tore the jacket from the sable back,
And danced upon its wearer in the mud.
'Twas highway robbery without a par,
But—I felt sorry for that dead Hussar !

Had it been won in some forgotten fray,
Stripped off for spoil, why, one would say no
more ;
But these are common barter, day by day,
Goods of a huckster in a wayside store.
A greasy shilling, destined for the bar,
Would buy the jacket of a dead Hussar.

Nay, educate the heathen if you will—

And if you can—persuade him he's a soul,
And plump your money down to foot the bill—

It cannot do much damage on the whole ;

Gather him to your bosom from afar,

But spare the memory of a dead Hussar.

His skins and hides are heathenish, you think,

Then weave him garments from your English
looms,

Of stout, hygienic stuffs that will not shrink,

To clothe his nakedness (and strong perfumes
Besprinkle lavishly, and by the jar).

But show *some* reverence for a dead Hussar.

.

If not, methinks, some night when all is still,

And not a leaf is stirring in the sky,

There'll come a crowd of ghosts from every hill

And every kopje where the dead men lie,

And several pious heathens will be slain,

While dead Hussars take back their own
again !

THE SLAYING OF MTIKANA

Out of the annals of forgotten days

When Lobengula held the reins of state,
And tall, proud *impis* ruled the forest ways,
Wandering through the land with spears ablaze,
Come chronicles of ancients, that relate
The doom of Chief Mtikana The Cloud,
And how he spoke with death, and laughed aloud.

Lord of the dread Godhlwayo host was he,
Skilled in the chase, and foremost in the fray,
And generous and well-beloved—full free
In gifting—with a fund of chivalry
Beyond his time ; a Bayard, one would say,
Though out of heathen stock, and late of birth,
Yet ranking with the noble of the earth.

It chanced, Mtikana—or so 'tis sung—

Had wedded Makwa, daughter of the King—
One knows the venom of a woman's tongue !

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The dainty snake his warming breast had stung,
Tainting his honour with her slandering,
And, leagued with jealous Chiefs, who sought his
fall,
Bore ill report to Lobengula's kraal.

Whereon, the King took counsel, and decreed
That messengers should seek the Chieftain out
And hale him to his presence, that indeed
Test might be made, and punishment at need
Be meted to him ; also, captains stout
Were sent to summon in a wizard wise,
To cast the bones, and lend a shrewd surmise.

So came Manenga to the council place
(Forebribed by Makwa with a lordly steer)
Cunning and crafty, of the wizard race,
Lord of the "Smellers-out"—his ferret face
Gleamed wolfishly among his feather gear,
And amulets, and charms, and carven wings
Lent weightiness unto his whisperings.

"O King," he mumbled, "Lord of earth and
sky !

The bones have spoken, and the fates are plain,
Mtikana, empowered from on high,

Shall smite—and lo, the Elephant shall die—

Potions, and charms, and spells alike are vain ;
His guardians are the moon and stars and sun,
King shall he be ere many days are run.

“In proof whereof, O King, the facts are clear—

The regiments are his servants to a man,
And loud ‘Hayete!’ strikes upon the ear
Whene’er the Chief Mtikana draws near—

Thus rings the royal salute—your kingly ban
Avails but little to divorce your trust,
Or trample down the traitor in the dust.”

Then rose Mtikana, and all were still.

“My King,” he said, “I pray you, slay me now !
It is not meet that one, whose only will
Has been the King’s, whose deeds are clear of ill,
Should languish in your prison huts, and bow
Long days before your gaoler’s look of scorn !
Come, slay me, ere my honour be forsworn !”

But Lobengula spoke him soft and fair,

Disclaiming aught of envy—“Hie you hence,
Gallant Mtikana ! we cannot spare
So brave a warrior—my gifts shall bear
Meet tribute to your noble innocence.”

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The Chieftain bowed, and answered murmuring—
“You crave my death? then slay me here, O
King !”

Howbeit, they prevailed on him to go,
And, bending till his feathers swept the ground,
He left the place with haughty tread and slow ;
Thereat the King in council, speaking low,
Gave orders to his captains—swift around
Mustered the Amanxusa Regiment, they
Whose province is to track the spoor, and slay.

With nodding plumes, and spears and shields of
hide,
They stood like statues, and the King came
forth

Without the kraal enclosure ; at his side
Stood captains of his regiments, and they cried,
“Men of the Amanxusa ! the King’s wrath
Has fallen on Mtikana, the Chief—
Swift on his trail, and let your work be brief !”

“Hayete !” came the cry ; and once again
“Hayete !” and the spear-stocks smote the
ground ;
Then, like a writhing serpent o’er the plain,

The Regiment of the Slayers fled amain,
 And silence reigned in all the hills around ;
 But Lobengula turned, with set, pale face,
 And paced awhile about the open space.

Meanwhile the Chief, his durance at an end,
 Had camped that evening at Dukate's kraal,
 And with him rode Mabamba, a good friend
 Who chafed, for friendship's sake, the night to
 spend

In slumber where such danger might befall,
 Crying : "The Amanxusa are a-trail
 Hot-foot and eager ; what may two avail ?"

"Be warned, Mtikana ! Nor halt we here !
 'Twere wiser far to seek to reach your home.
 If die we must, why then, 'tis better cheer
 To die at home, with friendly kinsmen near
 Than here upon the veld, where jackals roam
 To pick your bleaching bones !" The Chief re-
 plied :

"Death is but Death—so let the issue slide."

Now, ere the curtains of the night were drawn,
 Or timid buck had stirred upon the vlei,

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Mtikana arose—the quiet dawn
Slumbered within the hills, and, overborne
By shadows still, the dim white river lay
Across the valley, like a silver thread
Drawn out amid the labyrinth of the dead.

So stood Mtikana in thought awhile,
Gazing and peering outward through the
mist ;
Then, smiling, clenched his hand—but half a
mile
There lay between the hills a dark defile,
A narrow gorge, where frowning boulders kissed.
Thence, as he scanned the vlei from west to
north,
The Regiment of the Slayers issued forth.

Twining like snakes amid the grass, they came
A long, brown line—the Chief stood cold and
still,
Though horses grazed at hand—his eyes aflame
He gazed upon them, for he deemed it shame
To flinch, when death was Lobengula's will,
And so they halted, while "Hayete!" rang
Loud in the hills, and drowned the weapon's
clang.

“Men of the Amanxusa!” said the Chief,
 With firm, set lips, and quiet, steady hand—
 “Ye come upon an errand? lo, be brief
 And workmanlike, I pray! leave futile grief
 Unto the womenfolk!”—the soldier-band
 Stood fast, and speaking low in very shame
 Vowed 'twas upon no errand that they came.

Then spake again the Chief, “My lads, it needs
 No speech of yours to school me to my fate!
 Obedience is the soul of valiant deeds,
 And duty but the spirit-voice that leads
 The steadfast soldier to the sable gate
 Where Gods sit throned and smile—come, slay
 me now
 Ere dull delay beguile ye from your vow.

So saying, turned aside with quiet eyes,
 And steady mouth that seemed to cloak a
 smile,
 Then, with a shout that almost cleft the skies,
 They leaped upon him, and the assegaïs
 Drank of their fill in silence for a while,
 Till, sated with the lust of blood, they ceased
 And left the wheeling vultures to their feast.

AFTERWORD

TSARA Zwibuyana ! Goodbye, ye Sons of Ham,
Timid, and blind, and steeped as yet in a Monu-
mental Sham !
Ghost-beridden, and haunted—what if, in days to
come,
Prophets should rise among ye, smiting the nation
dumb ?

What if the White Man's Burden, heavier day by
day,
Should swell like a leaden millstone, draining his
strength away ?
"Nay, they are only children !"—that is the
parrot-cry.
Aye ! but there have been children whose brains
were fashioned awry !

Children there are in plenty, wrought in the
Devil's mould,
Rending the womb that bare them out of the
mists of old—
What if these be among them, and prophets of
Exeter Hall
Learn that the mild-eyed Heathen may compass a
nation's fall?

Still are the coils about them, and the cobweb
bonds of Fate,
But thunder follows the silence—and issues may
lie in wait ;
Issues undreamt and buried down in the deeps of
Time,
Issues no man may measure in careless strings of
rhyme.

Tsara Zwibuyana ! Ebony Friends, goodbye !
Maybe our children's children shall see when the
spearheads fly
Down in the dim-lit Future, somewhere behind
the Veil,
The sheep may turn on the Shepherd, and—
Prayers for the Heathen fail.

Tsara Zwibuyana ! Lo, we must bid adieu—
Granted the strains were feeble, maybe the words
were true—

Over the kraals the shadows are hushing the
world to rest,

And the Cup of the Future is filling with grapes
that the past has pressed.

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