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Hermanas calling the fish

JUNGLE CHUMS

*A Story of a Boy's Adventures
in British Guiana*

BY

A. HYATT VERRILL

Author of "*The Cruise of the Cormorant*," "*In Morgan's Wake*," etc.

ILLUSTRATED



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TO
THE BEST OF ALL CHUMS
MY WIFE

FOREWORD

WHILE this book is primarily a story of adventure for boys, yet it contains a vast amount of information in regard to British Guiana, its people, customs, fauna and flora, resources and industries. Even prospective visitors to the colony may obtain an excellent idea of the character of the interior from its pages.

The book was written in British Guiana; much of it while traveling by boat or canoe upon the great rivers, other portions in Indian benabs among the aborigines and still other chapters while seated in a hammock in wilderness camps amid the very scenes and at the actual spots described in the story.

Every effort has been made to eliminate inaccuracies and impossibilities from the tale and in each and every essential feature the work is accurate and reliable. But it is manifestly impossible to cover every feature, every phase of such a vast country as Guiana in a single story of adventure without drawing on imagination to some extent. Hence it has been found necessary to introduce certain fictitious localities and conditions and to combine in one district resources and industries which actually occur

in widely separated places. Thus, so far as known, there is no lake between the Corantyne and Berbice Rivers as described; but vast areas in this district are unexplored and unknown and there is no valid reason why such a lake should not exist or why navigable waterways should not connect the unknown headwaters of the Berbice with the equally unknown upper Corantyne. So, too, the strange Bush Negroes of Surinam have never, as far as known, crossed far into British Guiana territory, either on peaceful or hostile missions and, as a matter of fact, they are a most peaceable, harmless race despite the warlike and savage nature of their ancestors. Ratura, too, is an imaginary place,—a situation created for the purpose of the story, and many products are represented as found there which are unknown to the Essequibo district. But nowhere does the fiction interfere with the facts or vice versa. Indeed, many of the most dramatic incidents and most thrilling situations are but slightly altered accounts of actual occurrences and those portions of the text which refer to the native Indians, the ways and customs of the people and the various dialects are absolutely true to life.

A. HYATT VERRILL.

Georgetown, Demerara.

March 7, 1916.

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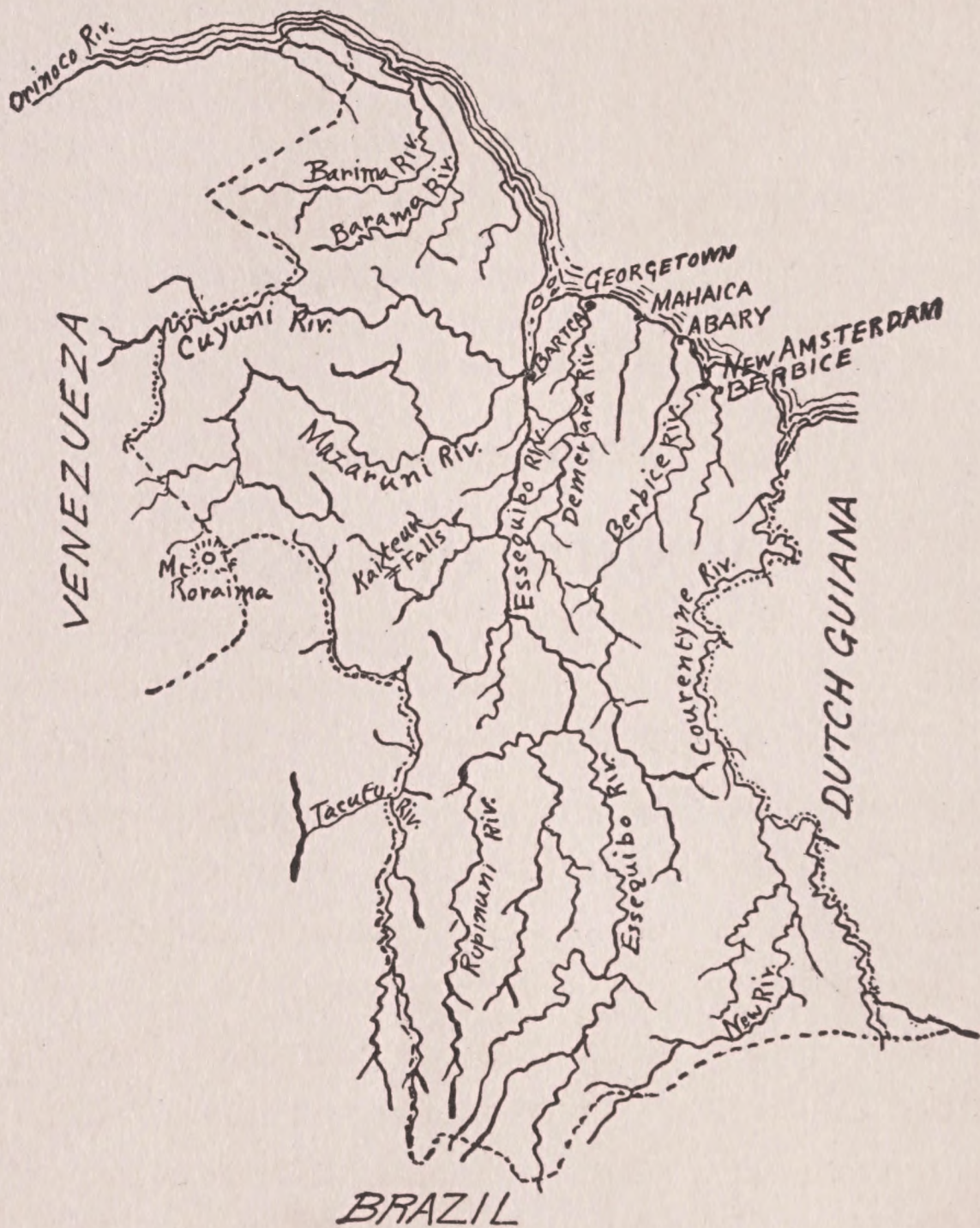
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JUNGLE CHUMS



Map of British Guiana

JUNGLE CHUMS

CHAPTER I

OFF TO SOUTH AMERICA

“I’VE just been down to see Frank off to Cuba,” announced Eric Marvin, as he entered his father’s office one dreary December afternoon. “Whew! but it’s cold down on the waterfront,” he continued, as he threw off his overcoat. “Perhaps I didn’t wish I were going along too. Just think of wearing summer clothes and going swimming and fishing in the warm sunshine within a week.”

“Well, I can’t blame you very much, I admit,” agreed his father. “How would you like a trip to the tropics for a Christmas present?” he asked.

“Hurrah! Do you really mean it?” cried Eric, and without waiting for an answer exclaimed, “When are you going? How long will we be gone? Where will we go? Do tell me all about it?”

“One thing at a time, my boy,” said his father,

laughing. "I am planning to go to British Guiana and shall try to get off next week. I have no idea how long we may be away, for I'm going on business. Mr. Perkins, the president of the Ratura Land & Development Company, has asked me to go down and look over their property. They own large tracts of land in British Guiana and instead of paying good dividends the property threatens to place the company in bankruptcy. The directors feel that there is something wrong, and as I am more or less interested and have had experience in the tropics they have selected me to go down and make an investigation and if possible put the place on a paying basis."

"British Guiana,—why, that's clear down in South America!" exclaimed Eric.

"Yes, the northeastern tip of the continent."

"That's ever so much better than Cuba," declared the elated boy. "There must be jungles and wild animals and savages and all sorts of exciting things there. Will I have a chance to do any hunting?"

"Undoubtedly," replied his father. "The Ratura lands are a long distance from the coast and the settlements and, in fact, extend far into the virgin forest or 'bush,' as it's called down there. A



Eric tried shooting the sun

very large river flows past the property, and if one followed up this stream it would lead one into the very heart of the vast South American wilderness. You'll find plenty of hunting and fishing, but I can't promise the savages. I expect the natives are pretty well civilized by now. However, there'll be many things to interest you."

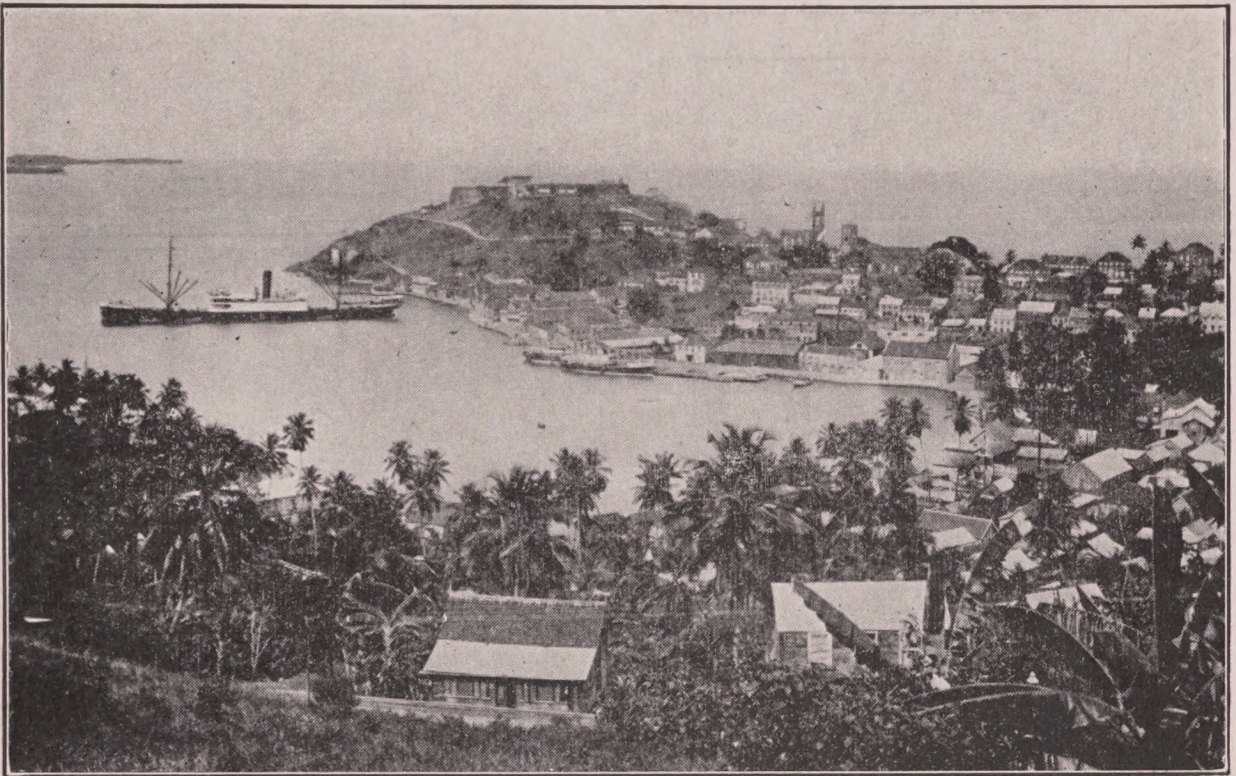
To Eric the forthcoming trip to South America was the event of his life, for he had never visited a foreign land, although much of his seventeen years had been spent out of doors, hunting, camping and tramping with his father in the woods and mountains of northern New England. But he had always longed to visit the tropics; to see the rank jungles and stupendous forests of which he had read, to navigate the great, mysterious rivers of the southern continent and to watch the strange and brilliant birds, and hunt the big game of South America. Now that his dream was about to be realized he devoted all his evenings to studying geographies and natural histories and to reading books on northern South America, while the days were fully occupied in preparation for the journey. At last all was ready, and on a raw, gray day Eric and his father stood upon the deck of the *Maraval* and watched the towering buildings of Manhattan as

they faded from view in the smoke and haze of the western sky.

To Eric the voyage was full of interest and excitement, and the days passed rapidly. For hours at a time he watched the flying fishes which skittered across the waves like "toy hydroplanes," as he expressed it. He saw the broad patches of floating Sargassum which marked the edges of the fabulous Sargossa Sea; he chatted with the other passengers and learned much of the country to which he was going; he made friends with officers and crew and even tried his hand at "shooting the sun" under the guidance of the jovial skipper.

On the fifth day the tiny barren island of Sombrero was passed, and the *Maraval* entered the Caribbean Sea, with low-lying St. Martin's on the eastern horizon and the great isolated cones of Saba and St. Eustatius ahead. They were the first West Indian islands Eric had ever seen and he gazed at them with the most intense interest as the ship approached the mighty volcanoes rising abruptly from the sea.

"They are both Dutch," his father told him, and added, "You should not judge the tropics by the appearance of these two islands. They are small



Anchor was dropped in the harbor of Grenada



Quaint St. Georges with its steep streets

and rather barren, but are wonderfully interesting, nevertheless.”

“I’m glad you told me,” said Eric; “I was just going to say I didn’t think much of their beauty. What’s interesting about them?”

“Their interests are very distinct,” replied Mr. Marvin. “St. Eustatius, or ‘Statia,’ as it’s usually called, is famous as the first spot where the Stars and Stripes were saluted by the guns of a foreign power, while in Saba the people dwell in a crater and build boats a thousand feet above the sea.”

“That’s the funniest thing I ever heard,” declared Eric, “but I don’t see anything that looks like houses.”

“You’ll see a few peeping from the foliage in the center of the island when we’re a bit closer,” remarked the captain, who had approached, “but the main settlement’s out of sight in a deep valley,—the old crater your father mentioned.”

“I’d like to stop and see that place,” said Eric, who was watching the shore intently through his glasses. “How do the people ever get up to their town, and how do they get their boats to the sea?”

“If you want to stop there you’ll have to go to St. Kitts and take a sloop,” replied the captain.

“Steamers don’t ever touch at Saba. Place has no harbor and no anchorage,—just a bit of shingly beach. Folks get up to the village—which, by the way, is called ‘Bottom’—by a flight of stone steps, eight hundred of them. But if you want to know all about the place go down and talk with the second mate, he’s a Saba man.”

Eric lost no time in finding the second officer, and from him learned a great deal about the strange island where people dwell in a crater and whose men are nearly all sailors.

Soon after Saba was left astern the ship passed along the leeward shore of St. Kitts, and Eric was loud in his expressions of admiration for the lofty, forest-clad mountains, the brilliant greens of the hillsides and valleys and the golden cane fields. Then Nevis, the birthplace of Alexander Hamilton, and the spot where Lord Nelson was married, was passed, and only the faint, cloud-like outlines of distant Montserrat and the filmy haze that marked Guadeloupe broke the blue rim of the sea.

The next morning Eric came on deck to find the *Maraval* approaching the island of Grenada and an hour later anchor was dropped in the perfect crater harbor of St. Georges, with its toy-like red-roofed houses and encircling hills of richest green.

After seven days of sea Eric and his father were glad indeed to stretch their legs on shore, and spent several hours strolling about the town and its neighborhood. The town was built on a steep hillside and many of the streets were carried up the slope in the form of stairways, while in one spot a tunnel had been drilled through the hill to form a highway. From the ancient forts above the town a splendid view of the harbor and its surroundings was obtained and the stay ashore was completed by a drive into the country to the Gran Etang.

To Eric everything was strange, wonderful and new. The groves of bronze-green cacao trees, with their odd red, yellow and purple pods hanging on the trunks and branches, attracted his attention, and his father had the coachman drive to the sheds where they watched the process of fermenting and drying the cacao beans.

The lofty, feathery, giant bamboo trees along the country road fascinated the boy; the wealth and luxuriance of the tropical foliage seemed marvelous to his northern eyes, and the immense, stately royal palms were a constant delight.

“I can hardly believe it’s still cold, wintry weather in New York,” Eric declared. “Why, only a week ago we were shivering in our overcoats,

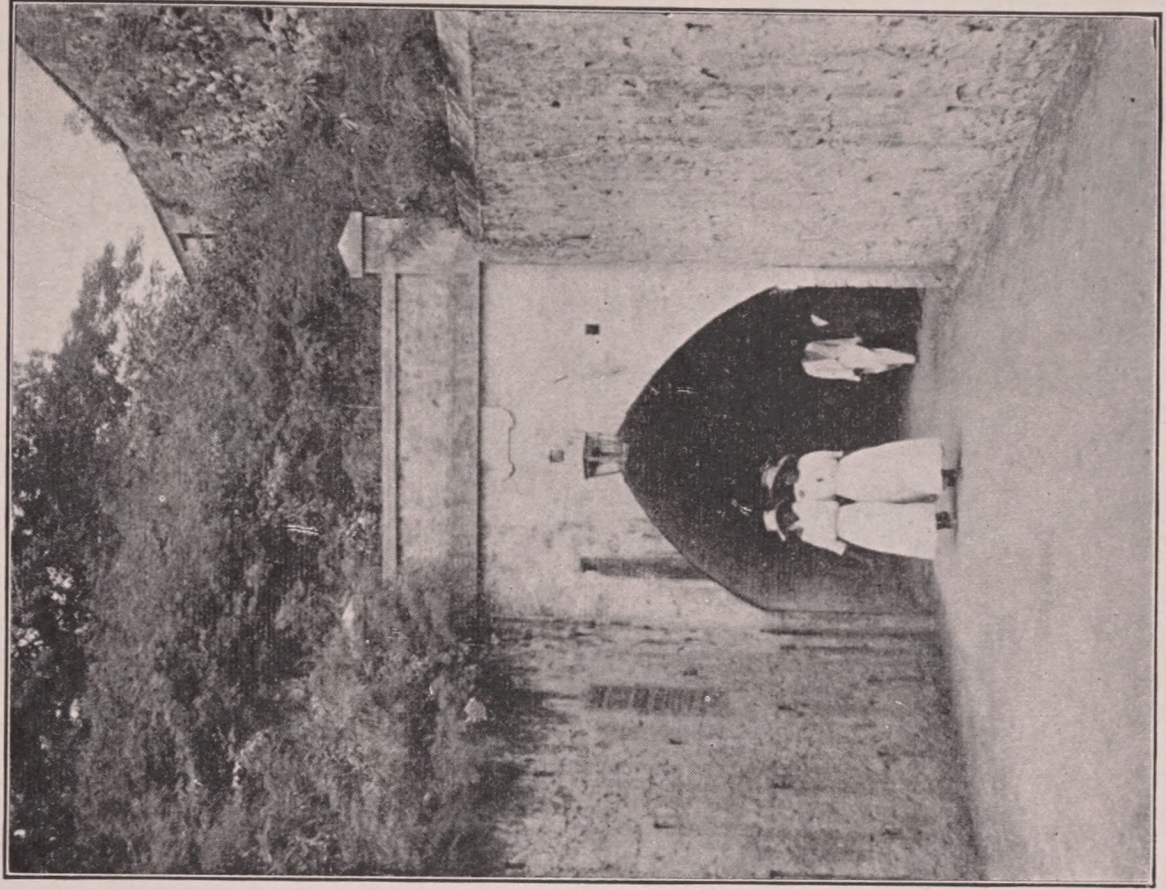
with slush up to our ankles in the streets, and here we're driving about in flannels with palms waving overhead and flowers in full bloom everywhere. It all seems like a dream."

His father laughed. "That's the way it seemed to me the first time," he said. "But after you've been here a while it will seem just as strange to go north and find no palms and the trees bare and leafless."

They had now reached the Gran Etang, a beautiful, silvery lake nestling in the very heart of the forest-covered mountains, and lunch was taken at the rest house. Here, for the first time, Eric had a chance to see a real tropical forest, and, after the meal was over, a walk was taken into the woods.

"My, but they're wonderful," exclaimed Eric, as he stopped and stared about at the enormous trunks soaring upwards for hundreds of feet. "Just see all the hanging vines and parasitic plants. It's like a gigantic spider's web or the rigging of a ship. I never dreamed trees could grow so huge. Why, not a single book I read gave any idea of what it's really like. Are the South American forests as grand as these?"

Mr. Marvin smiled at his son's enthusiasm. "These are nothing compared to the virgin 'bush'



In one spot a tunnel had been drilled through a hill



Many of the streets were in the form of stairways

of the continent," he replied. "Some of the other islands have forests far thicker and trees larger than Grenada, but none of them can compare with the primeval forest of South America."

"If I read it in a book I wouldn't believe it," declared Eric, "but if you say it's so, it must be; although I can't imagine how it's possible. Isn't there any game here?" he asked presently. "I haven't seen a living thing or heard a sound, except a few birds."

"There's not much game on Grenada," replied his father. "A few wild monkeys and armadillos, some semi-wild hogs and doves, pigeons and parrots are about all. But don't expect to find wild animals abundant in the forests, even on the continent, Eric. The pictures in geographies are very misleading. One may sometimes walk for hours without seeing a living creature larger than a dove or a squirrel or an occasional monkey. Game may be very abundant, but the forests are so vast and so thick that one must know the haunts of the creatures and must hunt diligently to find the game."

A row upon the lake, which, Mr. Marvin explained, occupied an ancient crater, completed the outing, and a few hours later the two travelers were again aboard ship and the green mountain

slopes of Grenada were blue and hazy in the distance.

The next morning Eric found the deep blue water of the Caribbean had changed to dull, brownish-green, while directly ahead lofty mountains stretched as far as eye could see to east and west.

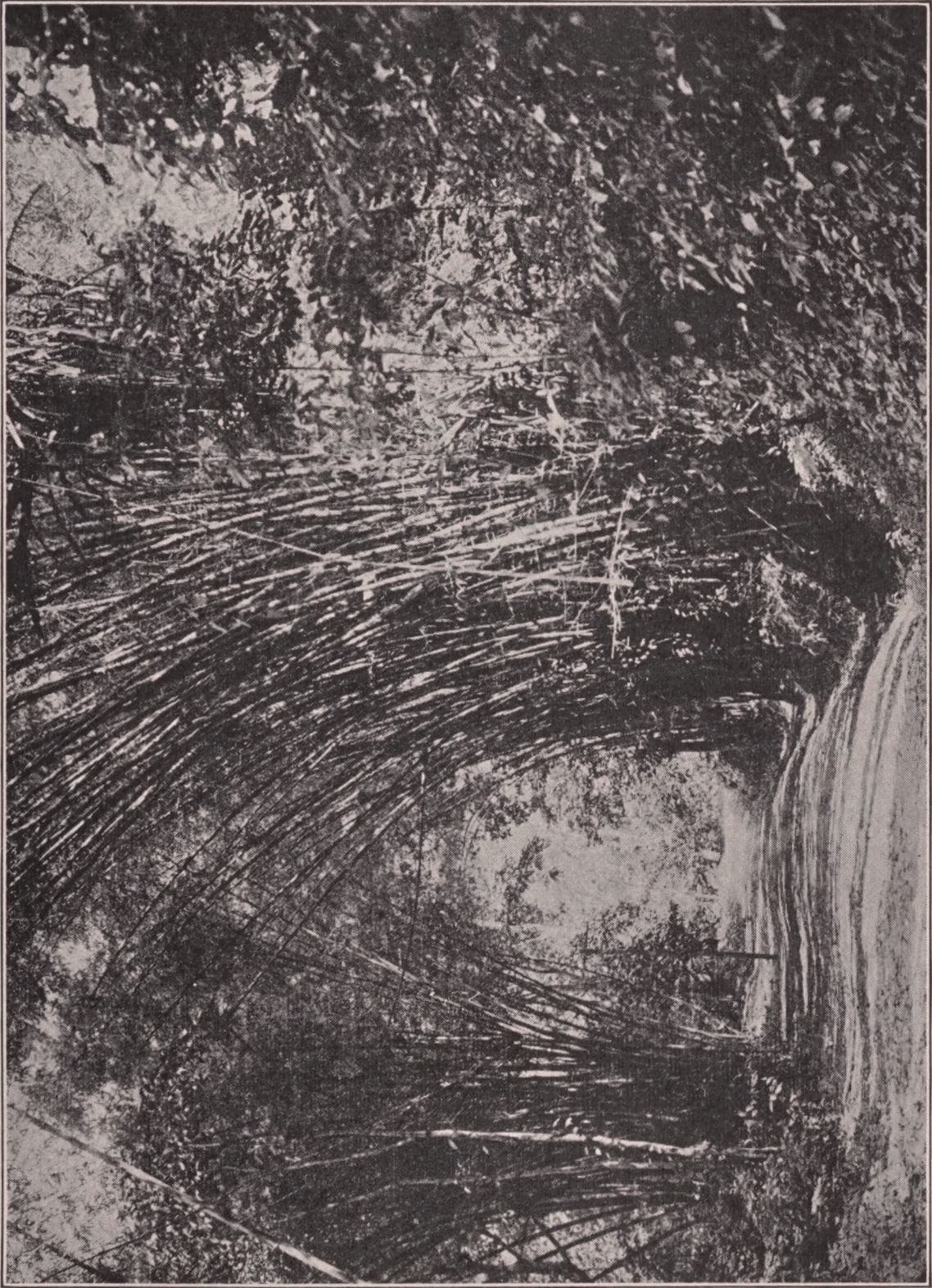
“We’re in the water of the Orinoco,” said the captain, in reply to the boy’s question. “The mud it brings down colors the water for forty or fifty miles out to sea.”

“Then that must be South America ahead,” exclaimed Eric.

“Sure as you live,” laughed the captain, “those mountains to the west are in Venezuela; those dead ahead are the islands between the ‘Bocas,’ and those to the east are on Trinidad.”

Rapidly the ship approached the land and presently Eric could distinguish the Bocas,—narrow waterways leading between wooded, mountainous islets, and seemingly scarce wide enough for the ship to pass through. Entering the nearest opening the *Maraval* steamed slowly ahead between the towering cliffs and wooded heights on either hand and a few moments later floated upon the tranquil waters of the Gulf of Paria.

To the left Trinidad reared its green-clad moun-



The giant bamboos along the country road

tains to the clouds, while to the right the distant Sierras of the continent loomed above the horizon.

“I should never know that was an island,” declared Eric, as he stood by his father’s side and watched the charming panorama of Trinidad’s mountains, valleys and sandy beaches. “It looks like the mainland,” he continued. “But on the map it seems a mighty small place.”

“Maps are deceptive things,” replied Mr. Marvin. “Trinidad is a large island, and stretches for over fifty miles north and south. Moreover, it’s really a bit of the continent and is only separated from the mainland by the Bocas, through which we have just passed, and similar narrow channels at the southern end of the gulf. In geology, fauna and flora, it’s almost identical with South America.”

The ship was now approaching the harbor of Port of Spain and in a few moments dropped anchor a couple of miles off the pretty town. Port of Spain seemed quite a metropolis after Grenada, and Eric was greatly interested in the many vessels which filled the roadstead and lined the waterfront. When a little later he stepped ashore from the launch, which carried the passengers from the ship, he was still more surprised, for the streets were thronged with people; trolley cars, automobiles and

motor trucks were everywhere; splendid buildings and stores lined the thoroughfares, and every one seemed busy, industrious and prosperous.

“Why, this is a real city,” exclaimed the boy, as he and his father passed under the splendid trees of Marine Square and entered Frederick Street.

“One of the busiest and most prosperous ports in the West Indies,” said Mr. Marvin. “And one of the best built also,” he added. “See, there’s something will interest you, Eric.” He pointed to a little group of people across the street.

“Why, they look just like pictures of India,” cried the boy. “Aren’t they picturesque and foreign looking?”

His father laughed. “No wonder they look like India,” he replied, “for they’re from India,—coolies, as they’re called here,—East Indians brought over as indentured laborers. You’ll see many of them here, but far more of them in Georgetown, over in British Guiana.”

Everywhere about the town Eric found much of interest. The bright-colored buildings, the smooth, wide, straight asphalt streets, the strange people of every shade and color, the beautiful parks and the magnificent public buildings all attracted him.



"It's like the rigging of a ship," exclaimed Eric

Then, when a short trolley ride carried them to the Savanna, the boy's enthusiasm knew no bounds. The immense green-swarded park, surrounded by a splendid driveway and bordered by magnificent residences, the great Queen's Park Hotel, and the palatial Government House all fascinated him, and he vowed it the most beautiful spot he had ever seen.

The next day a trip was made to the wonderful Pitch Lake, from which the asphalt for the world's highways is obtained; another excursion was made to the oil wells, and trips were taken to the superb cataracts and to the famous Blue Basin.

The four days at Trinidad passed quickly, indeed, and, when the ship once more steamed northward across the gulf and passed again through the narrow Bocas to the open sea, Eric felt that he had not seen half enough of the wonderful island they were leaving.

Fourteen days after leaving New York he stood upon the forward deck and, filled with anticipation, gazed through his glasses at the low-lying coast, which bordered the great muddy river up which the ship was steaming.

"It doesn't look a bit like South America," he remarked to a passenger who stood near; "I don't

see any forests or mountains; it looks more like the Jersey coast than anything else."

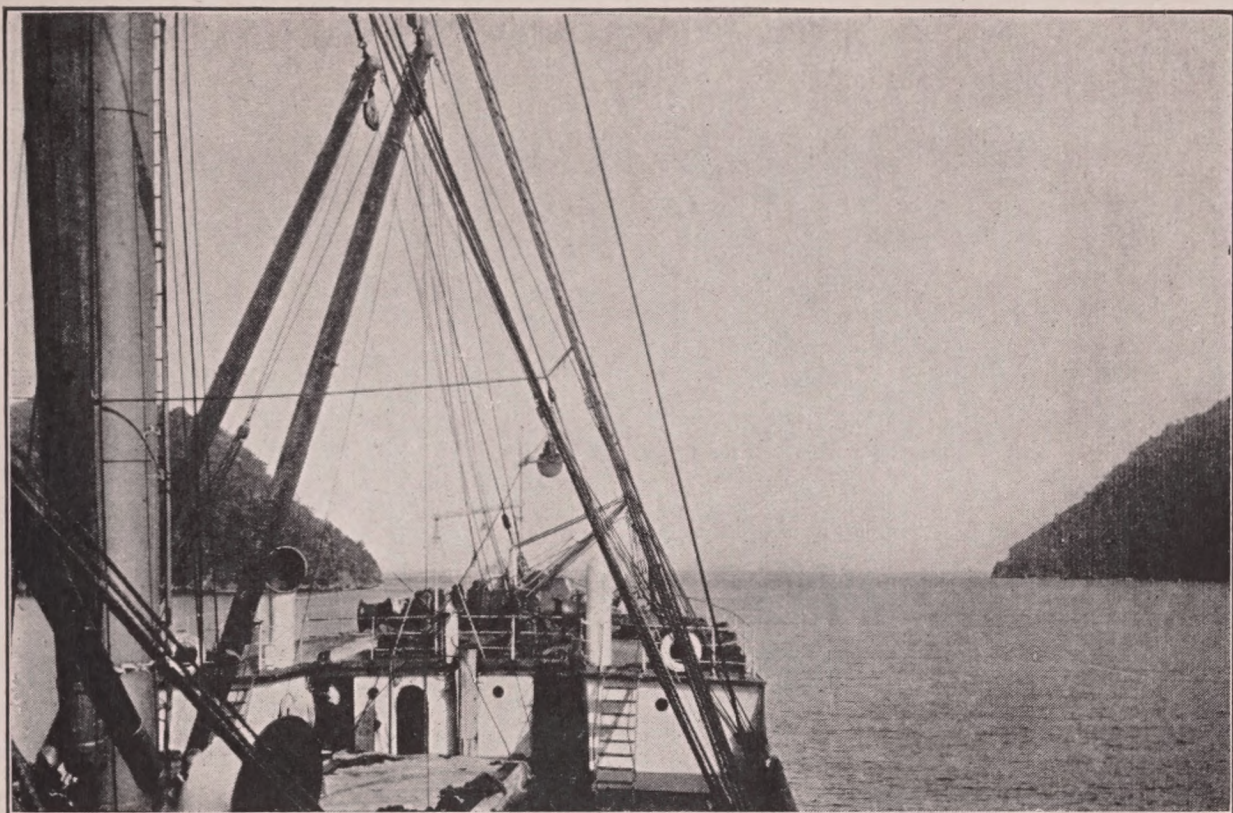
The passenger, an American gold miner from Paramaribo, laughed. "Don't you fret, son," he said, "you'll find bush a-plenty,—just step out of the city and you're in the bush. Of course, you can't see it from here,—coast's all low and swampy, and, for nigh a hundred miles back, land's as flat as this deck. You'll find Ratura's wild enough to suit you, I'll wager,—right in the heart of the bush."

"Hurrah! Then I'll have a chance to do some hunting," exclaimed Eric.

"Righto," the miner assured him. "There's game a-plenty. Only trouble is to find it. The bush here's mighty thick,—have to chop a path wherever you go,—and game naturally lights out o' the way when a chap makes a lot of racket. It's not so hard to kill the birds and now and then an agouti or a deer, but if you want to shoot big game, like tapir, jaguar, peccaries and such things, you'll have to get a Buckman or a Bushnigger hunter to go along with you."

"What in the world are Buckmen and Bushniggers?" asked Eric, puzzled. "It's all Greek to me."

"I keep forgetting you're a stranger and don't



The *Maraval* steamed through the Bocas



The ship anchored off Port of Spain

know Creole,” replied the other. “Buckmen are Indians,—native redskins,—and we call ’em Bucks or Buckmen so’s not to get ’em mixed with the chaps from India,—the coolies or Hindus, you know. We call the women or squaws, ‘Buckeens.’ Bushniggers are a queer lot,—sort of wild niggers that live in the bush, or leastways along the big rivers. They’re descended from runaway slaves and a heap wilder than the Bucks nowadays. Good-hearted chaps, though, even if they do run ’round naked and are a pack o’ heathens. You’ll meet up with plenty o’ Bucks, but you won’t run across any Bush niggers in Demerara, but over in Surinam,—Dutch Guiana, that is,—there’s heaps of ’em.”

“Do the Indians,—the Bucks, I mean,—speak English?” asked Eric.

“Well, I can’t say you’d call it King’s English,” laughed the other. “You’ll have a bit of trouble understanding their talky-talky at first,—sounds like dime novel ‘Injun’ talk,—but you’ll soon get used to it. The Bushniggers speak another sort o’ lingo altogether,—mixture of English, Dutch, African and French,—regular language o’ their own. But, look here, son, yonder’s the town. What do you think of it?”

Eric had been so interested in talking with his

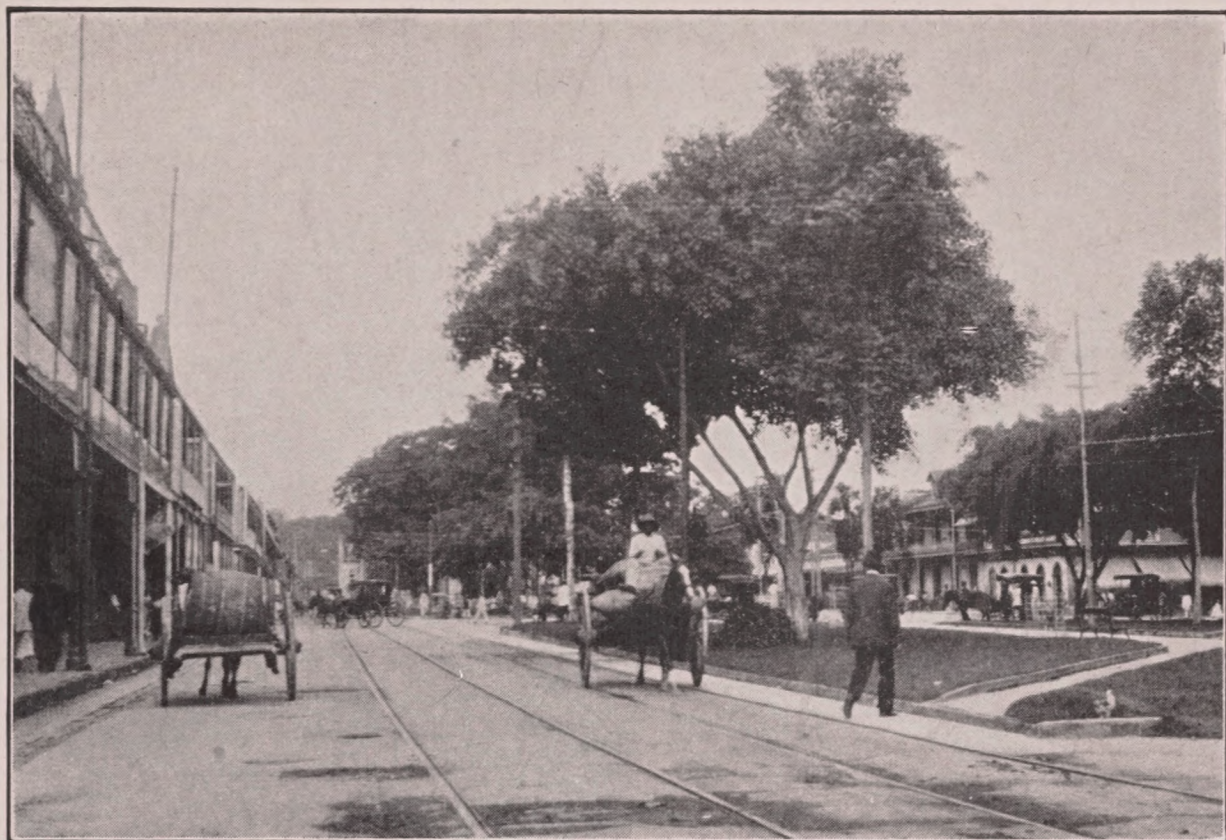
new friend that he had not noticed that the ship was close to the docks. All he could see were great warehouses, a few roofs and towers above them, a palm tree here and there, and numerous steamers and sailing craft moored to the docks and wharves.

“I don’t think much of its looks,” he admitted. “But there seems to be a great deal of shipping for such a little place.”

“You can’t see any more of Georgetown from the water than you can of the bush,” the miner informed him. “City’s below sea level,—or, rather, river level,—and out of sight beyond the docks and warehouses. You’ll find it a right smart bit of a city as soon as you hop ashore, and right up to date. Trolley cars, railroads, automobiles and everything else.”

“How do the people keep the water out if the city’s below the level of the river?” inquired Eric, as the big ship was being warped alongside the dock.

“You’ll see canals in most of the streets and out in the country,” the miner answered. “Every time the tide runs out they open the sluice gates and drain the water off and before the tide turns they shut the gates up again and keep the water out. It’s just like Holland for that,—you see, it used to be Dutch, and I reckon the Dutchmen couldn’t feel a



Marine Square, Port of Spain



A trolley ride carried them to the Savanna

mite at home unless they lived below sea level. Yonder's the sea wall,—favorite place for promenadin' in the evening,—band plays there, and all that sort of thing."

The steamer was now made fast to the wharf, the gangway was up and porters were busy carrying luggage ashore. Presently Mr. Marvin appeared, followed by a colored boy with the hand bags.

"I've just been learning all about the bush and 'Bucks' and 'Bushniggers,'" exclaimed Eric, as his father approached. "This gentleman's been telling me about everything. Do let me introduce you to my father, Mr.——"

"Teach," supplied the miner, "Frank Teach. Glad to know you, Mr. Marvin. Hope you'll have a fine time down here and find everything shipshape. If you happen to be over Surinam way, look me up,—every one there knows me. Pleased to be of any service to you when I can."

Thanking him for his offer, and assuring him that they would certainly look him up if they visited Dutch Guiana, Mr. Marvin and Eric bade Mr. Teach good-by, and a moment later Eric set foot for the first time on South America.

CHAPTER II

IN GUIANA'S CAPITAL

MR. MARVIN had much to attend to before leaving for Ratura, and for several days Eric was left to himself while his father was busy with agents, solicitors, merchants and others, and with papers and accounts. But time did not hang heavily on the boy's hands. He found Georgetown a fascinating city, with an interesting, motley population, and he never tired of watching the picturesque Hindus that swarmed everywhere and gave an Oriental touch to the cosmopolitan South American town.

At one spot he found a mosque, with domes and minarets gleaming among the palms, and somewhat timidly entered the grounds. A venerable, white-bearded descendant of Mohammed greeted him and in broken English invited him to enter the dim interior of the Moslem church. Somewhere Eric had read that those entering a mosque must remove their shoes, and slipping off his, he followed the priest and was shown the Koran resting in its niche.

When he finally parted from his ancient Mohammedan friend he felt as if he had made a visit to India itself.

Much time was profitably spent in the great Botanic Station, for here Eric found every useful and ornamental tree and plant of the tropics, and by the aid of a courteous assistant learned a great deal about the cultivation and preparation of tropical products. He saw the laborers gathering cocoa, watched them opening the pods and extracting the beans, and was shown the great trays on which the cocoa was drying in the sun. He also learned to distinguish many of the hardwood, cabinet and dye-wood trees by sight, and he marveled at the gigantic leaves and flowers of the Victoria Regia lilies which filled the ditches and canals; but of all things, that which interested him the most was obtaining rubber from the rubber trees.

Finding him interested, his guide explained the entire process at length, and even allowed Eric to try his hand at tapping the trees and gathering the milky juice which was afterwards congealed to form rubber.

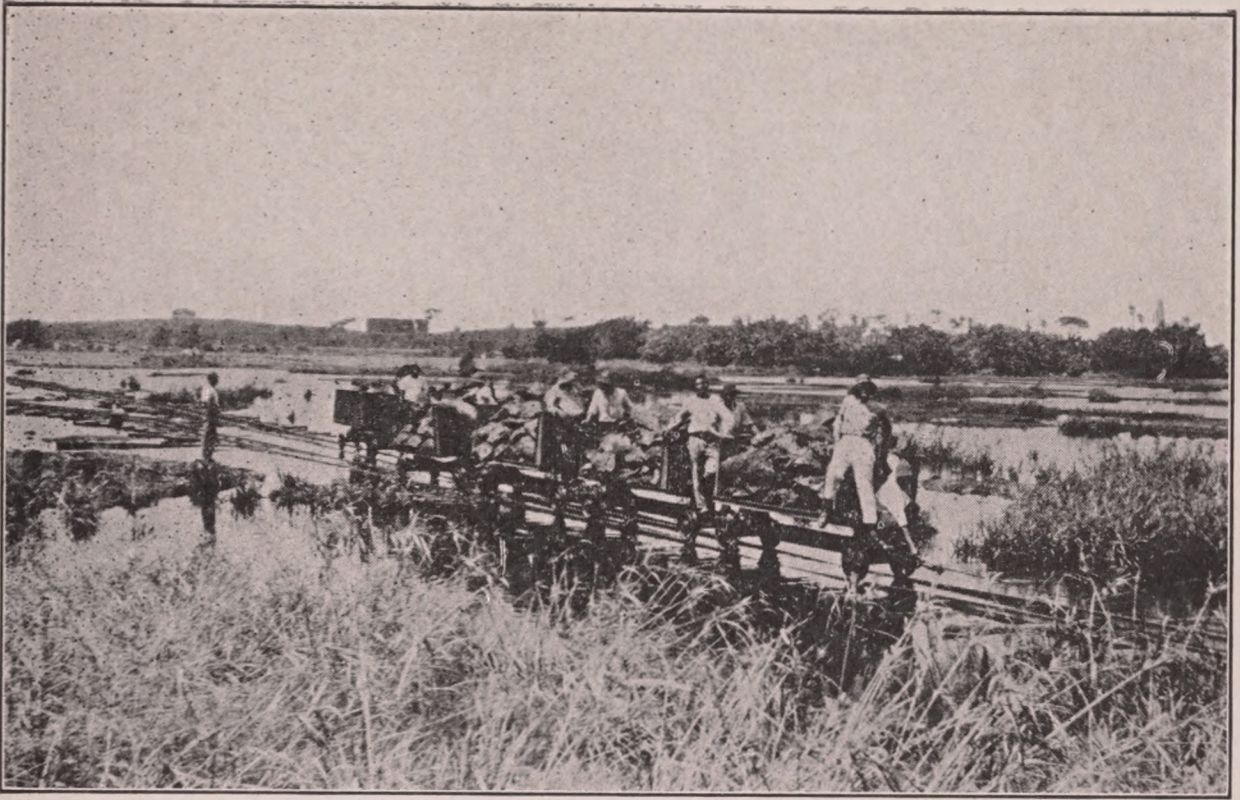
“It’s just like gathering maple sap,” exclaimed the delighted boy. “I wonder if there are any rubber trees at Ratura.”

“I believe there are,” replied the attendant. “At least, a grove was started when the plantation was established, but I cannot say what success they have had.”

“Well, if I owned an estate here, I’d go in for rubber,” Eric declared. It seems the easiest of crops to gather, and from what you say, there must be lots of money in it.”

“It’s been far too greatly neglected,” replied the other. “A few planters have gone in for it and are reaping good profits, but I should advise every one who has suitable land to raise rubber trees. Of course, there is a great deal of care necessary, and it requires several years for the trees to attain sufficient growth to tap, but once they are producing they are a constant source of revenue.”

“I’m mighty glad I’ve learned about it,” said Eric. “If there are any trees on our place I’m going to ask father to let me look after them. Can you tell me of any other things which might bring good profits from the Ratura plantation? That is,” he continued, “things which bring quick returns. You see, the company’s been losing money, and father’s come down to try and put it on a paying basis, and I’m sure you can help us a great deal with your knowledge.”



They visited the wonderful Pitch Lake



The waterfront of Georgetown, British Guiana

“There’s no reason why Ratura should not be paying well,” replied the other. “I expect mismanagement or dishonesty is at the bottom of your troubles. If your father wishes to turn the resources of the place into ready cash quickly I should advise getting out wood and timber. There’s a large demand for crabwood, purpleheart, greenheart and other woods just now for rifle stocks, gun carriages and other purposes, and I have no doubt there is enough of such material on Ratura to pay off all indebtedness and leave a handsome profit in addition. Then, there’s rice. A few plantations here are doing very well with rice, but the demand is still greater than the supply, for our large East Indian population consumes a vast amount of the grain. If you wish, I’ll show you our experimental rice plot, and you may obtain some useful information regarding rice cultivation. But, of course, rice is quite out of the question at Ratura.”

“That’s awfully kind of you,” declared Eric. “I’m anxious to help all I can, and all I learn will be of use. I’ll tell father all you’ve told me.”

They were now approaching a swampy, lotus-filled lagoon, and suddenly some huge creature rose in the midst of the pond, uttered a tremendous bellow, and disappeared with a great splash.

“What in the world was that?” cried Eric, with an exclamation of surprise.

“Only a manatee,” replied his friend. “There are many of them here.”

“Do you mean they are really wild?” asked Eric.

“Certainly they are,” the man assured him. “We never disturb them; but we do kill off the crocodiles or alligators now and then.”

“Do you have those here, too?” exclaimed Eric, in surprise.

“Yes, plenty, and to spare.”

“And look at those herons and egrets,” exclaimed the boy, as they came in sight of a pond near the path. “Why, you have a real zoological garden here.”

“It’s better than a zoological park,” declared the attendant, “for all our specimens are wild, and are free to go and come as they please. There are parrots in the trees,—see, there’s a flock now! Water fowl of many kinds live in the canals and ponds, and the shrubbery is full of birds,—even monkeys visit us occasionally. But it’s the same way all about Demerara; if you drive outside the city anywhere you’ll see rare and beautiful birds along the roadsides and quite tame, for we protect them by strict laws here.”

“Well, if birds and animals are so abundant right here in the city, it must be a perfect paradise for them up at Ratura,” said Eric.

“Few places are richer in wild life,” declared the other, “but if you are interested in such matters you should visit our museum. You’ll find an excellent collection there.”

“I certainly shall,” declared Eric. “I’ll spend a whole day there.”

When at last he was compelled to leave the gardens, Eric had obtained a vast amount of useful knowledge, and felt that he could really be of use in helping his father on the plantation.

Mr. Marvin listened with interest to his son’s account of what he had seen and learned during the day.

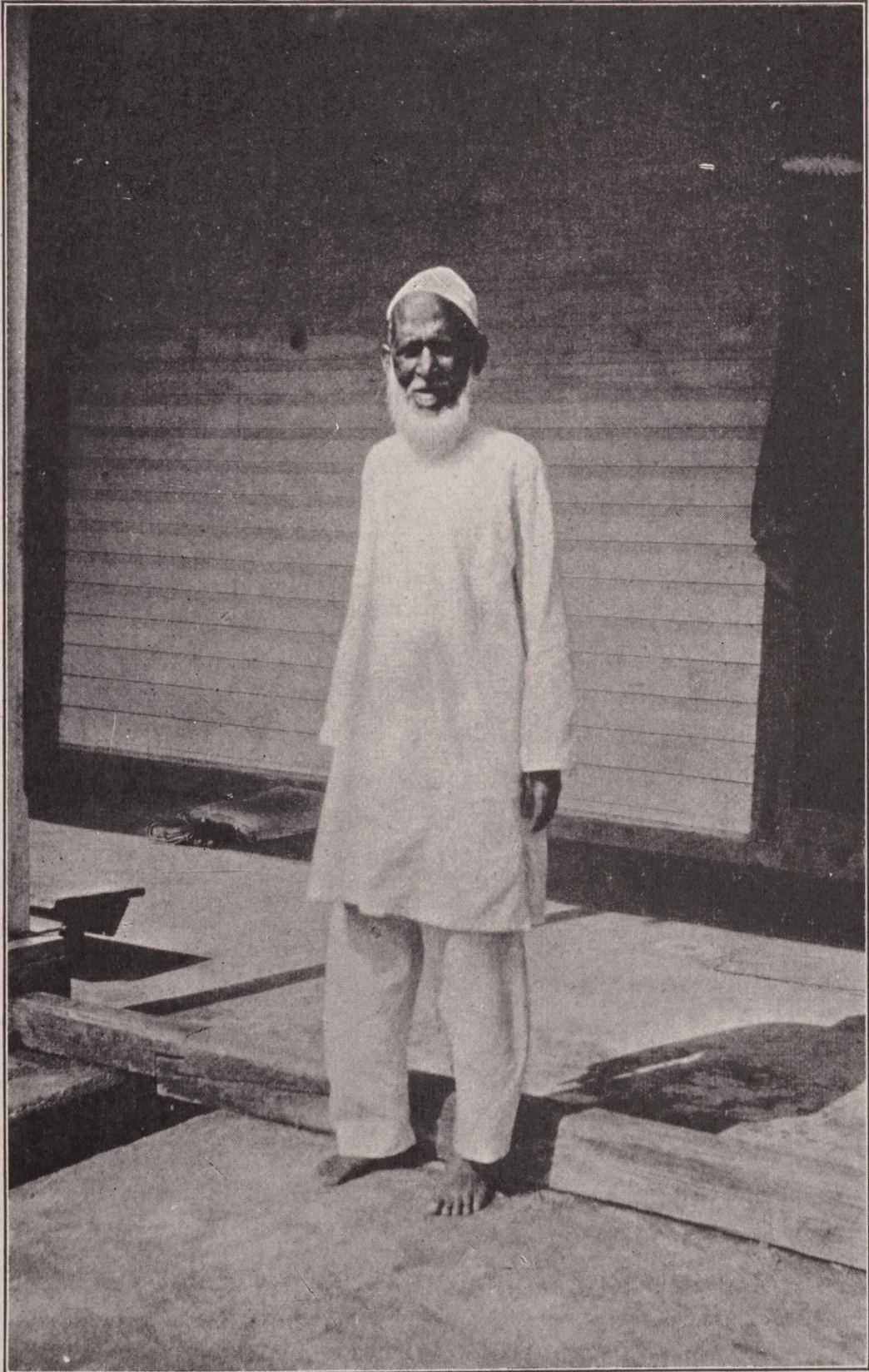
“I’m very glad to know you’ve been putting in your time that way,” he assured Eric. “I had intended visiting the station to obtain such information, but you’ve saved me the time and trouble, and we’ll be able to start for the plantation all the sooner. I expect to finish my business in town tomorrow, and we’ll leave the next morning. From what I have discovered already, I am convinced that downright dishonesty is at the bottom of our troubles. It’s a difficult matter to prove it, and if I dis-

charge the present manager, it may be hard to secure another to take his place. Moreover, I've been warned that he's a dangerous man,—utterly unprincipled,—and that if I make an enemy of him he'll no doubt try to obtain revenge in some way. However, I've firmly made up my mind to discharge him as soon as I arrive at the plantation. For these reasons I'm anxious to reach Ratura as soon as possible, for, if Leggett hears we are coming, he may suspect my purpose and do some damage and leave before we arrive."

The next day Eric spent in the museum, and by studying the hundreds of specimens of birds and animals, learned far more of the denizens of Guiana's forests than could ever have been acquired from books.

"We're off at daylight to-morrow," his father announced that evening.

"Thanks to your visit to the station, I've placed a large order for timber, but the finances were in such bad shape that I've been compelled to negotiate a large note to provide ample funds for immediate needs. It was somewhat difficult, for Ratura has earned a reputation as a losing proposition, but I found one man who still had faith in it, especially in view of the timber contract. He's an



A white-bearded Moslem priest invited him to enter

old Dutchman named Van Pelt, who lives in Paramaribo; and I think I was most fortunate in finding him, for, in case returns for the timber are delayed, he is quite willing to extend the note."

"Well, I'm ever so glad I helped some," declared Eric. "And I'm sure that with a little experience I'll be able to do a great deal about the place. But it's too bad that you had to give the note."

"In a way, yes," agreed his father, "but it enabled me to pay off all the little claims, and it's better to have one large creditor than a number of small ones, many of whom were clamoring for their money. At any rate, I'm quite sure Ratura has resources sufficient to place it on a paying basis if properly handled, but we can tell better after we see the place. Now, off to bed, Eric, for you've a long day's trip ahead of you to-morrow."

Little did father or son dream of the dangers or adventures which were in store for them or of the important part the Dutchman's note would play in their lives.

CHAPTER III

A SURPRISING RECEPTION

ERIC had studied every available source of information regarding British Guiana, but nothing he had read conveyed a true idea of the country. He knew that on the maps were countless rivers bearing strange Indian names, but not until he sailed across the mouths of the rivers on his way to Ratura did he realize what mighty streams they were. As Georgetown became a mere blurr of haze astern, and nothing could be seen but the vast waste of muddy waters with the low line of gray-green shores upon the horizon, he could scarce believe he was not upon the ocean.

“I’d never dream this was a river,” he remarked. “It must be miles and miles from shore to shore.”

“It’s nearly thirty-five miles wide here,” replied his father, “and the shores are so low that they appear even more distant than they are in reality. The Demerara and Essequibo Rivers join to form this estuary,—a sort of overflowed delta, so to

speak, but they are both very large and are navigable for many miles. In fact, ocean-going steamships and great sailing vessels go up the Demerara River for over sixty miles to load greenheart timber."

Soon the distant shores became more distinct, and in a few hours the steamer entered the Essequibo and headed upstream.

Eric was delighted with all he saw, and, while the opposite shores were still dim in the distance, he had splendid views of the great forest-clad islands in the river, and the densely wooded nearer bank.

"That's Dauntless Island yonder," said the captain, pointing to a large island, several miles in length, and rich with greenery, "perhaps you'd be interested to know it's built on a wreck."

"That certainly sounds wonderful," declared Eric, "but I don't see how any island can be built on a wreck. Do tell me about it."

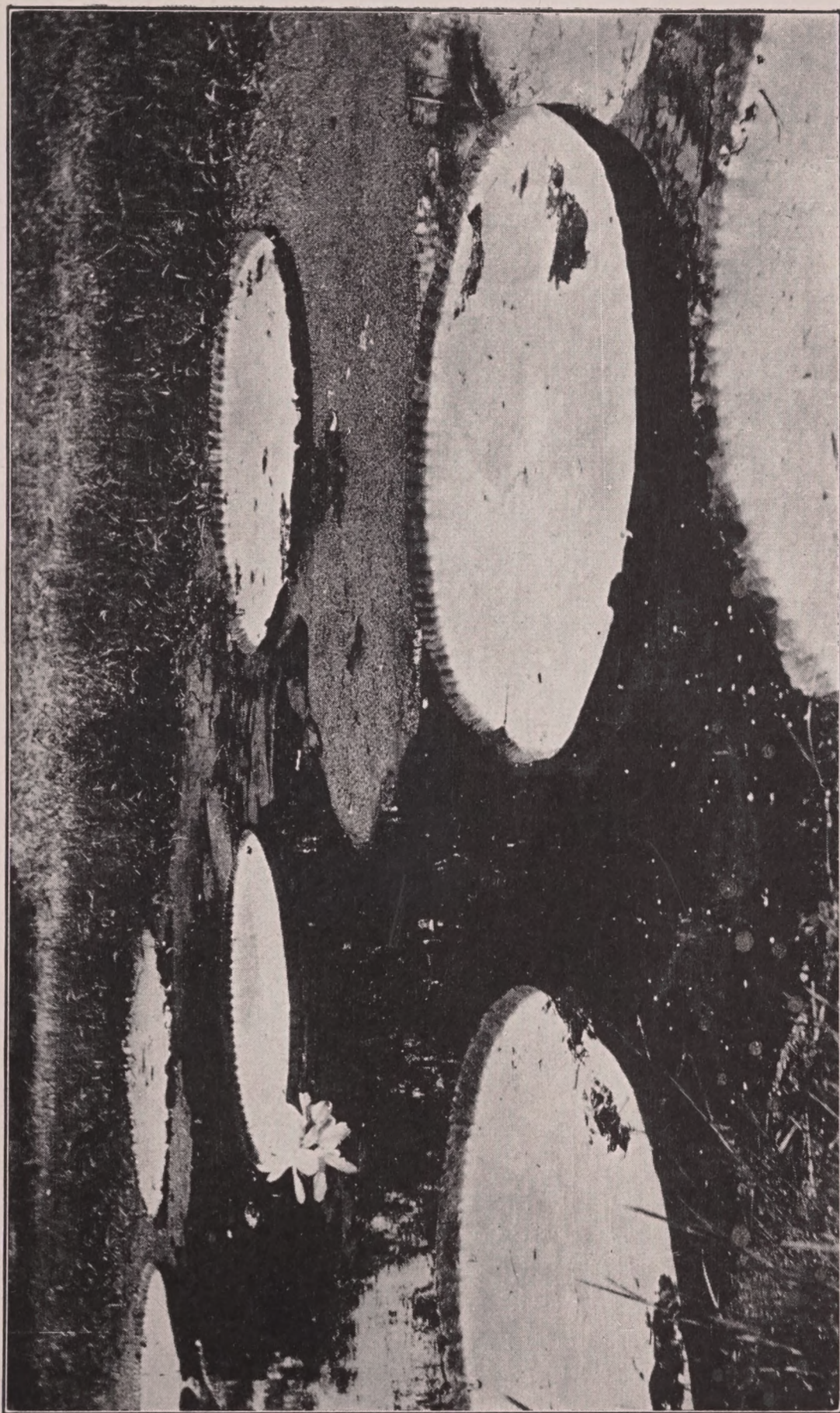
"It does sound a bit queer," admitted the captain, "but it's really very simple. You see, the river here is full of mud and sand,—that's what makes it so brown,—and just as soon as anything stops the current the sand has a chance to settle down and form a bar. About forty years ago a schooner named the *Dauntless* was wrecked over yonder, and pretty soon the sand commenced piling

up about her and formed a bar pointing upstream. Then mangrove seeds lodged on the bar and took root and they made more of an obstruction and caused more sand to pile up. Then the mucka-muckas—those big lily-like plants you see along the shore here—began to sprout up, and, protected by these and the mangroves, the island commenced to grow, until to-day there's a good-sized piece of dry land and big trees, all due to a little coasting schooner getting wrecked."

"I think that's simply marvelous," declared Eric. "Were all these islands formed in the same way?"

"I can't say about that," laughed the captain, "but I expect they all began in a small way and were started by something or another getting lodged in the stream. As you go farther up you'll see plenty of good-sized bars caused by timbers or branches of trees."

The boat was now running close to the shore, and Eric turned his attention to the herons, egrets and strange water fowl which rose flapping from their retreats in the shallow water. Presently he caught sight of a patch of brilliant red upon a black, muddy bank which greatly puzzled him. He was about to ask the captain in regard to it when suddenly the



The gigantic leaves and flowers of the Victoria Regia

brilliant color sprang into life and rose in air,—a marvelous cloud of scarlet which glowed against the dark green background of the mangroves like a mass of living flame. At the sight Eric uttered an involuntary shout of wonder and admiration, for he realized he was gazing at a huge flock of the rare and beautiful Scarlet Ibis.

At his exclamation the captain turned and glanced shoreward.

“Oh, it’s the Curri-curries,” he remarked. “They do look pretty, don’t they?”

“Why, you don’t seem a bit surprised,” cried Eric. “I never expected to see such a wonderful sight.”

“Surprised?” exclaimed the captain, in a puzzled tone. “What’s surprising about them? They’re always about, up and down the rivers, nobody pays any attention to Curri-curries.”

Presently the vessel slowed down and drew alongside a tiny dock or “stelling,” and Eric watched with interest the motley crowd of Hindus and negroes, who crowded the wharf; some waiting to board the steamer, others gathered to see their friends off, and others vending fruits, vegetables and caged birds.

Back from the dock were the broad, green fields

of an immense sugar estate, and the great black chimneys of the mill reared themselves far above the surrounding trees. Eric was surprised to find docks, settlements and sugar mills here, for he imagined that civilization had been left behind, and that all about was wilderness. He had not yet learned that everywhere in British Guiana civilization borders on the vast untamed wilds of South America.

By midday, however, the last signs of cultivation had been left far behind. The wooded shores, with their interminable mangroves, stretched for mile after mile on either hand, and between them flowed the great turbid river, dotted with islands and forsaken save by occasional dug-out canoes loaded with cordwood and manned by stalwart, half-naked colored men.

Now and again tiny thatched huts were seen amid the jungle, or dead brown brush, and partly cleared spaces indicated where wood-cutters were at work. At one spot, too, the steamer ran close to the shores of a great, forested island where a number of buildings and a neat church stood in the center of cleared and cultivated lands. Nearer at hand an ancient, crumbling ruin stood close to shore, and the captain told Eric this was an old Dutch fort, that at one time the Dutch had many towns and settlements far up

the rivers, and that the island was known as Fort Island.

Eric thought it would be great fun to go ashore and poke around among the ruins, and as a little dock projected from the shores he hoped the steamer would stop, but it kept steadily on, and soon the island and the fort were hidden behind other islands astern.

For hour after hour the boat continued, swinging around bend after bend, threading a zigzag course between sand bars and islands, and ever with nothing save river, sky and endless jungle in sight. But, while the scenery was monotonous, and there was little of interest to be seen, time did not hang heavily on Eric's hands, and he plied the captain and his fellow passengers with questions, and learned much of interest and many things which later proved of the greatest value. He discovered that the tide rose and fell for nearly one hundred miles up the rivers; that navigation ceased at Bartica because of rapids farther upstream; that the Mazaruni and Cuyuni joined close above the town, and that the great penal settlement of the colony was just across the Mazaruni from Bartica. He was filled with interest at the stories of the gold diggings and diamond fields of the upper rivers, and listened

to many a yarn of fortunes lost and won, and he gained an excellent idea of the life of the interior, the dangers of navigating the falls and rapids, the resources of the country and the products of the "bush."

Then the little settlements of Itaka, Dalli and Wolga were passed, with their granite quarries above the riverside, and Bartica was sighted far ahead, and just before sundown the steamer ran alongside the dock of this little town at the edge of the wilderness. It was a mere village,—a few score little wooden buildings straggling along grassy lanes,—but it was typically a frontier settlement, and everywhere were evidences that it was the jumping-off place of civilization. Before it flowed the great rivers leading into the heart of the continent, behind it stretched the forest, and on its streets silent, bronze-skinned Indians, negroes and colored men, Portuguese and a few Hindus mingled freely. Close to the dock was a great, open, shed-like structure, within which scores of prospectors and gold diggers swung their hammocks and cooked their meals, while waiting for boats to carry them up the rivers to the "diggings," and the front of the hotel bore the legend, "Boats, outfits and tacklings for the Balata, Gold and Diamond Fields."

Early the next morning Eric and his father boarded the heavy river boat which Mr. Marvin had engaged, and, impelled by the powerful strokes of eight paddlers, the craft swept swiftly up the river towards Ratura.

The sun was still low in the east, a mist hung over the river, parrots winged screaming overhead, great macaws screeched and toucans clattered from the tree tops, and from the depths of the forest issued countless songs, notes and cries of awakening life. The boat skirted close to the river bank, and Eric longed to step ashore and enter the rank green jungle, with its dark, mysterious shadows and giant trees. But he was forced to content himself with gazing at the bush from the passing boat, and with watching the strange birds and great sky-blue butterflies, that flitted here and there along the forest's edge.

At last a cleared space appeared ahead, the roof of a good-sized building was seen peeping from the greenery, and the boat was run alongside a tiny wooden dock at the foot of a shaded road. No one was in sight, and, while the boatmen busied themselves unloading the baggage, Mr. Marvin and Eric hurried up the pathway towards the bungalow.

As they came within sight of the house a white

man, clad in dirty pajamas, approached. He was small, wiry, shifty-eyed and weasel-faced, and Eric took an instinctive dislike to him even before he spoke.

“Good morning,” said Mr. Marvin pleasantly. “You are Mr. Leggett, I presume.”

“Morning,” grunted the other. “You guessed right; I’m Leggett. What do *you* want?”

“My name is Marvin,—this is my son, Eric,—and I’ve come down in the interests of the company, to look about and see if the place can’t be made to pay.”

Leggett’s lip curled in a scornful snarl. “Huh! Come down to spy on me, eh. Well, you’re welcome to see all you can. I ain’t got anything to hide, but you needn’t run away with the idea that this place’ll pay—’tain’t in it. I reckon I know my business, I do; and no bloomin’ green hand can show me anything. Might as well chuck up the place and sell out while the sellin’s good ’s my advice.”

“Oh, I don’t know about that,” said Mr. Marvin, as they turned towards the house. “I don’t question your knowledge, Mr. Leggett, but there may be unnecessary expenditures that can be reduced, or resources which have not been developed.



The hotel bore the legend, "Boats and outfits for the gold and diamond fields."

I should like, first of all, to go over your books with you."

At these words, Leggett stopped in his tracks, swung about and cried angrily, "So that's your game, is it? Come snoopin' around tryin' to make me the goat, eh! Well, mister, *I* don't keep books, I don't. I'm too old a hand to have anything 'round for smart Alecks like you to juggle about to prove I'm to blame. S'pose you think I been *doin'* your bloody company?"

Mr. Marvin flushed at the insulting words and manner of the man, but he spoke quietly and calmly. "I regret that you take this attitude," he said. "I had hoped to avoid any unpleasantness, but, under the circumstances, I might as well tell you that I intend to discharge you. I don't *think* you've been 'doing' the company,—I know it."

"You do, do you?" sneered the manager. "Goin' to fire me, are you? Well, I reckon you don't know who you're a-talkin' to. You've got another guess comin', mister. When Tom Leggett's fired, he fires himself. Now, you get to blazes out o' here, and get quick, while the gettin's good. I don't let any one call me a crook more 'an once, you bet your life."

As he spoke he whipped out a revolver and leveled it at Mr. Marvin. For a brief instant Eric and his

father hesitated, dumbfounded at Leggett's violent outburst and threatening attitude. But there was nothing to be done save obey the fellow's commands, for the boatmen were beyond call, and for all they knew the manager was a madman.

"Very well," said Mr. Marvin, after the tense pause. "You have the upper hand at present, I admit. But rest assured I shall soon return, and the police will be with me. I had no idea of prosecuting you before; but you've shown yourself unworthy of any consideration,—you're too dangerous to be at large."

"Comin' back with police, are you?" screamed Leggett, in a frenzy. "Come on; I'll know you nex' time I see you. I'll mark that smug face of yours all right,—take that, you dirty sneak!"

As he spoke, he sprang forward and snatching up a heavy stick raised it to strike. But the blow never fell; ere Mr. Marvin could dodge, ere Eric could spring forward, a lithe brown body shot downward from the foliage of the mango tree overhead and, landing full on Leggett's head and shoulders, bore him crashing to the earth. The revolver flew from the manager's hand and exploded harmlessly as it struck the road, and with the breath completely knocked out of his body by the unex-

pected onslaught, Leggett lay panting and half-conscious upon the ground, while over him stood a half-naked, bronze-skinned youth with a keen machete held threateningly at the other's throat.

“S’pose makeum move, me chop you plenty,” laconically remarked this new arrival on the scene, and the prostrate bully, all the fight gone from him, took the hint and remained motionless.

CHAPTER IV

AT RATURA

AT this moment the boatmen appeared, and a couple of black women and two or three Hindus came hurrying from the nearby house, attracted by the loud words of Leggett and the revolver shot.

“Wa, la!” exclaimed the boat captain, as he caught sight of the little group in the roadway. “Wha’ dat randan ’bout, Marster Marvin? Wha’ dis fellah try do fo’ you? Hi, yo’ Hermanas, yo’ stan’ from he now, we-all take care he don’ reap up no mo’.”

In a few words Mr. Marvin explained what had taken place, and how the youth, addressed as Hermanas, had dropped from the tree in the nick of time. Meanwhile, the young Indian,—for such he proved to be,—stood at one side; but maintaining a keen watch on Leggett, who, surrounded by the stalwart blacks and unarmed, showed no disposition to attempt escape or resistance, but stood glowering, scowling and scarlet with suppressed rage, in the center of the little crowd which had collected.

“Dis man a mos’ obstropolous buckra,” declared the captain, when he had heard Mr. Marvin’s account. “I mighty glad dis Buck boy drap he down, an’ I ’spec he right glad o’ de chance to gi’e he a good clout. Wha’ yo’ wish fo’ to do with he, mars-ter? I’s e a cons’able, sah, and I ’spec I bes’ comprehend he as a auspicious parson, an’ take he to de police at Bartica, sah.”

“Yes,” replied Mr. Marvin, repressing a smile at the boatman’s queer jargon, “he’s too dangerous to remain at large. I had not intended to prosecute him for his dishonesty; but after this attempted assault, I shall do my best to have him placed behind bars. Take him along to Bartica, captain, and turn him over to the police. I’ll appear against him with my son and Hermanas as witnesses whenever the case is called.”

Turning to his boat’s crew, the captain ordered them to tie Leggett securely, and addressing the discomfited manager, remarked, “Yo’ meet yo’ meta to-day fo’ surely, mon. Now, don’ yo’ go for tryin’ any contendin’, ’cause I gwine to fend fo’ myself, an’ yo’ go to makin’ flusteration I bet I mash you’ head, yes.”

With this parting injunction, the captain ordered Leggett to the boat, and with no choice left but to

obey, the rascal started forward and then, turning towards Mr. Marvin with an oath, he shouted:

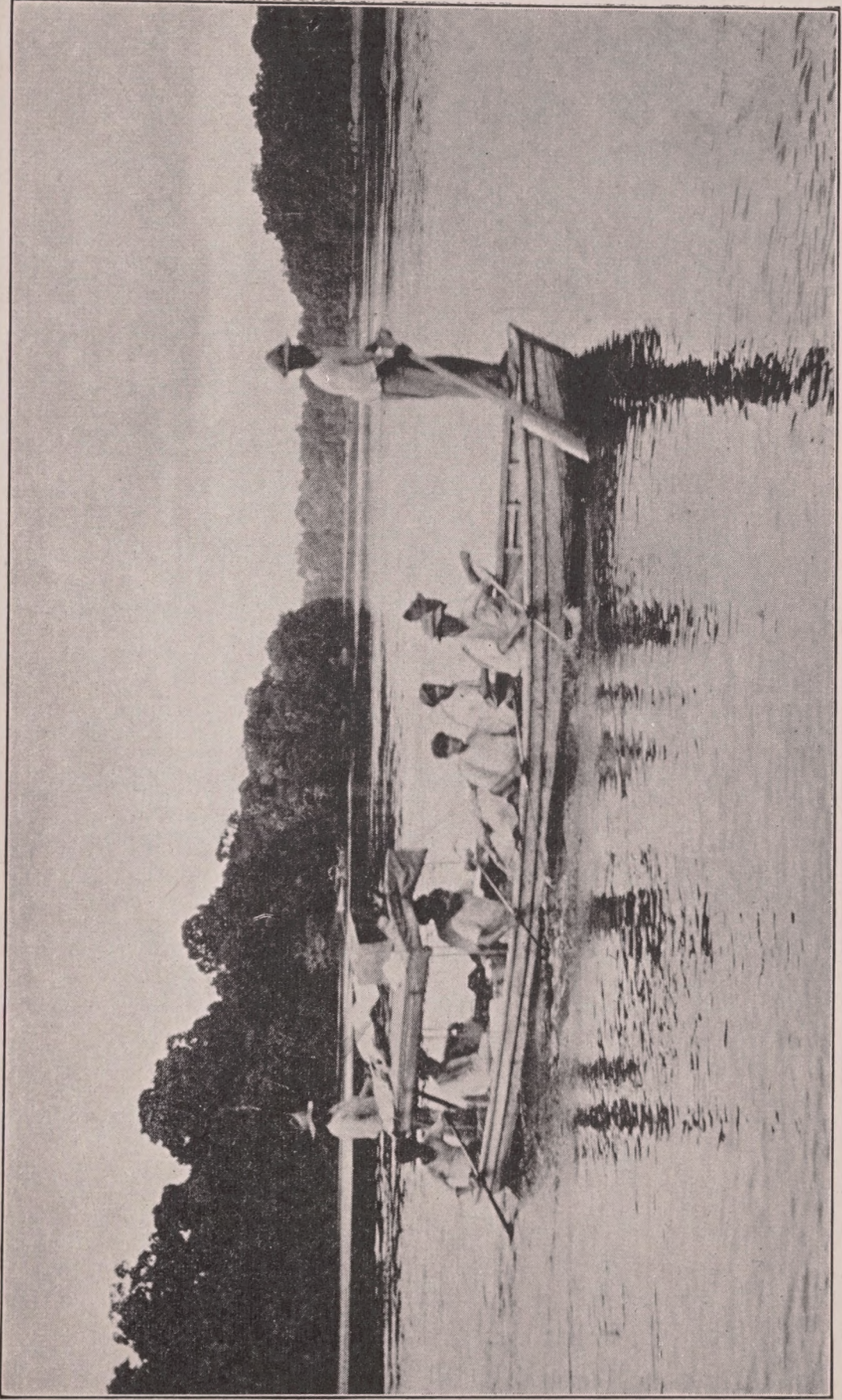
“You think you’ve got me, do you? Just wait and see. I’ll make you pay for this, you sneakin’ white-livered cur. I’ll make you wish you’d never seen Ratura. I’ll——”

His threat was interrupted by a huge, black hand grasping his shoulder and shoving him forcibly forward, and with a stalwart negro on either side he marched sullenly off and out of sight.

“Thank goodness, we’re well rid of him,” exclaimed Mr. Marvin. Then addressing the boat captain he continued, “Come up to the house, Glasgow, and get Leggett’s things. We have no right to hold his belongings, and you can turn them over to the police at Bartica.”

In the meantime, Eric had thanked the Indian boy for his timely intervention, and had already taken a great liking to the quiet, pleasant-faced aborigine, who, still shy in the presence of the white boy and his father, replied to Eric’s questions in monosyllables.

Having disposed of Leggett and the others, Mr. Marvin now approached Hermanas and extended his hand. “I must thank you for saving me from Leggett’s blow,” he said. “I shall be glad to have a



The boat swept swiftly up the river

talk with you at the house, and I've an idea that you can be of great service to my son here. He's fond of hunting, and is hoping to get out in the bush. I think you'll make a splendid companion for him. How would that suit you, Hermanas?"

"Me likeum too much," replied the Indian, with a grin. "Me make catchum deer, powis, labba, plenty game when walkum topside bush."

"Hurrah! That will be fine," cried Eric. "You'll be 'guide, philosopher and friend,' as the saying is, and I'll bet we'll be great chums. But I'll have to learn that funny talk of yours. I wonder if I can get the hang of it,—let's see.—Why, you hideum in tree?" Eric laughed joyously at his first attempt to speak the "talky-talky," and his father chuckled at his enthusiasm, but the Indian boy took the matter quite seriously.

"You makeum talky-talky all same Buckman," he declared. "Me in tree for catchum mango for cook. When seeum Leggett makeum loud talk me hideum. Leggett no good,—plenty bad man. When seeum make for shoot,—make for mash with stick, must makeum do something. No gotum bown-arrow, no gotum gun, me jump like so; knockum down same way. Now must catchum mango one time."

“Very well, Hermanas,” said Mr. Marvin. “Go ahead and get the mangos for the cook and then come to the house.”

With the agility of a monkey the Indian scrambled into the tree to resume his interrupted fruit-gathering, while Mr. Marvin and Eric walked on and entered the bungalow.

Under Mr. Marvin’s direction, the servant gathered Leggett’s belongings together and delivered them to the captain, and then, this matter attended to, Eric and his father partook of the very welcome breakfast served by the old black cook, who seemed highly pleased at her change of masters.

Before breakfast was over Hermanas appeared and, seating himself in the doorway, waited silently for Mr. Marvin to finish his meal. Although he spoke only the queer jargon peculiar to the “buckmen,” or Indians of Guiana, yet Hermanas understood English perfectly and, much to Mr. Marvin’s surprise, declared he could read and write. He was a bright, intelligent boy of about Eric’s age, and was wonderfully respectful and courteous in his manner. He told Mr. Marvin that his real name was Herman Thomas, which had been contracted to Hermanas; that he was an Arekuna Indian; that his home was “One hour walk topside creek”; that

his father was a woodcutter, hunter and balata rubber gatherer, and had been employed by Leggett when timber was required, or when the rubber trees were to be tapped, and that he, Hermanas, had done odd jobs about the place in return for his food and a few shillings a week.

His eyes brightened wonderfully when Mr. Marvin promised him regular wages to become Eric's companion and guide, but he absolutely refused to live at the bungalow or to sleep indoors. When the matter of clothing was mentioned he somewhat sheepishly admitted that he preferred the ragged pair of cotton trousers that formed his entire costume to any other garments, and that, were it not for the missionaries' orders, he would wear nothing but a loin cloth or "lap."

"S'pose wearum pants, wearum shirt in bush, getum wet. In bush no can catchum dry. No good like so, make Buckman sick, makeum fever. S'pose skin catchum wet dryum same way; no makeum sick."

Mr. Marvin and Eric laughed at the youth's concise explanation.

"Very well, Hermanas," said Mr. Marvin, "I expect you're quite right. Wet clothing certainly is unhealthy. If you prefer to go about with only a

'lap,' as you call it, by all means do so. We shall not object, and as long as you look after this boy of mine, teach him about the bush, and keep him from getting lost, bitten by snakes or running risks, I shall be satisfied. Have you a gun or a boat?"

"No got gun, gotum bownarrow, gotum blowgun, gotum wood-skin."

"What on earth is a 'woodskin' and a 'blowgun'?" asked Eric.

"A blowgun is a hollow cane through which the Indians blow darts with which they kill birds and animals," replied his father, "and a woodskin is a frail, crude boat or canoe made by stripping a piece of bark from a tree, and fastening the ends together. No doubt you'll have an opportunity of seeing your young Indian friend use them both."

"Yes, sir, me showum how shoot blowgun, how paddle woodskin all same Buckman," declared Hermanas.

"Does your father know anything about selecting timber,—how to tell good crabwood, greenheart and other woods?" asked Mr. Marvin. Hermanas assured him that he did, that his father was an experienced lumberman, and that he could get "Plenty timber too easy," if Mr. Marvin desired it.

"In that case," said Mr. Marvin, "I shall be glad

to employ your father. I have an order for a large amount of timber to be furnished as soon as possible. Can you have your father come to see me and talk matters over?"

"Yes, sir. Me bringum same day. Must makeum walk this side," replied the Indian.

"Very well, bring your father over, then. We have our hands full to-day, looking over the place, so Eric will not need you. Get your breakfast before you start."

The Indian boy hurried off towards the kitchen and, calling one of the Hindu laborers to accompany them, Mr. Marvin and Eric started forth to inspect Ratura.

They found the place much neglected, and the few negro and Hindu field hands doing little else than loaf, although as soon as they saw Mr. Marvin approaching they seized their tools and commenced to work diligently.

"See here, my man," said Mr. Marvin, addressing a huge black, who appeared to be a sort of foreman of the gang among the cacao trees, "you can't fool me that way. We might just as well have an understanding at once. Leggett's gone for good and all, and I've taken charge of the estate. I'm willing to pay good wages; but I want returns, and

I expect work when I pay for it. It looks to me as if Leggett had been pretty easy-going and hadn't given much attention to his laborers. Is this the way you've been working right along?"

The black man grinned, fumbled the ragged hat he held in his hands, and after a moment's hesitation, replied: "I spec' Mister Leggett don' min' if we works or no, marster. He spen' mos' o' his time a-settin' inside a-drinkin' swizzles, or a-strollin' off in de bush wif he gun. Now an' ag'in he take a look in at we all an' calls we a gang o' lazy niggers an' mebbe gi'es we a clout wif he stick. But, Lor'! we don' pay no 'tention to such flusteration, an' he allers pay us we money come Sat'day. Looks laik to me he don't care what we doin', long's he a-payin' o' other folks' money."

"I expect you're right," said Mr. Marvin, "the estate has been losing money right along, and Leggett's been pocketing the little profit there was. I presume he's padded his payroll and only kept enough laborers to make a showing if any one turned up to see what was going on. But that's over with now. If you men want to work and work well, I'll keep you on, but any one who shirks will go at once. I've come here to make Ratura pay, and I intend to make it do so, if it's possible. You're



The milky juice of the rubber trees trickling into the latex cups

foreman of this gang, I suppose. Now get busy, and let me see how much you can really do in a day.”

“Yes, boss, I’ll see dis gang wuks right lively, sah.”

As Mr. Marvin and Eric turned away the men were working industriously, evidently striving to see how good an impression they could make upon their new employer.

Wherever the two went it was the same; the men evidently killing time; weeds and undergrowth overrunning the cultivation, and the crops neglected and the trees uncared for.

The limes lay rotting on the ground, the coffee bushes were covered with vines and choked with parasites, the cacao trees were green with moss and hundreds of ripe pods were still ungathered, while the rubber groves resembled miniature jungles, rather than cultivated land.

“I cannot understand Leggett’s behavior,” remarked Mr. Marvin, as they started to retrace their way towards the house. “If he was downright dishonest, as he seems to have been, I should have expected that he would have cultivated the place thoroughly and made a greater profit by his thievery. Instead of that, he has let the place go to ruin. It looks almost as if he was deliberately trying to

make it worthless. I wonder if he is not really mad, —well, whatever the reason, the company is really to blame for not sending some one to look after the property sooner.”

“It looks perfectly hopeless,” declared Eric, “I don’t see how you are ever going to get the place into good shape again. Why, it will take years just to cut out the brush and weeds, it seems to me.”

“It’s not as bad as all that,” replied his father. “The first thing is to hire a large number of efficient laborers, and make them understand that they *must* earn their money. There are crops enough on the place to pay for the labor for the present, and I hope to commence getting out the timber at once with Hermanas’ father’s help. If he’s like his son, he’ll be a real find. By the way, from what you learned about rubber, do you think you could manage to tap some of our trees and gather the latex? Hermanas can help you, and I’ll furnish some laborers in addition. The trees have been tapped already, so they must be bearing, and rubber will bring quick returns.”

“I’m quite sure I can,” Eric replied. “I’ll start at that to-morrow.”

When they reached the house, after visiting the greater part of the cultivated lands, they found

Hermanas and his father waiting for them. The boy's father was a small, broad-faced Indian, with the same quiet, respectful manner of his son, and which, Eric found later, was characteristic of all the native Indians. He listened attentively; expressed his willingness to work at timber cutting, and assured Mr. Marvin there was enough timber on the estate to fill the contracts easily and quickly. He was very intelligent, and Mr. Marvin was surprised at the manner in which he grasped the details of the contract, and could calculate cubic and square feet from the figures given. He preferred to work on contract rather than for daily wages, and declared that he could obtain plenty of his tribesmen to aid him in the lumbering operations. He stated that it would be necessary to cut a "road" and place sticks across it in order to haul the timber out of the forest, and added, that if Mr. Marvin would lend him cattle he could work much more rapidly.

"Why, I didn't know we had any cattle," exclaimed Eric; "I only saw a few cows on the place."

"Gotum plenty cow, plenty ox," replied the Indian. "Two, t'ree, hund'ed."

"Well, where are they?" demanded Mr. Marvin.

“Two or three hundred head of cattle can’t be hidden very easily.”

The Indian then explained that the cattle were on the “savanna,” at some distance from the cultivated lands, and that they practically ran wild, and were seldom used,—save when fresh beef was required or timber hauling was to be done.

“Very well,” said Mr. Marvin. “Use what cattle you require. I must leave the entire matter in your hands for the present. I have much to attend to here, but shall try to get into the forest within a few days, to see what’s being done, and what our resources are.”

There was much to be done, and until late afternoon Mr. Marvin and Eric were busily engaged, making an inventory of supplies, tools and other articles on the place, making lists of various objects required, and readjusting and reorganizing the corps of servants, the laborers and the other employees.

Hermanas proved very useful, and it soon became evident that he was a youth with a vast amount of hard common sense and good judgment, and was a born “handy man,” and best of all he was very thorough and painstaking in all he undertook.

He had been so long at the beck and call of all

the Hindu and negro men on the estate, that the latter at first resented taking orders from him; but instead of lording it over them and taking undue advantage of his new position, Hermanas repeated Mr. Marvin's orders respectfully, and did not hesitate to lend a hand to help wherever required.

Much to Mr. Marvin's satisfaction, the men and women seemed anxious to please, and fell to with a will at clearing up and putting the place in order and, ere nightfall, a great deal had been accomplished, and the house was habitable.

"How any white man could live under such conditions and could deliberately see the place going to pieces under his eyes is incomprehensible," remarked Mr. Marvin. "But, thank goodness, we arrived in time to save the place, and I am confident we shall succeed. It will require all our resources, however. The more I investigate, the more I realize what an out-and-out crook Leggett is. Why, he must simply have pocketed thousands of dollars intended for the estate, and the worst of it is, I can't find a scrap of paper to prove his rascality. He was certainly a clever knave, and I'm thankful he's behind bars by now. He'd be a dangerous enemy to have at large."

CHAPTER V

THE BLOW GUN

THE next morning, as Eric and his father were seated at breakfast, discussing plans for the day, they were interrupted by hurrying footsteps in the gallery and the next instant the boat captain, Glasgow, appeared.

“What in the world are you doing here?” Mr. Marvin demanded, and added, “I thought you were in Bartica by now.”

“Eh, eh!” exclaimed the negro. “I’s bad noos me brung, master. Wha’ yo’ t’ink; dat obstrepulous Leggett he mek he escape, sah!”

“Leggett escaped!” cried Mr. Marvin. “How did that happen? Do you mean to say the rascal got away from your eight men?”

“Yassir,” replied the captain. “Lis’en, good marster; lis’en de story how de t’ing happen, an’ yo’ don’ vex wit me, sir.”

“It dis a-way,” he continued, “we haf he tie in de corial* all O. K., an’ we go ashore for mek break-

* *Corial*—A dug-out boat used on Guiana rivers.

fas'. Bimeby I ax de bowman fo' go to de boat an' take he breakfas'. Jes so he reach fo' han' de breakfas'—bam!—come paddle on he haid. He bus' out wid big cry an' we-all hear he bawl, an' run down e'ga' an' we jes' time see dat man swim 'cross de creek an' dis'pear in de bush topside. I ent know meself hukkum he fin' way fo' come loose o' de rope. Seems like he jes' stratch out like *camudi** an' squeeze tru. 'Tall 'vents, he gone clean 'way, an' we sarch an' we sarch, but no can cotch he to save weself. De bush plenty thick in dat part, marster, an' it too easy fo' man to hide heself. Bimeby we mek up we min' 'tain' no mo' use sarch-in' de bush, an' I t'ink bes' fo' retu'n an' 'quaint yo' wid de fac's o' de case, sah."

"Well, there's no use crying over spilt milk," remarked Mr. Marvin, as Glasgow finished his tale of the prisoner's escape. "I suppose he'll be caught sooner or later. Without food or arms he cannot live in the bush, and must come out at some settlement. If you report the matter to the police at Bartica they'll be on the watch throughout the colony."

"Beggin' yo' pardon, sah," said the captain, "I 'spec' dat Leggett man no gwine fo' to walk in to

* *Camudi*—Boa constrictor or anaconda.

be cotched, sah. When I tek de t'ing in consid'ation, I fin' out de cunnin'ess o' de scamp. W'en yo' t'ink he in, he out; he clean out. He plenty fr'ens 'mong de Bovianders,* sah, an' I 'spec' he gwine rangin' 'bout 'mong he fr'en's, an' plottin' an' complottin' 'gainst you-all. Yassir, dat what he boun' for do, sah."

"In that case, we must be on the watch," said Mr. Marvin. "He may attempt to carry out his threats of revenge, although personally I think he's too much of a coward to do so. However, I'll tell all the men to keep a sharp lookout, for it would not be beyond him to attempt to burn the place or destroy property. You should have kept a man constantly on watch over him; but hindsight is always easier than foresight, and there's nothing to be done now. However, as long as you are here, I will send a message to Georgetown, asking my agent to secure some additional laborers."

With the letter tucked safely in his deerskin pouch, and with many protestations of regret and humility at allowing Leggett to escape, Glasgow departed, while Eric, accompanied by Hermanas and with a Hindu carrying latex cups, started for the

* *Boviander*—Colored people who live in the bush along the rivers,—a corruption of "Above Yonder" ('Bov-Yander).

rubber groves, and Mr. Marvin set forth to direct the gathering of the ripe cacao pods.

Eric had learned quite a little in regard to tapping rubber trees during the time spent with the experts in the botanic station, and Hermanas had helped his father on many a Balata bleeding trip. Thus, the two boys working together, succeeded very well, for one possessed scientific knowledge and little experience, while the other had practical experience, but little scientific knowledge.

There were comparatively few large trees on the estate, but there were many which were old enough to tap, and Eric was immensely pleased as he went from tree to tree and saw the thick, milky juice, or latex, trickling into the cups placed below the V-shaped incisions in the smooth gray trunks.

His friend in Georgetown had cautioned him in regard to the care necessary to avoid injuring the trees, and had explained how the sap was produced between the inner and outer barks, and Eric took every precaution to prevent cutting through the inner bark. Hermanas showed great dexterity in using the odd hatchet-like tapping tool, with its double cutting-edge; but the work was new to Eric, and he soon found that practice was essential, and that more could be accomplished by leaving this labor to

the Indian and the negro and Hindu workmen, while he directed operations and saw to removing and emptying the cups as they became filled with latex.

Although Eric was most impatient to get into the bush and hunt, yet he realized that for the present, at least, pleasure must give way to business, and he labored diligently until mid-afternoon.

The rubber grove stretched away to the very edge of the forest, and Eric's eyes often strayed longingly to the cool, green jungle so close at hand. Parrots were constantly winging their noisy flight from tree to tree; the hoarse cries of macaws could be heard from the tree tops, and once or twice Eric caught sight of these great scarlet birds flying laboriously from one part of the forest to another, their long, pointed tails trailing behind. Again and again, Eric interrupted his work to watch these denizens of the bush, or to gaze with intense interest at the strange, huge-billed toucans that barked and clattered in the foliage, for he was still new to his surroundings, and it seemed marvelous and almost unnatural to see parrots, toucans, macaws and other strange birds flying about at liberty.

Once, as the party skirted the edge of the bush, there was a roar of wings and a flock of large dark-colored birds sprang from the ferns and whirred



He left the labor of tapping the trees to the Indian boy

into the forest like a covey of gigantic partridges.

“Marudis,” exclaimed Harmanas.

Eric remembered that in the museum at Georgetown he had seen some handsome pheasant-like birds with that name and which the attendant told him were among the finest of Guiana game birds.

“Oh, I do wish I’d brought my gun along,” he cried, as he gazed after the Marudis, “I might have got one of those chaps easily.”

“S’pose gotum blowgun mebbe catchum,” remarked Hermanas and, without waiting for a reply, he darted off towards the house.

Presently he returned, carrying a long, slender tube of cane and a tiny cylindrical box of woven palm bark.

Eric watched the Indian with interest, as he opened the cartridge-like receptacle, and drew forth a tiny, pointed stick with a tuft of yellowish-brown, woolly material wrapped about one end. This he slipped into the hollow cane and beckoning to Eric to follow, he started into the forest.

“I don’t see how you’re going to kill a Marudi with that thing,” remarked Eric, and then, remembering his determination to acquire talky-talky, asked, “How go for catchum Marudi like so?”

Hermanas grinned: "Me tellum killum Marudi same way. S'pose watchum, you see."

As soon as they reached the edge of the bush, Hermanas cautioned Eric to make no noise and, with eyes searching every dim mass of vines and each tree trunk, he crept stealthily forward. For a short distance they proceeded, and then Hermanas dropped on his knees, and pointed to a trailing liana a score of yards distant. Looking in the direction indicated, Eric saw two handsome birds, about the size of fowls, where they perched upon the vine,—turning their heads suspiciously from side to side, and peering about as if aware of danger.

Cautiously, Hermanas raised the cane tube, placed one end to his lips, pointed it toward the Marudis, and gave a sudden puff of breath. There was no sound, but swift as light the tiny dart sped from the blowgun and true as a bullet struck the nearest Marudi in its breast. The creature gave a little flutter of surprise, hopped to a neighboring vine, and plucked at the spot where the dart had struck. His companion crouched and raised its wings as if to take flight; but in an instant the Indian had slipped another dart into his weapon, and before the Marudis realized what had happened the second arrow sped through the air and found its mark.

Instantly the Marudi took wing, but the one first struck flapped its pinions once or twice, swayed on the vine and, losing its foothold, came tumbling to the ground.

“Hurrah——” commenced Eric, but his exclamation was cut short by a gesture from Hermanas and, obeying the Indian’s whispered word, Eric listened intently. A minute passed in silence and then, from a short distance to the right, some object fell with a heavy thud from the tree tops to the ground. Hermanas rose and hurried to the first Marudi, which was lying stone dead where it fell.

“Of all wonderful things!” exclaimed Eric, “I never would have thought that tiny arrow could kill a bird like that.”

Stooping, Hermanas picked up the little pointed stick from where it had fallen to the ground within a few inches of the stricken Marudi.

“Let me see it, Hermanas,” said Eric. He reached out his hand to take the dart.

“No touchum,” exclaimed Hermanas, holding the little object out of reach. “S’pose touchum mebbe catch die all same Marudi. He gotum Wurali.”

“Wurali?” Eric repeated questioningly, “what’s that, and why might I die if I touched it?”

“Wurali all same poison,” replied the Indian.

“Much bad. S’pose prickum makeum dead like so; likeum same way Marudi. Wurali how makeum blowgun kill. Wurali make killum all thing—killum bird, killum tiger, killum man.”

“Whew!” exclaimed Eric, “I understand. You use poisoned arrows. Gee! but that Wurali must be some poison.”

Slipping the poisoned dart into his case, Hermanas picked up the dead Marudi and led the way through the forest for a few yards. For a moment, he peered intently about and then, stepping over a fallen tree, reached down and secured the second bird, which the terrible poisoned arrow from his blowgun had killed.

Eric had been thinking and now he asked, adopting the Indian’s jargon: “S’pose killum Marudi with poison, how you eatum and no die?”

“No poison for eatum,” replied Hermanus. “Poison for getum in blood, no for getum in mouth.”

“Well, it’s all beyond me,” declared Eric, “I’ll have to ask father to explain; but, come along, Hermanas, we’re neglecting the rubber.” As the two boys reached the edge of the woods the Indian stopped and examined several deep marks upon a patch of soft, bare earth, and then explained to Eric

that they were deer tracks, which had been made very recently.

Hermanas, who was a born hunter, was anxious to trail the deer, but Eric insisted that no more time could be spent in hunting, much as he would enjoy it, and Hermanas, without a word of protest, continued on his way to the rubber grove and, hanging the Marudis on a bush, resumed his interrupted work.

When the day's work at last was done, a large portion of the bearing trees had been tapped, and Eric was highly elated at the amount of latex he had collected.

Mr. Marvin was also greatly pleased at his son's success, and complimented him upon the result of his first day's work. "I think I'll leave rubber cultivation to you, Eric," he remarked. "I don't know anything about it, and will have all I can attend to with the cacao, coffee and fruit; in fact, I must get a good overseer to help me as soon as the new hands arrive. I'll have to look after the business end of the estate and the timber, too,—that is, unless you think you and Hermanas can do as well at lumbering as at rubber gathering."

"I'll do my best," declared Eric, and added, "of course, I don't know much about rubber yet,—if I

hadn't picked up what I did at Georgetown I wouldn't be able to do anything,—but Hermanas knows a lot, and between us, I'm sure we can look after the rubber, and will have time to help with the timber, too. Hermanas knows all the trees and he's worked with his father at the timber grants up at Wismar. I'm sure he can teach me a great deal about it very soon."

"Well, we'll leave that for later on," declared Mr. Marvin. "I think you two boys have earned a day off. I know you are wild to get into the jungle with your gun, even if you haven't mentioned it. A little game will be welcome for the table, so you can take to-morrow for your first hunt, Eric."

"Well, it really won't be my first hunt," said Eric. "Hermanas and I stole a few minutes from work to-day, and do you know, he killed two big birds he called Marudis with his blowgun. It was the most wonderful thing I've ever seen. The birds hardly fluttered, and died almost instantly. He says his darts were poisoned with something he calls Wurali and that it will kill anything if it gets in the blood; but isn't poisonous to eat. Can you tell me anything about it?"

"It's one of the most virulent poisons in the



Raised the blow gun and placed one end to his lips

world," replied Mr. Marvin. "The merest scratch with a weapon dipped in Wurali will kill any living creature in a few moments and apparently without pain. It is used by many Indians of Central and South America, and is called Hurali, Wurali, Wurrari, Curare, and various other names by the different tribes. No one seems to know its exact composition, for it's prepared by certain experts among the Indians, and they surround its manufacture with much secrecy, and a great deal of mummary and hocus-pocus. The principal ingredients are various poisonous vines belonging to the strychnine family, but ant- and snake-poison, gums and various other things are added; many of them probably merely to conceal its true nature and to impress the other Indians. Strangely enough, it is not poisonous when taken internally unless one has a scratch or some other raw spot in the mouth or throat."

"Isn't there any antidote for it?" asked Eric. "I should think the Indians would constantly get killed by accident when using it."

"Yes," replied his father. "The Indians use cane juice and common salt to counteract the effects of Wurali. Many of them secure live birds and animals by shooting them with blowgun darts

and then, before the creatures die, administering cane juice and salt. I don't think I'd care to trust to the remedy and scratch myself with a poisoned arrow, however. I hope you'll be extremely careful, and that Hermanas will use every precaution when handling the arrows."

"That's mighty interesting," declared Eric, "but it really gives me the shivers to think of the stuff. I guess I'll let Hermanas leave his blowgun behind when we go hunting."

Hermanas was as greatly pleased as Eric at the prospect of a hunting trip the next day, and assured the white boy that if they started for the bush before dawn they certainly would secure game of some sort.

"What kind of game you think we'll find?" asked Eric.

"Mebbe catchum deer, mebbe powis, mebbe labba, mebbe waterhaas, mebbe acouri, mebbe bush-cow."

Eric laughed. "You've a fine lot to choose from," he declared. "I don't know what half those are. Wait a minute till I get the list of names I made at the museum and I'll see what sort of beasts we're likely to find."

With the notes in hand he asked Hermanas to

repeat the native names, and checking them off, found that *Powis* were the great Crested-curassows; *Labba* was another name for the big Guinea pig-like creature, otherwise known as the Paca; that *Acouri* was synonymous with Agouti, and that *Water Haas* and *Bushcow* were, respectively, Capybara and Tapir.

“You no think mebbe we shoot jaguar?” asked Eric, whose ambition was to kill one of the great, spotted cats.

Hermanas looked puzzled, and shook his head. “No sabby jag’ar,” he replied.

“They call them ‘tigers’ down here,” remarked Mr. Marvin, who sat nearby, in the gallery.

Hermanas’ face brightened. “Sabby tiger,” he announced. “Me tellum must makeum far walk topside, want shootum tiger. No catchum this side.”

“Well, I’m going to take a walk ‘topside’ some day,” declared Eric, as he rose to go to bed. “I mean to kill a jaguar and ever so many times I hear that place ‘topside’ when I ask about various things. ‘Topside’ must be a wonderful spot.”

His father burst out laughing. “‘Topside’ is no place in particular,” he explained. “It means up river; far away; a long distance,—to find ‘topside’

would be like seeking the end of a rainbow—no matter how far you go ‘topside’ is ever beyond.”

“Well, I’m going to catchum sleep topside bed,” laughed Eric, as he bade his father good night.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE JUNGLE

IT was still dark when Eric was aroused by Hermanas, and waiting only for a cup of steaming coffee, the two boys started for the bush.

Although the sun had not risen the eastern sky was tinged with pale saffron and pink, the light, fleecy clouds were edged with gold and above the river hung a thick white fog. Trees, land and forest were bathed in a soft, gray, mysterious light; every twig, leaf and blade of grass was dripping with moisture, and on every hand were the myriad sounds of awakening tropical life.

In the open clearings and cultivated lands it was quite light, but when the two boys reached the edge of the forest and entered the bush they were in almost total darkness. Here and there a gleam of faint light showed upon a tree trunk, far above their heads the interlaced branches glowed green in the rays of the invisible sun; but where they stood all

was black with deepest shadows and even the nearest objects were indistinguishable.

But Hermanas seemed possessed of owl-like vision and moved briskly forward, turning and twisting along some narrow path, now and then slashing at trailing vines or obtrusive branches with his machete, and ever penetrating deeper and deeper into the gloomy recesses of the jungle.

All was silent save for the sharp trill of tree frogs or the faint twitter of birds in the tree-tops, but presently the sun rose above the sand hills to the east; cool, soft twilight took the place of darkness in the forest and instantly the bush burst into life.

From every side the Wallaba-birds whipped out their ringing cries of "Whip-whee-weu-oo!" parroquets chattered, parrots screamed, macaws shrieked, toucans barked and hawks screeched from the trees. From hidden thickets the wonderful silvery notes of the Bell-birds rang, and great, red, howling monkeys aroused the echoes with their fiendish cries.

Presently Hermanas stopped, listened intently and then uttered a low clear call. From a short distance ahead came an answering cry, and, with a gesture for caution, the Indian crept stealthily for-

ward, repeating the call at intervals, with Eric following close at his heels. Naked, save for his scarlet loin-cloth or "lap" Hermanas slipped silently as a shadow among the vines, trees and undergrowth. Eric found it difficult indeed to keep pace with him without breaking twigs beneath his heavy boots or catching his khaki clothing on the thorns and razor-grass that beset him at every step.

At last Hermanas halted beneath a giant Mora tree, whose huge buttress-like roots spread for a dozen yards in every direction, and whose enormous brown trunk was half hidden by great clumps of orchids, vines and air plants. Crouching in the shelter of the great slabs of living wood the Indian pointed upward to the tangled mass of greenery a hundred feet above and whispered:

"Powis! You shootum!"

Eric peered intently at the indicated spot, but could see nothing aside from the dark green foliage, the gleaming scarlet orchid flowers and the drooping vines. Then from the far-off branches a broken golden fruit dropped down and Eric saw a large dark object moving among the leaves.

Raising his gun he fired, and at the report pandemonium broke forth in the tree-tops; hoarse, frightened cries and screams of scores of birds, the

shrill, terror-stricken chatter of monkeys, and the roar of great beating wings. But Eric scarcely noticed these, for with a terrific crash two great, black birds came tumbling downward and fell almost at the boys' feet.

They were splendid creatures almost as large as turkeys, shining iridescent black in color, and with handsome, curled crests above their bright, orange-yellow beaks. They were Crested-curassows, and Eric felt immensely proud as he examined the fine birds—the result of his first shot.

Cutting a piece of liana, or “bush rope,” Hermanas tied the two birds together, hung them out of reach of prowling animals, and once more led the way into the depths of the forest.

For some time there was no sight nor sound of game, and then as he scrambled over a fallen tree Eric uttered a startled cry, for he had landed almost on top of a great, shaggy, black creature as large as a bear.

He was so surprised at the unexpected meeting that he tumbled backwards into the thicket, while the strange beast—more startled than the boy—reared itself on its hind legs, pawed the air with its enormous front claws, and then wheeling about, scrambled off as fast as its unwieldy gait could



Hermanas halted beneath a giant mora tree in the forest

carry it. It was such a remarkable looking beast and Eric had come upon it so unexpectedly that he quite forgot to shoot, but sat staring with amazement. With a huge, bushy tail spread like an umbrella above its back, its coarse, shaggy coat, and stout legs ending in enormous hooked talons, and with a broad black and white stripe across its shoulders the animal was most formidable in appearance. But as Eric caught sight of the tiny head, ending in a long, slender, beak-like snout, he realized that it was only a giant ant-eater, and, picking himself up, he joined heartily in his companion's laughter at his momentary fright.

An hour's tramp revealed no other game, and Eric was commencing to think that game was not as abundant in the jungle as he had imagined, when Hermanas stopped and turning whispered:

“Me tellum shootum labba same day.”

Pointing to the soft earth he showed Eric a number of footprints and some freshly gnawed roots.

Then, crouching low, and with a signal for Eric to do the same, he crept slowly forward towards the bank of a small creek. Ever and anon he stopped, listened attentively and again moved onward, inch at a time. At first Eric could hear nothing save the steady dripping of moisture from the leaves,

the sharp, incisive notes of the ever-present Wallaba birds and the chirp of frogs and insects.

Then, as he crouched in the shelter of a thicket close to the creek's edge, his ears caught a low grating noise and occasional subdued grunts. At a gesture from Hermanas he crawled forward and peered cautiously through an opening of the thicket.

Before him lay the creek, its dark brown water mirroring the forest that rose above it on every side, and at the foot of the bank, a few yards from where he was hidden, were two strange animals gnawing at fruits which had fallen from a tree above.

They were about the size of half-grown pigs; reddish brown in color and handsomely striped and spotted with pure white. Eric raised his gun with the utmost caution; but, slight as the movement was, one of the labbas ceased eating, sniffed suspiciously and darted among the roots of the trees. The other was a second too late, and at the report of the gun rolled over dead.

Hermanas soon bound the legs of the labba with bush ropes, and shouldering the carcass, prepared to continue on the hunt; but Eric had no wish to kill more game than he could use, and told the Indian to return to the estate.

“Mebbe like seeum my house?” suggested Hermanas.

“I certainly would,” declared Eric. “Is it near here?”

“Not too far,” replied the Indian. “Takeum walk in woodskin for seeum.”

Eric laughed. “That’s the funniest thing you’ve said yet, Hermanas,” he exclaimed. “I’ll certainly enjoy ‘taking a walk’ in a canoe.” Hermanas grinned, but said nothing, and, turning to the right, hurried forward, following the bank of the creek. They had walked, perhaps half a mile, when they came upon a well marked trail, and following this the boys soon reached a little sheltered cove in the bank of the stream.

Here, tied to an overhanging tree, was the queerest craft Eric had ever seen. It was merely a shell of bark, barely twelve feet in length and less than eighteen inches in width, and it rested so lightly and one-sidedly upon the water, that Eric could not believe it would be possible for any human being to enter it without capsizing.

“Is that your woodskin?” he asked his companion.

Hermanas, who was searching for something in a clump of ferns, nodded affirmatively.

“Well, I’ll bet if we get into that thing we’ll swim

instead of walk," declared Eric. "It's the crankiest-looking canoe I've ever seen."

Hermanas had now secured the paddle for which he had been searching, and, hanging the labba in the shade, he led the way down the muddy bank, drew his primitive boat to shore, and holding it steady, invited Eric to enter.

"I guess it's all right if you say so," Eric remarked, as with great care he stepped into the craft and squatted down at the bow in the spot indicated by the Indian. Eric's weight brought the frail craft very low in the water, and he fully expected it to sink and fill or to capsize when Hermanas stepped nonchalantly into the stern. Nothing happened, however, and while the tiny canoe rocked slightly, as Hermanas seated himself, his weight seemed to affect its buoyancy but little. Eric drew a breath of relief, for he had confidently expected a ducking, and when the Indian drove his paddle into the water and the woodskin shot forward into the open creek he was pleasurablely surprised to find the craft fully as steady as the birch canoes to which he was accustomed.

All about were innumerable things to interest him and Eric soon forgot all else in admiration of the strange beauties of his surroundings. Vine-draped



The water mirrored every object in a wonderful way

trees and graceful palms rose in an impenetrable wall of greenery on either bank; arches of tangled lianas and spreading branches met above the water; mangroves spread their sprawling roots in the shallows, and the gigantic lily-like arums or "muckamuckas" reared their thick green stalks and huge, arrow-shaped leaves along the banks. Strange air plants and brilliant orchids bedecked the limbs and trunks of trees and festooned the vines, and great dazzling blue butterflies flitted in and out of the shadows, their cærulean wings reflected in marvelous manner upon the dark surface of the stream. Dark, reddish-brown in color, smooth as glass and with a strange, oily appearance, the water mirrored every object in a wonderful way. It was as if the canoe were floating in mid-air suspended between two forests—the one right side up, the other reversed—and Eric could scarce distinguish where water ended and land began. Here and there fallen trees or "tacubas" barred the way, and with consummate skill Hermanas dodged between the branches or followed tiny leads into the jungle and around the obstructions, and passed through spots where countless water lilies covered the water as with a carpet ablaze with yellow, pink and purple blooms.

At other places the great knotted ropes of vines hung above the waterway and the two boys crouched low as their little craft darted beneath the aërial bridges. As they passed under these the Indian cautioned Eric not to touch the mass of vegetation or to allow it to scrape across his back, and explained that many of the vines and trees were armed with strong, recurved spines which would inflict terrible wounds or tear garments to ribbons.

It was very silent on the creek, but there was plenty of life to be seen by one with keen eyes and a love of nature. Stately white egrets flapped reluctantly from their fishing spots in tiny coves; blue and green kingfishers—some large as pigeons, others scarcely larger than humming birds—flashed from perches into the water at sight of passing fish or insect; doves and pigeons cooed softly from the foliage along the banks; quaint, bright-hued mannikins flitted among the bushes; gaudy cotingas hopped about 'mid vines and air plants; great white-headed hawks and broad-winged vultures wheeled majestically overhead; curious soft, gray, fin-foot birds, purple gallinules, and dainty golden-winged jacanas ran nimbly across the huge *Victoria Regia* leaves, and sun-bitterns spread their gorgeous wings as they strutted along the muddy shores.

From the tranquil water tiny fresh-water flying fish skittered off like skipping stones as the canoe approached, and curious "four-eyed fish" scurried away in schools on every hand. Once Eric caught a glimpse of a great scaly alligator that slipped from a tacuba as the boat rounded a bend in the stream, and at another time a big otter swam swiftly across the creek, leaving a trailing wake of silver upon the dark water.

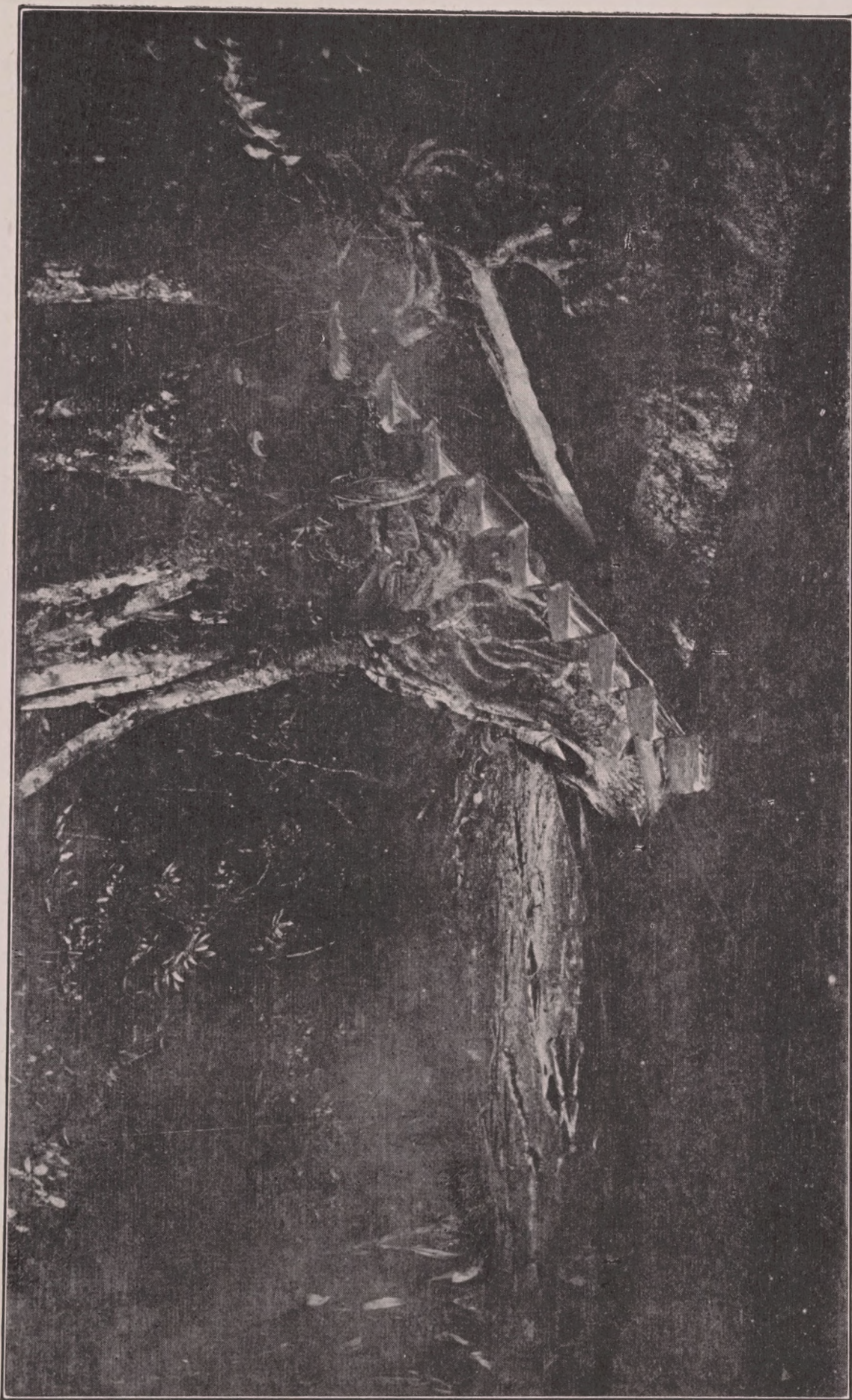
It was like navigating a new world, an undiscovered land, and Eric plied Hermanas with questions as to the various trees and plants, the insects, the fishes and the birds, to all of which the Indian replied, telling his white companion their Indian names, the uses to which they were put and something of their growth or habits.

For nearly two hours they paddled up the creek and then, swinging around a sharp bend, came in sight of a little clearing at the edge of the stream. Moored to the trees and drawn upon the muddy shores were several woodskins and two or three large dug-out canoes, and leading from the water's edge to the top of the steep bank was a crude, primitive ladder made by cutting deep notches in a log. Here Hermanas ran his canoe onto the mud, and hopping out, steadied the craft while Eric stepped ashore

and clambered up the ladder to dry land. Up the hill and through the clearing ran a narrow, well marked path, and Hermanas, leading the way, told Eric that this led to his father's camp.

As they reached the summit of the bank they came face to face with a naked brown boy, who uttered a little cry of fright and dodged out of view among the bushes, as he caught sight of the stranger. Hermanas shouted a few words in his native tongue, however, and the youngster, reassured, came shyly forth and trotted along beside Hermanas, the while casting furtive, suspicious glances at Eric. Presently they came to a field covered with banana trees and cassava plants with the thatched roofs of the Indians' houses rising above the greenery.

Eric had expected rude lean-tos or wigwams and was filled with surprise when, upon reaching the Indian camp, he saw the neat open houses or "benabs" of the Arekunas. Supported on stout upright posts were huge, steep-sided roofs of beautifully thatched palm leaves; hard pounded earth served as the floors and from the posts swung numerous hammocks. No men were visible; but several girls and women were busily working at various tasks in the benabs, and Hermanas greeted them in Arekuna and



Leading from the water's edge was a primitive ladder

then led Eric into the largest benab and invited him to take possession of a luxurious hammock.

It was very pleasant to lie here in the shade of the broad roof, for the open sides allowed a free circulation of air, and the gentle forest breeze was wonderfully cool. It was interesting, also, for the women went on with their tasks utterly oblivious to Eric's presence, and he watched them intently as they pared cassava roots, grated them on slabs of wood roughened by tiny stones set in gum, and baked the cassava cakes on sheets of iron above a fire of coals.

Presently the woman who was grating the roots rose and took a strange six-foot tube of basketwork from where it hung on a nearby post. Calling another girl to help her, the flexible tube was then pressed down until it was scarcely two feet in length while its diameter was almost trebled. Into this the grated roots were pressed, and then the two women carried the tube to a tree just outside of the benab. Here the upper end of the tube was hooked over a branch, a stout lever was passed through the lower end and pressing upon this the women exerted all their strength. At once the tube commenced to lengthen and become more slender,

and from the interstices of the basketwork liquid oozed forth.

“What *are* they doing?” asked Eric of Hermanas.

“Makeum cassava,” replied the Indian, and he then explained the whole intricate and wonderful process by which the poisonous roots of the manioc or cassava plant are converted into nutritive and wholesome food.

He showed Eric how the roots were pared, how they were grated, and told him the poisonous juice was pressed out by means of the “metapee” as he had seen. He also explained that any remaining traces of poison were driven off by heat, and handed Eric one of the great flat cakes which had just been baked on the hot iron. Eric thought the cake had a very pleasant, nutty taste, but was rather dry, and Hermanas told him it was usually eaten with “pepper pot.” Eric asked what this was and the Indian informed him it was made of the cassava juice boiled down until thick and known as “cassareep” and that into this peppers and bits of meat were thrown, and that a “pepper pot” was always on hand in every house, and that the contents kept forever.

“Cassava must be mighty useful,” remarked Eric. “Do you use it for anything else—useum for other thing same way?”

“Makeum piwarrie,” replied Hermanas, and in answer to Eric’s question he stated that “piwarrie” was an intoxicating drink which was used at the Indian feasts, and was made by the women, who chewed up the cassava cakes and spat them into a trough of water where it was left to ferment.

Eric thought this a most filthy and disgusting method of preparing the liquor, and was much relieved to find that Hermanas’ father had forbidden the use of the drink in his camp, owing to the debauchery which resulted from drinking it.

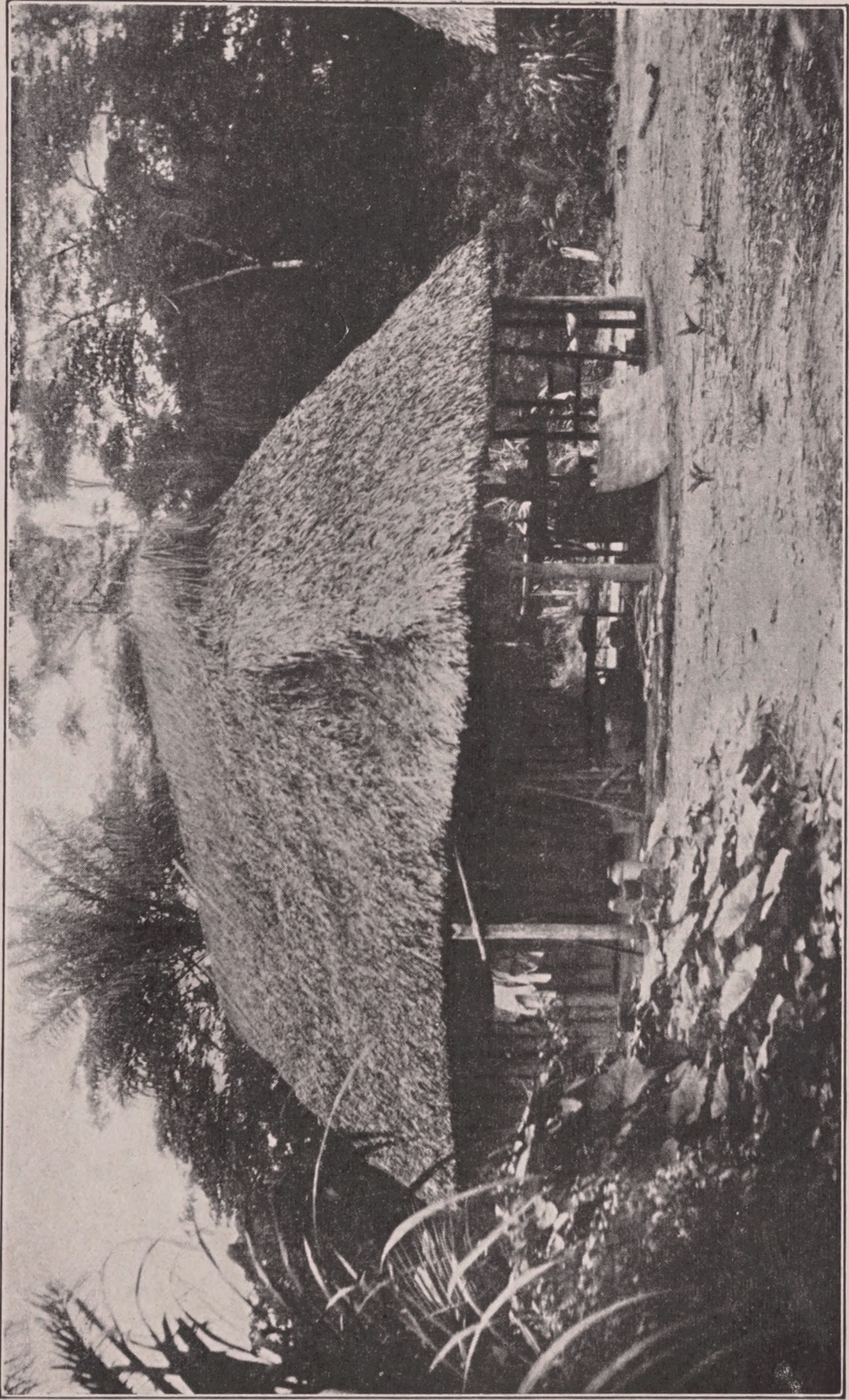
An Indian girl now appeared with breakfast, and the two boys did ample justice to the meal. There were cassava cakes and pepper pot, of course; but in addition there were sweet potatoes; fried, boiled and roasted plantains; yams, and roasted “acourie” or agouti, which Eric declared excellent. The waitress was a comely girl, fifteen or sixteen years of age; but her golden-brown skin was disfigured by bright-blue lines tattooed across her lips and cheeks like a fanciful mustache. Hermanas told Eric she was an Acawoia girl who had married an Arekuna and, in reply to a question about the tattoo marks, explained that these indicated that she was one of the women selected to chew cassava for making

piwarrie, and that as such she was entitled to certain privileges and respect.

Eric was greatly interested in this, for it savored of the primitive aborigine, and he had been quite disappointed in finding the Indians so civilized. He had half expected to find them garbed in feathers and beads, but instead found them dressed in worn and rather ragged civilized clothes, and not until long afterwards did he discover that beneath their other garments the women still wore their beautifully woven bead aprons or "queyus"; that the "piaimen" or medicine men still possessed great influence over their fellows, and that civilization was scarcely more than a veneer.

But he took a great liking to the quiet, soft-voiced people and thought it would not be at all unpleasant to live for some time in their camp here in the heart of the wilderness.

After breakfast the two boys wandered about the camp, and Eric found much to interest him and learned a great deal about the arts and crafts of the Indians. He saw women weaving their wonderful cotton hammocks, and was filled with admiration at the deftness with which they spun the strong cotton twine from the raw cotton, using only a rude wooden spindle for a spinning wheel. He saw others



The neat thatched benabs of the Arekunas

weaving coarse baskets or "surianas" in which burdens are carried by the women, while still others were plaiting beautiful "pegalls" or wicker trunks, or snake-like "metapees." Every one was busily employed at something and all seemed content and happy. At first the women and children had been shy and had scarcely spoken; but now they had become accustomed to his presence, they laughed and chattered gayly, and Eric discovered they could all talk and understand English.

In every house there was a platform of sticks across the rafters and on these the Indians kept all their possessions, and Eric was greatly elated when in one house he saw a number of bows and arrows lying upon the platform above his head.

"Do your people use bows and arrows?" he asked Hermanas, and added, "I thought you all had guns."

"Useum bownarrer for shootum fish, shootum bird. Useum gun for shootum deer, shootum labba, shootum tiger. S'pose no can buy powder, no can buy shot, useum bownarrer all time."

Eric examined the bows and arrows with the most intense interest, for they were different from anything of the sort he had ever seen. The bows were very powerful, and about six feet in length, while the arrows were made of light cane and were fully

five feet long. Most of them had no feathers and the heads were of various kinds. Some had fixed steel heads with many barbs; others ended in broad balls of hard gum, while others had barbed steel points slipped loosely upon the end of the arrow and secured by a long line wrapped about the shaft.

Hermanas explained that each kind of arrow was used for a definite purpose; that the fixed heads were used for turtles and birds and small animals; that the blunt heads were used for killing small birds or stunning creatures to be captured alive, and that the loose-headed arrows were designed for shooting fish, the light shaft floating free and acting as a buoy when the fish was struck and the line serving as a means for hauling the fish ashore—in fact, the whole affair was, in reality, a miniature harpoon shot from a bow.

Eric wanted Hermanas to show him how the arrows were used, but the Indian said there were no fish and no game in the vicinity, but he promised to try and shoot some fish in the river when they returned to Ratura.

Time passed quickly in the Indian camp, and it was long past noon when Eric, realizing that several hours were required to reach home, bade good-

by to his Arekuna friends and again embarking in the woodskin started down the creek.

The labba was found where they had left it, the two powis were undisturbed, and laden with these the boys tramped homeward through the forest. To Eric there was no sign of a trail or mark by which Hermanas found his way through the jungle, but a turned leaf, a bent twig, or a cut vine left by the boys as they entered the bush was enough for the Indian's keen eyes, and he hurried on unerringly and without pause or hesitation. At last the old trail was reached and a few minutes later they stepped out of the forest and into the cultivated land of Ratura.

“You appear to have had good luck,” said Mr. Marvin, as the two boys arrived at the house late in the afternoon.

“I expect we could have killed more if we'd stayed longer,” replied Eric, “but I didn't care to kill things just for sport, and we had enough as it was.”

“Quite right,” agreed his father. “That's the true sportsman's spirit. Destroying life merely for fun is despicable; but to kill for some purpose—even if not actually necessary—is quite different, especially if in so doing the hunter gains accurate knowledge of wild life, acquires woodcraft and self-

reliance and trains eye, ear, brain and muscles by the chase. How did you enjoy your first experience in the jungle?"

"It was splendid," declared Eric, "and we visited Hermanas' home and had breakfast with the Indians. Everything was so interesting and so different from anything I imagined. But I never could have done anything without Hermanas. He showed me all the game, and it was wonderful how he found his way about. Without him I should have been lost in a minute and might have tramped for hours without finding game."

"Well, I expect you are pretty well tired; what do you say to a good swim? One of the men showed me a fine bathing beach which he says is perfectly safe."

"I'd like nothing better," declared Eric. "Come along, Hermanas, I'll bet you swim like a fish."

Hermanas grinned. "S'pose takeum bownarrer. Mebbe seeum fish," he remarked.

"Yes, bring the bow and arrows along," replied Eric. "If you can catch fish that way you're certainly some fisherman."

The beach was a charming spot, a crescent of golden sand bordering one side of a great pool or basin, barred from the river by a ledge of rocks,



The women went on with their tasks oblivious to his presence



Bade good-by to his Arekuna friends

and safe from the dreaded Perai fish, electric eels or other dangerous inhabitants of the river.

The water was pleasantly cool, and much to Eric's surprise its deep, reddish-brown color left no stain upon his skin or upon his garments.

Hermanas enjoyed the bath fully as much as his white friends, and won their admiration by his feats at swimming and diving, for the Indian appeared as much at home in water as on land.

After their bath Hermanas picked up his bow and arrows, and, cautioning Eric and his father to move silently a few yards in the rear, walked slowly along the shore, peering intently into each rock-bound pool and hole. With arrow fitted to string and bow ready for instant use he moved onward like a figure of glowing bronze in the soft rays of the sinking sun. Presently he bent forward, drew his bow and seemed about to shoot; but in a moment he relaxed, and, standing erect, commenced beckoning towards the water, the while uttering a low whistle.

"He's calling the fish," whispered Mr. Marvin. "I've heard of it before, but I've never seen it done—it's a most interesting performance."

"Does he really expect the fish to come to him?" asked Eric, in surprise.

“He surely does,” replied Mr. Marvin. “I’m not prepared to say that the fish *do* respond to his gestures and whistles, but others have assured me they do. Ah! he must see one now.”

Hermanas had ceased his gestures, and with a quick motion drew the bow to his ear; there was a ringing twang and the long arrow clove the water and disappeared in it with scarce a splash.

The next moment the shaft bobbed up and instantly Hermanas leaped forward, and seizing the line attached to the cane commenced hauling it in. Eric and his father hurried forward, and as they reached the Indian he pulled a great, flapping, silvery fish onto the rocks.

“Me tellum shootum fish same way,” he remarked proudly.

Eric clapped Hermanas on his bare brown back: “Hermanas,” he cried, “you’re simply a wonder—I’ll believe anything you tell me after this.”

“Too easy shootum fish like so,” declared the Indian. “All Buckman catchum same way.”

As the party walked up the path towards the house Eric was very silent, but presently he turned to his father and asked: “Do you suppose Hermanas really called that fish to him?”

Mr. Marvin smiled—“Ask Hermanas,” he replied.



With a quick motion he drew the bow to his ear

CHAPTER VII

AT THE TIMBER GRANT

FOR several days Eric and his father devoted their time to the estate, and then one morning two great corials arrived, laden deep with a motley crowd of negroes, coolies and Portuguese.

They were the new laborers and under the direction of a colored overseer they were lined up, signed their contracts and were given quarters in the barrack-like "ranges" which had been enlarged and renovated for their use.

About this same time Theophilus, Hermanas' father, arrived with his first lot of timber—three fine pieces of purpleheart. He reported that the lumbering was going on rapidly and that he hoped to bring in two or three logs each day in the future. As there were now plenty of hands to attend to the estate, and as the new overseer seemed a competent man, Mr. Marvin decided to make a trip into the timber grant and suggested returning with Theophilus the same day.

Eric was greatly pleased at the prospect, for there was a chance of securing game, it meant a night or two spent in the forest, and he was deeply interested in the timber cutting besides.

A few hours later the party set forth, Theophilus leading the way, Hermanas following with a loaded "suriana" upon his back and secured by a strip of bark around his forehead, and Eric and Mr. Marvin walking close behind, while in the rear were the oxen which had hauled out the logs, in charge of three Indians.

Within the boundaries of the cultivated land the way was easy, for there was a fairly broad earth road, but at the edge of the bush this dwindled to a mere path deeply scored by the marks of the logs and Eric wondered how the great timbers ever had been drawn out. Presently they came to a muddy spot and here Eric noticed stout hardwood sticks had been placed across the path at intervals of a few feet, thus forming a rude skidway across which the logs slid easily.

This road led through the dense jungle and Eric asked why the men did not cut the great trees which rose on every hand.

"They're probably not the kind the contract calls for," replied Mr. Marvin, and, calling to Theophilus,

he asked what kind of trees grew in this part of the forest, and if they were of any value for timber.

The Indian informed him that there were Mora, Silver-balli, Wallaba and numerous other trees, that many were used for timbers for buildings, and that wallaba was used for shingles, but that most of the wood was only of value as firewood.

Eric would have enjoyed lingering in the forest to watch the many strange birds whose notes, cries and calls issued from the tree-tops and thickets, but the old Indian trudged rapidly on and Eric was forced to content himself with the hopes that the timber tract was as rich in bird life as the bush they were traversing.

Up hill and down dale the trail led, at places crossing oozy hollows, beautiful with giant ferns and palms of countless varieties; at other spots carried over crystal clear streams on rude bridges, but ever with the stout cross-pieces, like the ties of a railway, laid from side to side.

“Seems to me they have to bring the timber an awful distance,” remarked Eric, as after an hour’s walk they stopped for a moment’s rest beside a little brook. “I thought they could find timber anywhere in the forest.”

“So they can if they want common timber,” replied Mr. Marvin, and added:

“This contract calls for definite sized logs of selected timber of certain kinds. The trees do grow all over the country, but in most spots they are scattered and it would cost more to clear the jungle and fell the worthless trees than the good ones are worth. In some places, however, greenheart, purpleheart and other valuable trees are abundant and in such localities timber can be cut to advantage. It’s a pity our timber grant is so far from the estate. The haulage costs a great deal and a light railway would be a vast help. We can’t afford that at present, however; but maybe in the future we’ll have one.”

“I wonder if I know greenheart and crabwood when I see them?” remarked Eric, as he gazed about him at the numerous trees. “The man in the Botanic Station showed me the various trees, and I learned how to distinguish them, but they look very different to me here.”

“I expect you’ll learn quickly,” replied his father. “Hermanas can soon show you the distinctions; that’s one reason I made this trip—to let you see how the work is carried on so you can take charge if necessary.”

Presently the tramp was resumed, and a short distance farther on they came upon a noisy, sweating crowd of Indians hauling a huge log along the trail by means of bush ropes. They were glad to turn the work over to the ox drivers, and joined the rest of the party to return to the spot where cutting was going on.

“I’ve heard a lot about these Indians’ laziness,” said Eric, “but I don’t see how any one can call them lazy after seeing them haul that huge timber over this trail.”

“They’re not lazy in the true sense of the word,” replied Mr. Marvin. “When they work they work exceedingly well and with all their energies, and as they are powerfully built and possess marvelous endurance they accomplish a great deal. For example, they’ve built all this wood road since we arrived at Ratura. The only trouble is they never can be depended upon to undertake work, for they are quite independent and can live comfortably without laboring and they scarcely require money, except to purchase clothing and ammunition.”

“I can’t blame them much,” declared Eric. “It must be lots easier to lounge in a hammock in one of their houses and just grow cassava and hunt

game for a living than to chop down trees and haul logs through the forest.”

Soon the sound of axes ringing on wood reached their ears, and a few minutes later they came to a partly cleared spot in the forest where they saw a group of Indians busily chopping at a huge tree. Naked, save for loin cloths, the redmen stood upon a light framework of poles nearly twenty feet above the ground and wielded their long-handled axes with wonderful dexterity. “What on earth do they stand up there for?” asked Eric. “Why don’t they chop the tree down close to the ground and save all the trunk there is?”

“If you come closer you’ll see,” replied his father. “There,” he continued, as they drew near, “you see how the trunk of the tree spreads out into huge buttresses or slabs. It’s a habit peculiar to the majority of tropical forest trees and a provision of nature to enable the trees to secure a firm foothold in the soft earth—sort of natural braces or guys as it were. To chop through all those slabs would take a vast amount of time and labor and the timber would be useless, and hence the woodcutters erect their platforms so they can cut the trees above the buttresses.”

“I understand now,” said Eric; “I might have

known, too, if I'd stopped to think, for I noticed many of the trees with similar trunks when I was hunting with Hermanas."

Theophilus now approached and warned Mr. Marvin and Eric that the tree would soon fall and led them to a place of safety far to one side.

"Can't we stand closer than this?" asked Eric. "We're too far off to see anything."

Theophilus shook his head and explained that the falling tree would bring down countless vines and lianas and that these, being connected to other trees, would tear away limbs or branches or even pull over smaller trees, any one of which might injure or kill a person standing nearer.

"How do the men manage?" asked Eric.

"They're in the safest spot," replied Mr. Marvin. "Their only real danger is in the butt end kicking back, but they're as agile as monkeys and are seldom injured."

Very soon an ominous crack sounded from the huge trunk, and after a few swift strokes the great tree commenced to lean slightly to one side. Instantly two of the men sprang from the platform and scurried off to points of safety while the remaining Indian stood his ground and continued to aim strong, ringing blows upon the straining wood.

Another crack, a loud, tearing, rending sound and the axman leaped to earth and hurried out of sight behind a nearby tree. Slowly, majestically the gigantic tree swung over; from far above came the sharp ripping of vines and limbs; masses of air plants, dead branches and a shower of leaves fell from the tree-tops; great cable-like lianas swung free and writhed in the air like enormous serpents. Then, with a final deafening roar, the stupendous trunk came crashing, rushing, hurtling downward, whipping trees and limbs into shreds as it swept on its irresistible way until, amid a blinding whirlwind of leaves, twigs, branches and vines, it struck the earth with a blow that shook the forest.

Eric had gazed fascinated at the falling monarch of the jungle. "Whew!" he exclaimed, when all was over and he drew a long breath. "Wasn't that simply magnificent?"

"It *was* a grand sight," agreed his father, "but these men see it so often that I don't suppose they think anything about it."

"Well, I'll never forget it as long as *I* live," declared Eric.

His father laughed. "You'll forget all about it by the time you've seen a few dozen trees felled," he replied.

The choppers had now reached the tree, and were busily cutting away the vines, air plants and orchids which covered the enormous trunk, while others hewed at the mighty limbs that spread for scores of feet in every direction.

To Eric the growths upon the fallen tree were wonderful and he uttered exclamation after exclamation as he discovered strange and beautiful orchids, odd air plants, and masses of gorgeous flowers upon the prone trunk, and the lianas it had brought down in its fall. It was little wonder that he was interested and enthusiastic, for the roof of the jungle had been brought within his reach, and at his feet lay the wealth of luxuriant growths that were at other times a hundred feet or more above the earth.

Hermanas, too, was poking about amid the mass of tangled vegetation, and presently hurried to Eric with a soft, fuzzy bundle in his arms.

“What is it?” asked Eric, as the Indian approached. Hermanas lifted the object up and exhibited a strange yellowish-brown creature about the size of a cat. “Night monkey,” he replied. “Mebbe you wantum for keep. He makeum plenty tame. Plenty funny for pet.”

Eric took the queer little beast in his hands and examined it curiously. “It’s the funniest thing I

ever saw," he declared. "Thank you, Hermanas, I'll be awfully glad to have the fellow for a pet. What does it eat?"

"Eatum all thing all same man," replied the Indian. "Eatum banana; eatum cassava; eatum meat, spider, bug, everything."

"The real name is 'Kinkajou,'" said Mr. Marvin. "They're related to bears and raccoons, but have prehensile tails like monkeys and marvelously long, flexible tongues like ant-eaters. In their wild state they live mainly on insects and honey which they draw from the wild beehives with their tongues. When I lived in Central America I had one as a pet, and he proved the most interesting and drollest of creatures you could imagine."

"You take care of him till we reach home, Hermanas," said Eric, and, handing the baby kinkajou to the Indian boy, he followed his father towards a spot where a number of men were squaring up the logs already cut.

The work was all done by means of axes, and Eric marveled at the skill and rapidity with which the men hewed the rough logs into neat square timbers. Several trees were already squared up and ready to be hauled out, others were lying where they fell and waiting to be trimmed to shape, while



The timber road led through the forest with great trees on every hand

the men who felled the trees were busily erecting a scaffold about another doomed monarch of the forest.

Theophilus led Mr. Marvin and Eric about the grant. He showed them the trees selected and marked for cutting, stated how many of each kind could be obtained, and pointed out the distinguishing peculiarities of the various trees. By the time the sun dropped behind the fringe of primeval forest to the west, Eric had learned a vast amount about the work and the timber trees, while Mr. Marvin expressed his pleasure at the progress being made.

“At this rate we’ll soon be able to fulfill the contract,” he remarked, as the party made their way towards the Indians’ camp. “I think we can make our first delivery this week.”

“How are you going to send these big logs down the river?” asked Eric. “It won’t be possible to put them in a boat.”

“We’ll float them down,” replied his father. “It will take several days and only a few can be handled at one time. For that reason I’m anxious to hurry them off as soon as possible.”

“I don’t understand how we can float them when Theophilus says these timbers sink in water,” said Eric.

“That’s accomplished by means of boats,” replied Mr. Marvin. “Strong timbers are placed across a large corial, or a ballyhoo boat, with the ends projecting on either side, and the logs are suspended from these so that they are slightly submerged. By this method several timbers can be floated by means of a comparatively small craft.”

The wood cutters’ camp consisted of several benabs or logis built of pole and palm and very similar to the houses at Hermanas’ home. As Eric and his father approached they saw some of the men busily at work on a new logi. The posts and framework were in place and fully half the roof was completed. Hermanas told them that this fresh house had been built especially for their use, and that it would be ready for occupancy by the time the evening meal was over. Eric could scarcely believe that the dwelling could be completed in such a short space of time; but after he had watched the men at work and had seen how rapidly and deftly they plaited the broad palm leaves and tied them to the roof timbers to form the thick, weather-proof thatch, he was not surprised to learn that the whole structure had been made since his arrival, and that the Indians’ homes could be built in a day or less.

As the evening meal was finished darkness de-

scended on camp and forest, and a wonderful picture was spread before Eric and his father as they reclined in their hammocks beneath their logi. Against the dark background of the great trees the fires glowed brightly, touching the orchid-covered trunks with ruddy lights, filling the air with the aromatic scent of burning gums and transforming the palm-thatched logis to canopies of gold. Squatting on their haunches, leaning against the nearby trees or lounging in their hammocks the Indians rested, talking in low tones in their tribal tongues; their muscular limbs and half-savage faces gleaming like bronze in the fitful light. All about huge fireflies twinkled and flashed like animated stars; an owl hooted from the forest; a soft-winged goatsucker asked, "Who are you?" in querulous tones as it flitted by, and from far and near came the ceaseless chorus of the frogs. As the fires died down the men knocked ashes from their pipes, crawled into their hammocks and curled up for the night. Then great rain drops pattered loudly on the thatch, a sudden shower quenched the last glowing embers of the fires, and darkness and silence fell like a velvet curtain upon the camp in the jungle.

Eric soon fell asleep, despite the fact that it was his first experience in a hammock. He awoke with

a start to hear a weird, wailing scream issuing from the depths of the bush apparently close at hand. It was inky black, deep silence brooded over the camp and Eric felt a sudden wave of loneliness and unreasonable fear sweep over him. He tried to reason with himself, to shake off the nameless terror which that Banshee-like cry created, but despite his efforts he felt a tingling sensation on his spine and the hair seemed to bristle on his scalp. Evidently the Indians and his father had not been disturbed, and, snuggling down in his hammock, he tried to drop asleep once more; instead, he found himself listening with almost bated breath for a repetition of the awful sound from the forest. But only the occasional call of a night bird or the twitter of bats broke the silence and at last he fell into a troubled slumber from which he was aroused by the sound of voices, and, sitting up, he found the Indians already cooking their morning meal. The sun was still below the forest, a soft breeze rustled the leaves and countless bird notes filled the cool morning air.

“You hearum tiger?” inquired Hermanas, as Eric approached.

“Hear a tiger, when?” replied Eric, puzzled.

“In night; makeum plenty noise like so.” The Indian uttered a perfect imitation of the cry which

had caused Eric such an uncomfortable half hour during the night.

“Oh, so that was a tiger,” said Eric. “It scared me all right. He must have been close to camp. But I didn’t know you heard it.”

“Me hearum,” replied Hermanas. “No make come near camp; plenty far in bush.”

Mr. Marvin now approached and Eric inquired if he had been awakened by the jaguar. His father confessed he had not heard the cries, and Eric asked if it was not dangerous to sleep where the great cats prowled about. “They’re not at all dangerous unless wounded,” said Mr. Marvin, “and will never approach a camp or settlement unless to capture goats, poultry or other prey.”

“Well, I wish I could kill one,” declared Eric. “Don’t you suppose Hermanas and I could find the one that screamed if we hunted for it?” “I doubt it,” replied his father. “The natives usually hunt them with trained dogs. However, if you’d care to go for a hunt, you may. There’s nothing much to be done here, and some game will not come amiss.”

As soon as they had taken a light breakfast, the two boys started off, and within a minute after leaving camp were in the heart of the bush. For some time there was no sign of game,—not even a powi or a

marudi could be heard, and Eric had begun to think the animals had all been frightened off by the woodcutters, when a small reddish-brown creature scurried across an open space a few yards ahead. Eric raised his gun, but before he could pull trigger Hermanas grasped his arm and whispered: "No shootum. Look see." He pointed to the ground and Eric saw a number of small, deep hoofprints. "Peccary," said Hermanas in a low voice. "Mebbe so we killum." There had evidently been quite a herd of the wild pigs in the vicinity, for the ground was everywhere marked by their sharp hoofs, while torn roots and upturned earth showed where the creatures had been rooting about in search of food.

Hermanas moved slowly in ever-widening circles, and at last located the trail by which the peccaries had departed, and signaling to Eric to keep close at hand he crept, half crouching, through the undergrowth.

For fully half a mile the two boys proceeded in this manner, the trail leading first this way, then that, and Eric's back ached and his muscles were cramped with the unaccustomed attitude. Then the Indian stopped, Eric slipped up beside him, and Hermanas pointed to a little muddy hollow surrounded by a thick growth of small palms. Eric

looked intently at the spot. At first he could see nothing but the dark reddish mud, the fallen palm fronds and the pool of stagnant water. Then what he had taken for a lump of mud moved slightly, a low grunt followed, and instantly Eric realized that the peccaries were lying, buried to their eyes, in the cool mud within a few yards of where he crouched.

As he raised his gun to fire, all he had ever read or heard of the habits of peccaries flashed through his mind. He remembered tales of the mad courage of the animals when wounded or attacked, how the savage little pigs tore men to shreds in their anger and how hunters were often compelled to climb trees and wait for hours until help arrived after firing at a herd of the creatures. Where he and Hermanas lay hidden there were no large trees to climb, the brush and creepers were too thick to permit of running, and Eric wondered what would be the result of his shot or what would happen if the peccaries attacked Hermanas and himself.

He was no coward, but he felt he was taking a terrible chance, and he longed to question his Indian friend before firing at the pigs. But he realized that to utter a sound would start the peccaries on headlong flight, and he knew that Hermanas must be

familiar with the creatures' habits, and that he would not allow him to run any risk.

All these thoughts passed through his mind as he raised his gun and aimed at the nearest pig and without hesitation he pulled the trigger.

At the report a tremendous chorus of snorts, grunts and squeals came from the wallow, and Eric leaped to his feet, peering into the smoke and expecting to see the peccaries rushing toward him with gleaming tusks bared. Instead the squeals and grunts became fainter and fainter; Hermanas dashed forward and Eric, following, reached the muddy hollow, to find it empty and deserted save for a fine big peccary that was stretched lifeless at the edge of the pool.

As Hermanas deftly cut the musk-glands from the peccary's back and proceeded to clean the carcass on the spot, Eric questioned him about the habits of the wild pigs, and asked why they had not turned on the hunters as he had been told was their custom.

The Indian assured him that he had never known of peccaries attacking men, that they scurried out of sight at the first sign of danger, and that he considered tales to the contrary as "Plenty much lie."

The peccary, even when dressed, was a good load

for the two boys, and fastening it to a stout pole, the two ends of which rested on their shoulders, Eric and Hermanas started towards the camp.

Eric had always prided himself upon his ability to find his way in the woods, and in the north had never become confused, but here in the Guiana wilds he was completely at a loss, and would have been perfectly helpless without his Indian chum.

Hermanas, however, seemed to know where the camp lay by instinct, and set out through the forest without the least hesitation; merely remarking that he was taking a short cut.

Presently they reached a small creek, and as they pushed through the underbrush along its shores some large animal plunged down the bank and with a tremendous splash leaped into the water.

“What was that?” exclaimed Eric. He dropped his end of the pole and held his gun ready.

“Water-haas,” replied Hermanas.

Eric asked if they could get the creature, but the Indian shook his head and assured Eric that the water-haas or capybara was a very shy creature and that it was as much at home in the water as on land. He also said that it would no doubt raise its head above water in some hidden spot among the overhanging foliage and would be able to watch the

boys' movements without a possibility of their seeing it.

As both the boys were rather tired they sat down to rest upon a fallen tree beside the creek and both kept a sharp lookout for the capybara, but the wary animal failed to appear, and the boys again resumed their tramp. A little after leaving the creek Hermanas halted, motioned to Eric to set down the peccary and then, beckoning to him, led the way through the thickets to one side. Here there was a slight rise or small hill and, wriggling up this, the boys looked down upon a little open space among the trees. A ray of sunshine broke through the foliage and in the center of the golden light stood three birds such as Eric had never before seen.

They were about the size of Guinea-fowls, but with longer legs and more slender necks, and they stalked slowly about in a most dignified and stately manner. They appeared to have no wings, for their backs were covered with soft gray feathers that drooped down all about their bodies. Their graceful necks and heads seemed made of black velvet, while their breasts gleamed with wonderful metallic hues of iridescent blue, purple and gold, like the throats of humming birds.

They were Trumpet birds, and Eric gazed at them

with interest and admiration, while Hermanas urged him in whispered tones to shoot. But Eric had no wish to kill the beautiful creatures, and although the Indian could not understand why the birds were not fair game and was no doubt disgusted at Eric's refusal to destroy them, he made no protest, but remained motionless beside the white boy. At last an incautious movement warned birds of the presence of human beings and, like shadows of the forest, they slipped into the surrounding jungle.

As the boys trudged onward the peccary seemed to increase in weight with each step, and when at last they came in sight of the camp they were glad indeed to throw down their load and rest their weary limbs in the hammocks beneath the grateful shade of the logi.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CONSPIRACY

FOR many weeks nothing of importance occurred at Ratura. The men worked diligently, the overseer knew his business thoroughly, and Mr. Marvin, believing in the adage, "If you want a thing well done, you must do it yourself," attended personally to every detail about the estate.

Eric was here, there and everywhere,—invariably accompanied by Hermanas,—and his youthful enthusiasm, his never-failing good nature and his wonderful energy made him a universal favorite among the men, who exerted themselves to the utmost to please the "young marster." All over the estate the effects of energetic work, careful supervision and practical knowledge were evident. The land was free from weeds and brush, the trees were carefully pruned and trimmed, neat paths and roads led through the cultivation, and a large kitchen garden had been laid out in which many northern vegetables were thriving.



He helped to gather the cocoa pods

All the bearing rubber trees had been tapped, the latex had been successfully coagulated and a great bale of the brown, translucent sheets of raw rubber had been shipped away. The limes had all been gathered and crushed, the juice concentrated and several barrels of citrate had been made. The lumbering had proceeded smoothly and rapidly, and timber after timber had been floated down the river and delivered safely in Georgetown. The cacao trees had added their quota to the whole, and to Eric the preparation of the cocoa had proved vastly interesting. He helped the men to gather the red and yellow pods, he admired the dexterity with which they chopped the pods open and emptied the thick pulp and the seeds it contained into the waiting baskets, and he watched each dripping load as it was dumped into the fermenting vats. Then when the dark brown beans were spread upon the great shallow trays for drying Eric visited them daily as the men shuffled and raked them about, and he was always the first to note an approaching shower and to see that the trays were run under their sheds to prevent the beans from getting wet. At last they were cured and dried to perfection and were safely stored in bags for shipment, and the foreman averred they were the finest cocoa beans ever grown

in the colony. Eric felt vastly proud at the result, as indeed he well might, for every step in their preparation had been under his watchful eyes and the men had taken extraordinary care in the work.

But there had been plenty of recreation as well as work for the two boys. Many hunting trips had been taken in the jungles for several miles about and many a long voyage had been made far up the forest creeks in the woodskin.

Sometimes no game had rewarded them, but at other times luck had favored, and deer, capybara, labba and even a big tapir or "bush cow" had been brought in by the "jungle chums," as Mr. Marvin called the boys. Moreover, two fine ocelot skins and a ten-foot crocodile hide decorated the walls of the gallery as trophies of Eric's hunts, but no "tiger" had he seen, and he had also failed to secure one of the huge "camudis," or boas, of which he had heard marvelous tales.

"It's funny we don't see more snakes," he remarked, when talking with his father on one occasion. "I've hunted high and low and Hermanas and his Indian friends have hunted and yet we haven't seen a single live snake except a harmless yellow-tail about five feet long and one or two little striped fellows like our garter snakes at home. Why, from

what I'd read and heard, I thought the jungles were alive with snakes and that a person's life was in danger all the time he was in the bush. I supposed anacondas and boas were just waiting to seize and crush one, that bushmasters rushed out to kill any passer-by, that deadly green parrot snakes hid themselves in the foliage and struck down the traveler without warning, and that huge rattlesnakes lurked in every thicket. Are there really any such snakes here, father?"

Mr. Marvin laughed. "Such stories are like many other tales one hears about the tropics," he replied. "They are vastly exaggerated, and the experiences of countless travelers and many years are condensed into a single yarn. There *are* snakes, both harmless and poisonous, in Guiana, as in nearly every country; but they are so few, so scattered and so shy that one might spend years in the colony and never see a single venomous snake or a large boa or anaconda. In fact, snakes are not nearly as abundant here as in the United States, and it's the rarest thing for a person to be bitten,—even the bare-footed Indians, coolies and negroes pay no attention to such a remote danger. It's the same with many other things,—such as scorpions, tarantulas and centipedes, which northerners are prone to think

swarm everywhere in the tropics, and threaten the lives of visitors at every turn. As a matter of fact, all these are as scarce as snakes,—as you know from experience,—and, moreover, they are practically harmless. One might as well live in dread of death by hornets or bees as of these much maligned creatures.”

As Mr. Marvin ceased speaking a messenger arrived and handed him a letter.

“Do you suppose you could manage the estate for a week or two?” he asked Eric, as he finished reading. “I find I must go over to Barbados on business,—it may mean another large timber contract,—and the steamer sails the day after to-morrow. I don’t think you’ll have any difficulties,—everything’s running smoothly now. Van Pelt’s note falls due in a short time, but the timber contract is almost filled, there’s a good balance on hand from the rubber, cacao and other products and this, with the returns from the contract, will cover the note easily. I’ll be back in time to attend to it, I hope—if not, I’ll cable Van Pelt to extend it until I return, or I’ll mail you power of attorney and directions to meet any contingency.”

“I’m sure I can manage nicely,” Eric assured him. “I know how everything should be done, and

the men all work well and will do as I tell them. Don't worry, father, I'll love the chance to see how well I can manage alone.'"

Matters were soon arranged. Mr. Marvin hurried away to catch the steamer, and Eric was left in sole charge of the estate, and everything went on much as usual at Ratura. A few days later Eric received a long letter from his father, stating that he had secured another large contract and instructing Eric to have Theophilus commence cutting for it at once. He also said that he found it impossible to return in time to attend to Van Pelt's note and enclosed a power of attorney authorizing Eric to collect the money due on the timber and to draw the cash from the bank in order that the note might be paid on time. It all seemed very simple and, the last of the timber having been floated down the river and delivered, Eric and Hermanas left the estate in charge of the overseer and started for Georgetown.

They reached Bartica after sundown and took rooms at the hotel to await the river steamer, which sailed early the following morning. The boys were quite tired and went to bed early and were just dropping off to sleep when they were aroused by the sound of voices as two men entered an adjoining room. The rooms were separated only by thin

wooden partitions which, to afford better ventilation, did not extend to the ceiling, and the boys could not avoid overhearing the conversation next door. At first they gave no attention to it, only hoping that their neighbors would soon retire and allow them to rest undisturbed. Then Eric caught the word "Ratura," and, whispering to Hermanas to be silent, he strained his ears to hear what was being said on the other side of the partition.

"It's a cinch," declared one voice, "Marvin's away, and only that kid of his is in charge. *He* can't raise a cent, and Marvin can't be reached,—he left Barbados on the *Carraquet* yesterday and won't be in till Sunday. The note's due on Thursday; to-day's Monday, and I'll be at the bank on the dot, don't you fear."

"Can't the kid get the cash from Bascom and meet the note?" inquired the other voice.

The first speaker laughed. "I've seen to that," he replied. "Bascom's gone to Paramaribo to see some timber, and no one else is going to pay ten thousand dollars to a kid,—even if the contract is filled. No, sir,—that note's going to protest, and I'm going to throw Marvin into bankruptcy and get Ratura,—believe me."

"I wouldn't be too cock-sure," remarked the



He watched the men as they chopped the pods open

other. "Court won't turn the place over just 'cause you've got the note, and Marvin can't raise cash to settle,—even if the note's not paid on time; they'll extend the time or investigate. Marvin's pretty well liked, and he'll get fair play."

"Say, you must be getting cold feet," replied the first voice contemptuously. "There's plenty of other creditors, and they'll all jump on him if that note's not paid on time. Even if he raises enough to square 'em all, suits cost money, and it'll tie up his contracts and take his time. If he can't fill 'em no one's goin' to give him credit. Then Leggett can get in his play. I tell *you*, Tom, it's a sure game. You don't think I've gone into this deal with my eyes shut, do you? Not by a long shot,—we must have Ratura by hook or crook, and I'm not taking chances. Wouldn't Marvin be sick if he knew what we know,—jolly good joke, I say."

"Too bad Leggett's game fell through," commented the other. "If Marvin hadn't turned up when he did, things would have been dead easy, and we wouldn't have had to buy the note. Three months more and the place would have been sold out, and we'd have had our innings. How did you manage to make Van Pelt sell the note? I thought the Dutchman promised Marvin to extend it."

The other man chuckled. "So he did," he replied, "Marvin trusted *him* all right,—never dreamed there'd be trouble. Why should he,—he didn't know any one wanted his bally old place or *why* they should. Lucky job I had something on Van Pelt. Old chap wouldn't listen to selling at first, but I put the screws on him and brought him to terms all right."

"You're a smart one," said the other admiringly. "How *did* you do it?"

"Remember that chap, Scheerer,—the fellow who was held here as a German suspect? Well, old Van Pelt got him off,—swore he was a Dutchman, known him for years, and all that. I'm wise to the fact he *was* a German, all right, and an officer at that. When Van Pelt found *I* knew, and had ways to prove it, he was jolly well ready to make any terms, you bet. Things would 'a been too hot for him here if the story'd leaked out. Sold out cheap, too,—pity we had to spend the cash, though."

"Well, here's luck to you," exclaimed the other. "You're off on the morning boat, eh?"

The sound of tinkling glasses followed, and Eric listened breathlessly while the two strangers drank their liquor. But the conversation was not resumed. Presently there was the noise of chairs pushed back,

a door shut, and footsteps echoed down the hall.

Hermanas slipped to the door, opened it noiselessly and peered out, but the hallway was dimly lit, and the strangers' backs were unrecognizable.

Eric was dumbfounded at what he had heard, and threw himself into a chair, absolutely at a loss. He was face to face with a terrible situation, and tremendous responsibilities had been thrust suddenly upon him. By merest chance he had learned of some deep-laid plot to obtain Ratura, to destroy his father's credit, and to throw the company into bankruptcy; but by whom or for what reason he could not even guess.

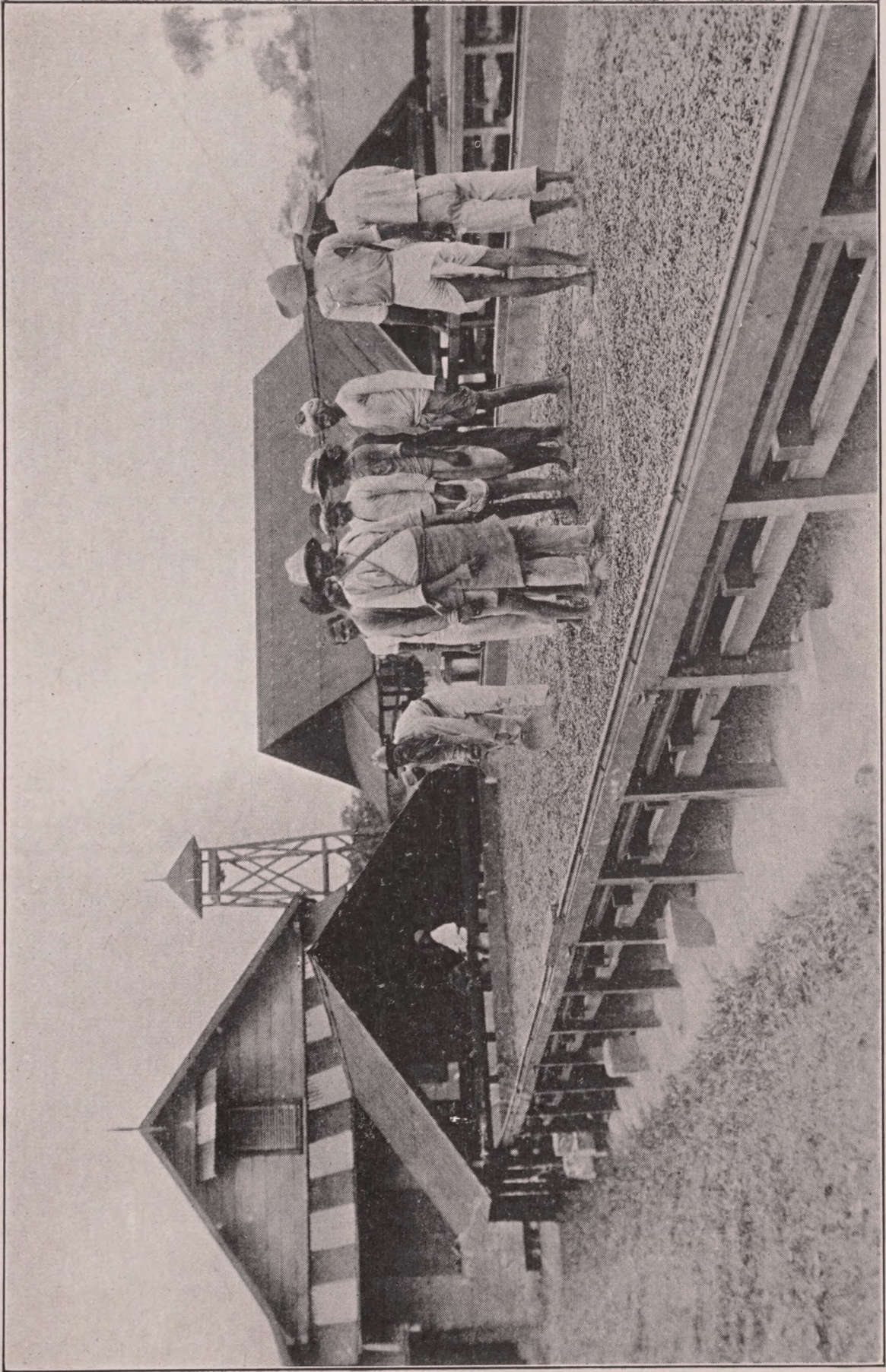
One thing had been made clear, however, Leggett was mixed up in the conspiracy, and Eric now understood why the rascally ex-manager had falsified accounts, had allowed the estate to run down by neglect, and had asserted that it could not be made to pay. Beyond doubt, his scheme had been to force the company into bankruptcy, or to sell out to avoid such a result, and thus throw Ratura in the way of his confederates. No wonder he had become furious when Mr. Marvin had arrived so unexpectedly and all the well-laid plans had been destroyed. Eric wondered where Leggett was at present,—who the strangers were, and why they were so anxious to

secure the estate at all hazards; but it was absolutely beyond him; it was all a deep, inexplicable mystery.

What *could* he do? The note which he had expected to pay on the morrow had passed from Van Pelt's hands, and Bascom, who owed the money for the timber, was beyond reach. Mr. Marvin was at sea, there was no cash available save that in the bank, there was no means of borrowing, and Eric knew no one to whom he could turn for help or advice. Yet something *must* be done at once to save Ratura and avoid long, expensive lawsuits.

Worst of all, he could not invoke the aid of the law, for, inexperienced as he was, he realized that there was no crime premeditated, that the scheme as revealed was perfectly legitimate, even if it was underhand, and that, above all, he had no proof, and could not even tell the names of the plotters.

The more he racked his brains for some way out of the dilemma the more hopeless it seemed. Overwhelmed with the knowledge of the blow so soon to fall, powerless to prevent it, and striving to think of some means of circumventing the conspirators, Eric had quite forgotten his companion's presence, and putting his thoughts into words, exclaimed,



As the men shuffled and raked the cocoa beans in the drying trays

“What can I do? I *must* get money before Thursday.”

“S’pose mebbe sellum cattle,” Hermanas remarked.

Eric leaped to his feet. “Fine!” he exclaimed. Then his face fell, as he asked, “But who’s going to buy cattle? We’d have to sell an awful lot to make six thousand dollars.”

“Gotum two, t’ree hund’ed, mebbe. Me know one feller mebbe buyum,” replied the Indian.

“Do you?” cried Eric. “Where is he? How much are cattle worth?”

“He coolie man, live Berbice side. Mebbe pay fifty dollar,” was the answer.

“Hurrah!” shouted Eric. “If we can sell two hundred cattle we can pay the note without drawing the cash from the bank,—even one hundred and twenty head will be enough. But where’s Berbice, and how can we get there?”

Hermanas explained that Berbice was beyond Georgetown, and that to reach it they must go to the capital and take either the train or the coastwise boat.

“But we won’t be in time,” objected Eric. “It will take us all day to-morrow to reach Georgetown, all the next day to reach Berbice, a day to see your

friend and return, and another day to get boats to Georgetown,—that's Friday night, even if we make connections, and the note falls due on Thursday. We *must* have the money before three o'clock that day. Besides, the man's going down on the boat to-morrow and he might recognize us and have us followed or robbed. We can't do it, Hermanas." Eric sank into his chair the picture of dejection.

But the Indian was in no mood to despair, for to his mind no obstacle was too great to be overcome if mere physical endurance and dogged perseverance could accomplish it.

"Me tellum make walk Georgetown this night," he announced, as if walking sixty miles through the bush and across rivers was the simplest matter in the world.

"Don't be silly," exclaimed Eric. "How *can* we walk to Georgetown?" Hermanas grinned as he realized Eric's mistake. "No makeum walk for foot, makeum walk for corial," he explained and added, "S'pose mebbe findum Buckmans same time." Without waiting for a reply he slipped from the room and Eric heard his bare feet pattering rapidly down the stairs.

Eric had become accustomed to the jargon of his Indian friend, and he judged that Hermanas had

gone forth to find some fellow tribesmen and a canoe for the night trip down the river.

As he sat alone, waiting for Hermanas to return, it occurred to him to inquire of the proprietor as to the identity of the men who had occupied the adjoining room and, rising, he hurried downstairs. But the black manager could give him no information. "The men were strangers," he said, "gold diggers or prospectors, most likely,"—who had come down the Mazaruni in the afternoon and had engaged the room for a few hours only. They were not stopping there over night, had not registered, and he could not say where they were staying. One, he thought, was a colonial, the other an American, but he was not sure,—they might be Canadians. So many strangers came and went; and it wasn't always wise to ask their names or business.

As Eric, disappointed, turned to mount the stairs Hermanas appeared and whispered that all was in readiness and if Eric was willing they would start at once.

The boys had little baggage, and it required but a few moments to pack their belongings. Then Hermanas uncoiled a light bush rope which he had concealed beneath his shirt and attached one end of this to the kit-bags.

“What *are* you doing?” asked Eric.

“S’pose seeum go, mebbe watchum,” replied the Indian. Leaning from the window he uttered the low, quavering call of the goatsucker. An answering cry came from the inky blackness below and Hermanas quickly lowered the bags and dropped the rope after it.

“But we can’t leave without paying,” said Eric, who now realized that the wily Indian was taking precautions to evade suspicion, and intended slipping away secretly.

“S’pose putum money in letter. Leaveum in room,” suggested Hermanas. Everything had happened so rapidly and Eric’s head was in such a whirl that this simple expedient had not occurred to him. Acting on the hint, he slipped the amount due into an envelope, addressed it to the proprietor, and placed it conspicuously on the dressing case.

Then, following his companion’s directions, Eric went downstairs, stopped a moment in the billiard room and engaged the manager in conversation while Hermanas, silently as a shadow, slipped past and out of doors, unseen by any one. Remarking that he was going for a stroll about the village, Eric followed, and a moment later joined the Indian in the yard.

It was a cloudy night and everything was wrapped in darkness so dense that Eric could see nothing, but Hermanas seemed to possess the eyes of an owl, and quickly led the white boy towards the river side.

A few whispered words in Arekuna assured Eric of the presence of several Indians, unseen hands guided him down a steep slope and into a boat, there was the soft splash of paddles and Eric felt, rather than saw, that they were afloat and moving rapidly into midstream. For a time only the slight grating of paddles on gunwale, the soft splash of water and the lap of waves broke the silence, but presently the Indians commenced to talk among themselves. Then the rising moon broke through the clouds, a soft light revealed the river and the shores and Eric could distinguish the other occupants of the canoe. Hermanas was at the bow, behind him was a stalwart Buck, a third man was seated behind Eric, and at the stern sat a fourth Indian grasping a huge steering paddle.

Silvered by the rapidly increasing moonlight the further shores rose in a dim, gray bank above the river, and behind,—now fully half a mile distant,—a few twinkling lights against the dark forest marked Bartica.

Onward across the great river sped the canoe, the lights of the village dwindled to mere pin points and disappeared, and close ahead rose the vast, interminable mass of jungle. In the shadow of the bank the canoe dropped downstream, it swept around a bend and an instant later was swallowed up in the wilderness as the lynx-eyed Indians drove it swiftly up a narrow creek.

Never will Eric forget that trip by canoe through the midnight forest. On either hand rose walls of black, the Stygian stream twisted and turned like a huge, black serpent through the bush; and night birds cried, owls hooted and frogs croaked on every side. Myriads of fireflies flitted through the dank, moist air, startled labbas and capybaras snorted and splashed to safety as the canoe approached, and once two balls of green glared from an overhanging tree, and the awful, wailing scream of a jaguar sent cold shivers down the boy's spine as the great cat sprang from its perch and crashed off through the thicket.

How the boatmen found their way, how they avoided tacubas, how they escaped the drooping vines and threatening thorns that barred their passage, was beyond Eric's comprehension. It was wonderful enough to see Hermanas navigate the

creeks in daylight, but such was mere child's play compared to traveling this forest waterway in darkness. But unerringly, unhesitatingly, the men paddled on; the steersman swinging around tacubas as if by instinct, the men crouching low, warning Eric, as the craft sped under trailing vines and limbs beset with six-inch thorns, and the canoe threading the labyrinth of streams, swamps and creeks as though signposts marked the way.

For hour after hour they went on; the moon rose high in the sky; the lily pads and mucka-mucka leaves gleamed like great silver platters against the shadows, and vines, trees and foliage loomed ghostly above the dark, mysterious banks.

Suddenly the forest ended, great reeds and water plants lined the stream, and an instant later the canoe slipped forth from the creek and danced upon the waves of a broad river flowing like a stream of gleaming silver beneath the tropic moon.

It was the Demerara, and by creeks and channels known only to the Indians, the canoe had slipped through the jungle from the Essequibo and the trip to Georgetown had been shortened by thirty miles.

CHAPTER IX

A RACE AGAINST TIME

As the sun rose above the roofs and towers of Georgetown the next morning a light canoe, manned by four Indians, slipped up to the public landing at the foot of America Street.

From it a tired, sleepy white boy arose and stepped stiffly up the stairs, and behind him trudged a young Arekuna, carrying two kit bags.

The drowsy policeman on the pier glanced casually at the couple, but there was nothing suspicious about the stranger from up river, and his Buck servant, and Eric and Hermanas passed on to Water Street and a nearby restaurant.

Long before the river steamer left the dock at distant Bartica the two boys were speeding across the broad cane fields and savannas towards Berbice, and at the time the mysterious owner of the note landed at Georgetown, Eric and Hermanas were bargaining with a New Amsterdam boatman to carry them to the Indian's "coolie man" acquaintance.

Baboo Raj Sawh was a wealthy man, a "Creole Hindu," or, in other words, an East Indian born in Guiana, and like many of his race a keen business man, who did not believe in "putting all his eggs in one basket," figuratively speaking. He had shops in the capital and New Amsterdam; rice estates at Leguan and Abary; meat stalls in the market at Georgetown; a pawn shop where his fellow Hindus could secure ready cash for their barbaric jewelry; a cattle ranch on the Berbice River, and shingle grants on the Essequibo.

Hermanas became acquainted with him at the latter spot, and later lived at his place on the Berbice when Theophilus was engaged by the Baboo to do some lumbering. Of all his ventures the cattle ranch was Raj Sawh's special pride and hobby, and, as Hermanas knew that his Hindu friend was always purchasing any cattle which he could obtain at bargain prices, the Baboo had at once occurred to him as a prospective buyer of the Ratura stock.

Raj Sawh greeted Hermanas cordially and welcomed Eric with dignified "salaams," professing to be highly honored by his visit and at once ordering refreshments served on the gallery. Eric was immensely taken by the white-robed Oriental and his courteous manners, and felt instinctively that in him

he would find a friend in whom he could confide.

He, therefore, told his story frankly to the Baboo, explained the necessity of securing six thousand dollars immediately, and offered to sell the cattle to obtain that sum.

The Hindu listened attentively, nodded gravely once or twice to indicate he was following Eric's narrative, and did not speak until the boy had finished his tale.

Then he smiled kindly, and his eyes twinkled. "Gladly would I the cattle buy," he declared, "even if you needed not the money so most urgently, but it is my custom never to buy that which my eyes have looked not upon. How shall I to know that the cattle have not sickness or not old and skinny are?"

Eric's face fell. "But there's no time——" he commenced. The Baboo raised his hand and interrupted him. "Permit me to finish, Sahib," he said. "Most truly, it my custom is thus not to pay for that I have seen not yet, but I have lived among many men of many nations, and to judge men well I have learned. The eyes of the Sahib Marvin are straight, and his tongue speaks truly. One condition only I make; it is thusly. The cattle are far away, much money will it take and much time to bring them. Ratura know I well, and food there for

the cattle is. Permit the cattle I buy at Ratura to remain, until such day as I desire, and two hundred I buy for fifty dollars each."

"That's splendid of you," cried Eric. "Of course, they can stay there till you send for them. We haven't any use for the savanna, and there must be over three hundred head on the place. You can pick out any you want. Oh, I can't begin to tell you how relieved I am."

Raj Sawh now brought paper and pen and asked Eric to make out a bill of sale with a clause permitting the cattle to remain at Ratura until the Baboo should send for them, and stating that no charge was to be made for pasturage. The paper was signed, witnessed, and stamped, and the Hindu handed Eric a check for ten thousand dollars, payable at the Colonial Bank at Georgetown.

"Won't those fellows be surprised when they find the note's paid," exclaimed the delighted boy, as he folded the check and placed it carefully in an inner pocket.

"Ah," said the Baboo, with a smile, "they will find that, as it is most truly said, there more manners than one of from a cat removing its skin are."

"That's it," assented Eric, striving to suppress his amusement at the Hindu's quaint English.

“They’ll find the ‘kid’ isn’t such a helpless fool as they thought,—but the credit all belongs to Hermanas and yourself, Mr. Sawh. If Hermanas hadn’t suggested selling the cattle to you, I wouldn’t have known which way to turn, and, if you hadn’t trusted me and believed my story, I couldn’t have raised it on time. I don’t know how we can ever show enough gratitude to both of you.”

Raj Sawh spread his hands in a deprecatory gesture. “It is an honor to serve the Sahib Marvin,” he declared, adding, with a twinkle of his eye, “And good business, also. Truly, Hermanas has well served the Sahib. He a bright and faithful Buck boy is.”

Now that the excitement was over, and Eric knew the note could be met, the strain of the past thirty-six hours began to tell and, despite his every effort, he could not suppress a yawn.

The Hindu noticed it at once and insisted that the tired boys must take their much-needed rest immediately. It was too late to catch the train back to Georgetown that day and, as an early start must be made the following morning, in order to reach the bank before three o’clock, Eric was glad indeed to follow the Baboo’s suggestion and go to bed at once.

He was aroused by a cat-footed coolie servant, and

feeling vastly refreshed after his long nap he joined his host at dinner on the balcony. During the meal Raj Sawh offered to take the boys to New Amsterdam in his launch, explaining that a matter of business necessitated his going down the river, and Eric gratefully accepted, for the launch would save several hours' time and thus it would not be necessary to depart before dawn as had been planned.

The sail down the river in the launch was a pleasant change indeed from the slow and clumsy row-boat which had brought the boys from New Amsterdam the day before, and Eric was in high spirits at the prospect of the successful termination of his trip. There was ample time in which to catch the train which was due in Georgetown before noon, and there seemed to be no reason why the money should not be in the bank several hours before closing time.

But bitter disappointment was in store for Eric. When he reached the little station no train was waiting and the station master calmly informed them that the train had "fallen down" the day before, and that there was no possibility of reaching Georgetown before night.

It was a terrible blow to Eric, who saw all his plans crumbling to bits and his strenuous efforts coming to naught through this new calamity.

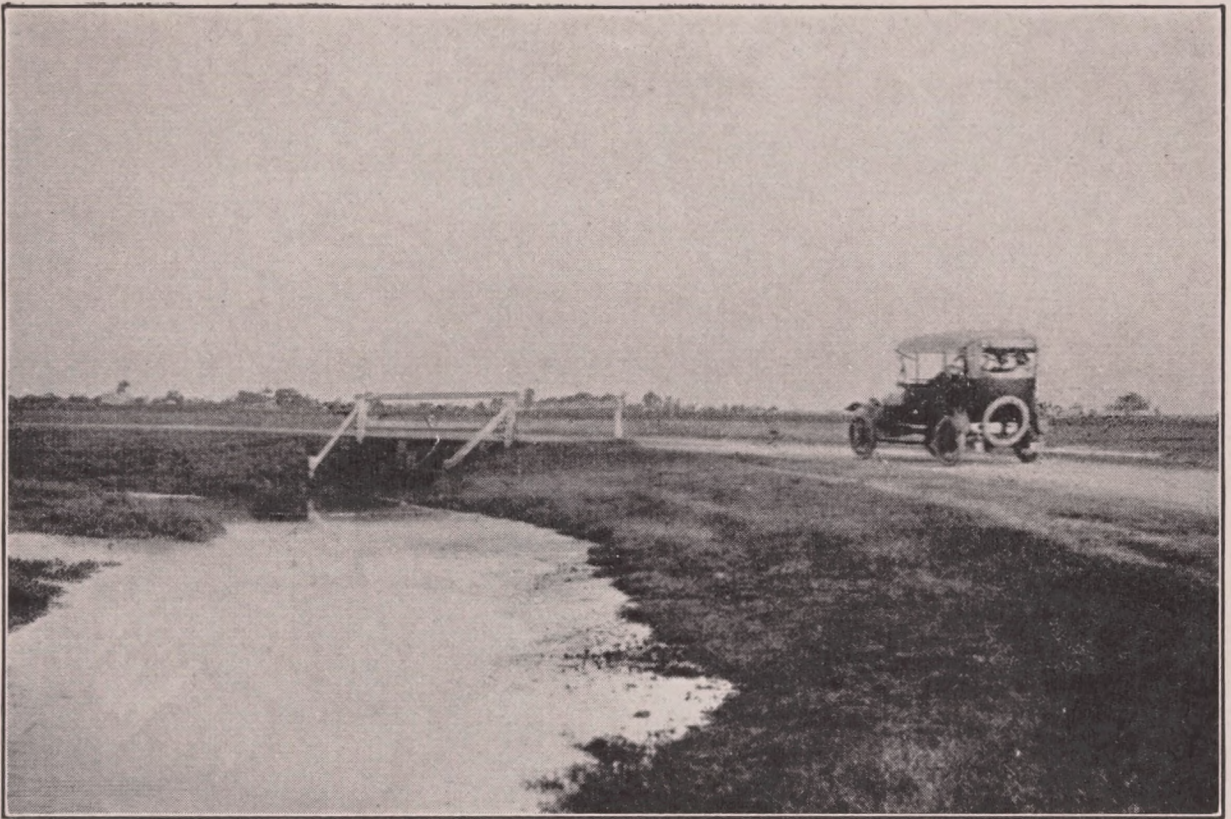
But he had forgotten the Baboo, who now stepped forward with a ready solution for overcoming this seemingly insurmountable difficulty.

He owned an automobile, he explained; there was an excellent road to Georgetown, the run could easily be made in five or six hours, the car was at Eric's disposal and he, Raj Sawh, would be most happy to go along and see that the chauffeur made good time without driving recklessly.

Eric jumped at the chance,—they would still best the plotters,—and within half an hour they were humming westward over the smooth, hard road towards Georgetown.

Eric was delighted; the morning air was cool and fresh, the road stretched like a great red ribbon across the flat green savannas, and the car ran beautifully.

Acres of wondrous green marked broad rice fields, and as the car rushed by, immense flocks of ducks rose, wheeled, and filled the air with frightened calls, while great red-legged Heeri storks, slate-blue herons and roseate spoonbills flapped upward from the shallow water of the marshes. High in the clear blue sky great vultures sailed in vast circles on motionless pinions; bright-hued birds twittered



The car rumbled over scores of tiny creeks



Past the Victoria Law Courts

and sang in the wayside weeds; masses of pale-blue water hyacinths and rose-colored lilies filled the ditches. Eric thought he had never enjoyed such a perfect ride.

Across the Abary River the car sped on; it rumbled over scores of tiny creeks; the horn honked through many a picturesque village, and here and there Eric caught glimpses of the sparkling sea. Mahaicony was passed, and beyond the flat savannas waving palms and the lofty chimneys of sugar mills appeared, houses and settlements became more frequent, and Mahaica was reached. More than half the distance to Georgetown now had been covered, the car had made splendid time and all were in the highest spirits. Onward rushed the car; mile after mile slipped by, until, rounding a turn, the car was stopped with a jerk and the occupants gazed speechless with surprise at what they saw. Before them stretched a vast expanse of water, a veritable lake, extending from the line of trees that marked the shore to the distant railway embankment. A few bushes and weeds broke its smooth surface, and submerged telegraph poles marked the line of the highway; but road, ditches, fences and bridges were nowhere to be seen.

“What is it? What’s happened?” exclaimed

Eric, as a colored man approached with a red flag under his arm.

“De sea defenses bus’ up ag’in, sah,” replied the negro. “Las’ night come spring tide an’ strong win’, an’ w’en tide wash dis marnin’ he flood de road, sah.”

Eric had read accounts of the troubles with the dykes which held back the sea along the coast, but he had not dreamed that the water could break through and overflow roads and land to such extent.

“Oh, can’t we get through?” he cried. “We *must* get to Georgetown before three o’clock.”

The road guard grinned. “I ’fraid yo’ gwine to be a bit ’etarded, sah. De tide he farlin’ now, but yo’ boun’ to wait fo’ a co’ple hour mo’ fo’ de road to make bare, sah.”

“It seems as if everything was against me,” exclaimed Eric, his heart again sinking. “Even the sea had to break in and stop us from reaching Georgetown on time.”

The kindly Baboo tried to reassure him, and expressed his belief that they would still reach Georgetown before the bank closed, but in his heart he was doubtful. But there was nothing to be done save wait, there was no other road, to walk was out of the question,—even if it were possible to follow the

curving road under the water, and Eric strove to be patient as the minutes dragged slowly on.

Hermanas alighted from the car, cut several sticks and planted them in the roadway at the edge of the flood. In a few moments they were several inches from the water and by this all could see that the tide was really receding. Half an hour passed and grasses, weeds and the tops of fences appeared above the surface of the water. In an hour the banks beside the road were visible, and at the end of two long, weary hours the red muddy road was free of water above the flooded lands, and Raj Sawh ordered the chauffeur to proceed.

But long immersion had transformed the burnt clay road to a mass of thick, tenacious mud; the car sank deep within it and the wheels spun and slipped and scarce any headway could be made. It was dangerous, too, for here and there the highway had been undermined, large sections of the road had dropped away, and time and time again the machine came perilously near to plunging off the roadway into the ditches.

Fully a mile of this damaged road had to be traversed, and when at last the mud-bespattered car reached the hard, dry road beyond, three precious hours had been lost. Georgetown was still a dozen

miles distant and in less than half an hour the bank would close.

To reach it in time seemed hopeless, and Eric resigned himself to fate, and tried to comfort himself with the thought that he had done his best; that no one could blame him for his failure, and that nature herself had joined with the conspirators to thwart him.

But old Baboo Raj Sawh was a born sport, and an inherent gambler (when the chances seemed good), and the determination to win, despite all odds, was strong within him. The plucky attempt that Eric was making had appealed to him from the first, he had taken a great liking to the boy, and he was now as intent upon balking the plotters as was Eric himself.

In a few words he instructed the chauffeur to make all speed until the city limits were reached, to use care not to be halted by the police after entering the town, and to select the quickest route to the bank and then, turning to Eric, he remarked:

“While life is, expectation there may be, as says the proverb. Of us none yet have lost life, thus why be despaired? In time yet may the bank be arrived at, Sahib Marvin.”

Despite Eric's dejection, he could not but smile

at the Hindu's odd speech. As the car tore at break-neck speed through Plaisance and onward past the golf course, and as the lofty wireless towers and lighthouse of Georgetown loomed higher and higher above the palms, his depression took wings and his heart beat fast with the thrill of the mad race against time.

Plodding coolies leaped aside and cursed the rushing car in Hindustani; ragged negroes scrambled from the roadway and bawled vague threats as the machine flashed by; sheep and cattle scurried from the highway at the screeching horn and roaring exhaust and plodding donkey carts and other vehicles drew hastily to one side.

But the speed could not endure for long, and at Kitty village the driver slackened his reckless pace and bowled through the village and past the botanic station and into Brickdam road at a speed within the limits of the law. It was now a question of minutes; then of seconds, and as the muddy, steaming car rolled down High Street and past the Victoria Law Courts the clock in the church tower struck the hour of three.

CHAPTER X

MORE TROUBLES

“I’m afraid you’re a moment too late, Baboo,” remarked the smiling, benevolent-looking manager, as Raj Sawh and Eric leaped from the car and dashed into the bank. “It’s after three,” he continued, “and business is over for the day. I’m very sorry, but you’ll have to wait until to-morrow. I judge you were delayed by the breach in the sea defenses.”

Eric felt all had been in vain. On the morrow the conspirators would resort to the courts and all the money which was to have gone towards paying the note would be expended in long lawsuits. But as these dismal thoughts filled Eric’s mind his Hindu friend was rapidly explaining the whole affair to Mr. Bond, who,—banking hours over,—was not at all averse to listening to the Baboo, who was one of the largest of the bank’s depositors.

“Yes, the note *was* presented,” Eric heard Mr. Bond say. “The holder,—a stranger to me,—gave

the name of Davison and, as the transfer of the note appeared quite correct, I had no reason to question it. He came in not more than ten minutes ago and inquired if the note had been met. I told him it had not, and he departed, stating he would bring suit at once. I'm afraid nothing can be done, my friend. Even if the money were offered now I could not accept it,—you see, the note is made payable through New York. I can only pay the amount to the holder here on receipt of cabled instructions.”

At these words Eric had an inspiration and as the idea flashed upon him he threw his hat in air and uttered a shout which startled Raj Sawh and caused Mr. Bond to think the boy had gone suddenly mad.

“Hurry up, Mr. Sawh,” cried the excited lad, “we can beat them yet. The banks won't close in New York for an hour and a half. We can cable the money and get an order back. Won't that fix it all right?”

The Hindu looked puzzled, but Mr. Bond saw the point at once, although it had not occurred to him before.

“To be sure,” he exclaimed. “Mr. Marvin is quite correct. There is a difference of about one hour and forty minutes between Georgetown and New York, and if you hurry you can doubtless send

a cable and receive a reply before the closing of the New York bank.”

Eric started for the door, but at the threshold stopped as a new thought occurred to him. “But we haven’t any cash,” he cried. “The cable people may not take a check.”

“I’ll arrange that,” declared the bank manager, who was now thoroughly in sympathy with Eric. “Let me have the check and I’ll certify it,—even if ’tis after hours.”

Ten minutes later the cable had been sent and as Eric and Raj Sawh were awaiting the reply at the cable office Mr. Bond entered.

“I’m anxious to see you best that pack of rascals,” he exclaimed; “and I’m going to do all I can to aid you. As soon as the receipt arrives I’ll send a message to Davison notifying him that the note was met on time at New York. I don’t think he’ll do anything in the way of bringing suit before morning. He’ll realize he’s been beaten; but I would suggest seeing your attorney, Mr. Marvin. Tell him the facts and he can stop any suit which may be brought.”

As Mr. Bond finished speaking, the operator handed Eric a message, but as the boy glanced at it he seemed puzzled. “I can’t make head or tail



The Colonial Bank in Georgetown, British Guiana

of this," he declared, handing the slip of paper to Mr. Bond. "It's all a meaningless jumble,—what does 'Western Union' at the beginning mean?"

"It's sent in Western Union code," explained Mr. Bond. "We'll soon decipher it." Seizing a code book he rapidly ran over the pages, checking off the words in the cable and jotting down their meanings on a sheet of paper.

"Here it is," he announced presently:

"Ten thousand dollars, account Van Pelt note, received. Credit cabled Colonial Bank, Demerara. McIntosh, Colonial Bank of London, New York branch."

Eric drew a long breath of relief. "Thank goodness that's done," he exclaimed. "I can't thank you enough, Mr. Bond," he continued. "I seem to find friends everywhere."

"Don't mention it," cried the other, beaming until his ruddy face and bald head fairly shone. "I'm off to Davison's boarding place to tell him what I think of him, and to notify him his game didn't work. I *couldn't* sacrifice that pleasure by sending a messenger." Hurrying briskly from the office, Mr. Bond jumped into his waiting motor car and disappeared down the street.

"Let's go and see Mr. Prince now," suggested Eric; "Mr. Bond seemed to think it a wise plan."

Raj Sawh was heartily in accord with the suggestion and a few moments later his car drew up before the law courts, and Eric and the Baboo climbed the iron stairway to the solicitor's office.

Mr. Prince,—Crown solicitor and attorney for innumerable firms with holdings in the colony,—was not an emotional man, and his real feelings were carefully concealed behind a heavy grizzled beard and a pair of thick glasses, but as he heard Eric's tale he became intensely interested and uttered frequent exclamations of surprise.

“You've certainly exhibited remarkable resourcefulness and keen business ability,” he declared as Eric finished his story. “Your dashing American method of ‘taking the bull by the horns,’ so to speak, and riding rough-shod over every obstacle simply takes my breath away. I have no wish to belittle your efforts in the least or to underrate the jeopardy in which your affairs were placed, but I question if any serious results would have followed, even if the note had not been met to-day. Doubtless Davison might have brought suit, but legally he could not proceed until he had actually presented the note in New York. As a matter of convenience notes are often made out in this manner and are presented and paid here through cabled instructions to

the bank, but in order to take legal action such a note must be presented at the place at which it is made payable. I do not know whether your father intentionally made this note payable at New York or whether it merely happened that he had a blank note on which New York was printed and which was left as the place of payment through an oversight. In either event it was most fortunate for you, and any move that Davison may have contemplated has been forestalled by your activity and foresight. You did perfectly right in assuming no risks, Mr. Marvin, and I congratulate you on the successful termination of your efforts."

"Who do you suppose the fellows are and *why* are they so anxious to secure Ratura?" asked Eric.

"I shall make every effort to solve those mysteries," declared the attorney. "There must be some valuable mineral or other resource on the estate and of which we have no knowledge. No doubt Leggett was aware of it, and sought the aid of others to further his schemes,—he was quite impecunious, I imagine."

"Well, I suppose there's nothing we can do, even if we find who the fellows are," said Eric.

"Not unless we can place our hands on Leggett and secure his arrest," replied Mr. Prince. "No

doubt he would divulge the whole plot if he were apprehended,—men of his type usually do so,—but as regards the others I cannot see that they have violated any law up to the present time.”

As Mr. Marvin would arrive on Sunday, Eric decided to remain in town to meet his father, and gladly accepted Raj Sawh's invitation to stay at his house in the meantime.

Despite every effort, Mr. Prince could discover nothing of importance regarding the man Davison and his associates. He learned that the fellow was a stranger who claimed to be an American, that he had been in the colony for several months, having arrived on a steamer from Paramaribo, and that he had been a frequent visitor at Ratura while Leggett was in charge. He had received the money in payment of the note without comment, had not endeavored to institute suit against Mr. Marvin or the company, and had departed on the Friday boat for Dutch Guiana.

Leggett's whereabouts were still unknown, and the police, being firmly convinced that he had fled across the border to Venezuela or Brazil, had ceased to search for him.

Mr. Marvin was justly proud of Eric's exploit, and was vastly pleased to find that his son could be

depended upon when thrown upon his own resources in such an emergency as had occurred. To Raj Sawh he expressed his deepest gratitude for the aid he had rendered, while Hermanas was presented with a fine double-barreled gun and an abundance of ammunition as a token of appreciation for the part he had played.

Both Eric and his father insisted that the Baboo must accompany them and visit Ratura, and the Hindu, who had become deeply interested in their affairs and was also anxious to see his newly-acquired cattle, readily consented to the plan.

When the party reached Ratura they found a crowd of negro laborers gathered before the house, their sullen looks and excited voices plainly indicating serious trouble of some sort.

“What’s the matter, why aren’t the men at work?” demanded Mr. Marvin, as the overseer approached with worried face.

“There’s trouble a-plenty, Mr. Marvin,” replied the man. “Las’ night the dryin’ sheds burn down and all the cocoa los’.”

Mr. Marvin gasped: “The cocoa and sheds gone!” he exclaimed in amazement. “How did such a catastrophe happen,—who’s responsible?”

The overseer shook his head. “I can’t say, sir,”

he replied, "it's mos' mysterious. Two, three time it catch fire since Mr. Eric left, sir, and each occasion when it raining hard. No one was near, an' I can't accoun' for it at all, sir. The men say as it's Obeah, Mr. Marvin, and they won't work, they all refuse, and say as how they deman' to be paid off and leave. They jes' awaitin' on you' comin', Mr. Marvin. I try to reason with them and tell how foolish they is, sir, but it's no use in the leas'; all the black men boun' to go, sir."

"What utter nonsense," cried Mr. Marvin. "How can the place be Obeahed? Why, these men have worked here right along,—they're well paid, and if they had any cause for complaint they know I'd listen to it, without getting up such an absurd excuse. Surely they can't believe the fire was supernatural."

"I can't say as to that, sir," replied the overseer. "They've had no complaint to make, Mr. Marvin, an' they say as how they sorry to leave you, sir. I no believer in Obeah or witchcraft or such humbuggin', but I a bit trouble' over the fire myself, Mr. Marvin. You see, the flame jus' burn up as if the rain light the roof of the shed, sir. Then some of the men foun' bones an' red rags tie' to the trees about the place an' half a dead cat under the ranges.

They say as how that means seven years' trouble, Mr. Marvin. They's a silly lot, but they don't work when the Obeah man been about, and he's put his marks on this place beyon' doubt, sir."

While the man had been speaking Mr. Marvin had been thinking rapidly. "I'll wager Leggett or some of his friends are at the bottom of this outrageous affair," he declared. "There's no witchcraft and nothing supernatural about it. The fire was caused by chemicals,—there are many substances that burst into flames when wet,—and the rags, bones and cat were left merely to frighten the men and cause them to think Obeah was at work. It's a dastardly attempt to cripple me and cause trouble and expense."

"No doubt, sir," agreed the overseer. "I'm quite prepared to remain here, Mr. Marvin, and the coolies will stay; they're Mohammedans and Hindus, an' don' fear Obeah. Perhaps *you* can induce the others to remain, sir."

But argument, explanations and ridicule were of no avail, the ignorant, superstitious blacks were convinced that the dreaded Obeah man or Witchdoctor was about, that the place was accursed, and that to disregard the warnings would result in disaster to themselves. To a man, they demanded the wages due, so that they could leave at once.

Raj Sawh had remained silent, but now he spoke. "To permit them to depart will most wisest be," he said. "They most stupid are, but with such brains of foolishness are they created. Gladly will I Hindu send you to labor in the places of these, for, as the driver-man most truly says, the Hindu possesses not of Obeah the afraidness."

"That's most kind of you, to help me out of this difficulty," declared Mr. Marvin. "You're certainly a friend in need. I regret I did not secure coolie labor in the beginning,—I'm thoroughly disgusted with these men. Luckily, we have enough hands left so that all work need not cease while we are awaiting the new laborers."

Addressing the overseer, he said, "Tell the men I'll make up the payroll at once and give them their money,—they can go back in the boats in which we arrived."

Half an hour later the last of the frightened crowd of blacks had departed, and Mr. Marvin, accompanied by Eric, Raj Sawh and the overseer, set forth to examine the damage caused by the mysterious conflagration.

"I wonder what's become of Hermanas?" remarked Eric, who suddenly noticed that the Indian had disappeared.

“He ran off a-carryin’ his gun, sir,” replied the overseer. “I expect he gone to the bush to try to shoot somethin’ for dinner, Mr. Eric.” Scarcely had he finished speaking when the distant report of a gun was heard.

“I guess you’re right,” agreed Eric. “He was awfully anxious to try his new gun.”

They had now reached the cocoa sheds, which lay in a heap of blackened ruins, while all about were scattered the charred bags and half-burned beans. Fully a thousand dollars’ worth of property had been destroyed, and the entire crop of cocoa had been lost, for Mr. Marvin had been holding the beans for a rise in the market.

It was a serious loss, and Eric took it to heart more than any one else, for the cocoa was his special pride, and now all his care and the labor of many weeks had been brought to naught by the incendiary. Raj Sawh quite agreed with Mr. Marvin’s conviction that Leggett or his friends had caused the fire, and while they were discussing the matter Hermanas arrived.

“What did you shoot at?” asked Eric, who saw that the Indian had no game.

“Me shootum man,” was the surprising reply.

“You shot a man!” exclaimed Mr. Marvin.

“What do you mean, Hermanas? Did you kill some one? Surely the rascal’s not around here.”

“Me tellum shootum, all same,” declared the Indian. “Seeum track makeum walk for bush. Make follow like huntum labba same way. Seeum man make walk for creek in canoe. Shootum like so, but no hitum. S’pose have blowgun me killum, sure.”

The others listened, astounded. There could be no doubt that a stranger had been in the vicinity, that Hermanas had trailed him to the creek and that the fellow had escaped in a canoe.

“I’ll bet he don’t come back in a hurry,” exclaimed Eric. “Too bad you didn’t pepper him, though. Where did you find his tracks?”

Hermanas led them to the rear of the burned sheds and pointed to the soft earth. Among the imprints of many bare feet were several marks of heavy-soled boots. No one on the estate wore boots save Mr. Marvin, Eric and the overseer; the tracks had evidently been made very recently, and as they were quite different from those made by the overseer’s shoes, all were convinced that Leggett or one of his friends had prowled about the place.

“I don’t believe he’ll come near while we are on hand,” remarked Mr. Marvin. “Hereafter, one of us must remain at the estate constantly, or the fel-

low may destroy more property while we are absent. I shall certainly take out an insurance policy at once to protect the company against any further loss.”

Nothing more could be done, and the party soon returned to the house, where dinner was awaiting them, and throughout the meal and during the evening the conversation was mainly of Leggett, the conspiracy and plans for the future.

Raj Sawh was to remain on the estate for some time, for he had sent a note to Georgetown, instructing his manager to secure the necessary Hindus for Ratura, and he kindly offered to wait until the new men arrived, when he would address them in Hindustani,—a procedure which he modestly admitted would no doubt influence their subsequent behavior.

In the meantime the Baboo looked over the estate, and he congratulated Mr. Marvin on what had been accomplished, and suggested many things which could be done to make the crops more remunerative. He also inspected the cattle, seemed greatly pleased with them, and jokingly told Eric that he felt really grateful to Davison, who had indirectly helped him to secure such a bargain.

In due time the coolies arrived, and the next day the Baboo announced his intention of departing on

the morrow. Mr. Marvin was anxious to go to Georgetown, also, but he disliked leaving Eric alone on the estate, for the fear that Leggett might return was constantly in his mind. He felt it was essential to take out an insurance on the property at once, however, and as Eric declared he was not the least bit nervous, and was quite able to look after himself and the estate as well, his father decided to accompany Raj Sawh to town. The new coolies worked well, the overseer spoke their tongue and seemed able to handle them without trouble, and Eric found little work to do.

Remembering Mr. Prince's theory as to why Davison and his fellows wanted Ratura, Eric determined to search the estate thoroughly and, in company with Hermanas, he wandered about, examining the earth and rocks. The Indian had once been to the gold diggings on the upper Cuyuni, and had often seen the "pork knockers"* hunting for the precious metal. With an old tin pan he showed Eric how they worked, and the two boys spent hours "panning" the sand in the beds of the Ratura streams. Eric had never seen this done, and was fascinated by the way in which the fine mud and sand disappeared as the pan was whirled about, un-

* Native gold diggers who wash out gold in a small way.

til only some coarse gravel and a few pebbles remained. Many of the pebbles thus revealed were delicately tinted and semi-transparent, and Eric, attracted by their oddity and beauty, saved several and placed them in a box among his other curios. But not a trace of "color" rewarded the boys' efforts, and Eric was soon convinced that no gold existed on the estate, or that if it was there he could not discover it.

The day before Mr. Marvin was expected to return Hermanas asked permission to visit his home and spend the night with his people. He was crazy to exhibit his new gun to his fellow Indians, and Eric readily gave his consent.

It was the first time that Eric was alone in the house at Ratura, but he was not in the least nervous or lonely and, dinner over, he settled himself in an easy chair and prepared to spend a pleasant evening with an interesting book.

CHAPTER XI

KIDNAPED

THE house servants had finished their tasks and had retired to the quarters, the last sounds of song and laughter had died away in the coolie ranges, and Ratura lay silent in the tropic night. The soft river breeze rustled the palm fronds and swept cool and refreshing through the bungalow, and from the open doors and windows of the living room broad beams of light streamed forth and threw a golden glow upon the wide gallery and the flowering vines outside.

Under the hanging lamp in the spacious room sat Eric Marvin, buried in his favorite book, oblivious to all else, and unconscious of the danger lurking close at hand.

Within the black shadows of the shrubbery crouched two dark forms. Slowly, cautiously, they crept forth, avoiding the patches of light that flecked the path, until the steps leading to the gallery were gained. Like savage beasts stalking their prey

they stole, inch by inch, up the stairs, and like great black serpents they slipped across the gallery towards the open door. Noiselessly they rose,—one on each side of the portal,—wild, savage figures, with fierce, bloodshot eyes, carefully gauging the distance between them and the unsuspecting boy. Then, lithe and swift as tigers, they leaped upon their victim.

So sudden and unexpected was their attack, so sure and swift their spring, that Eric uttered no cry, no sound. One moment he was reading beneath the brilliant light, the next he was half suffocated, blinded and enveloped in inky blackness as a heavy cloth descended and wrapped his head and shoulders in its folds. He strove to struggle, to kick, to free himself, but he was pinioned fast in the iron grip of gigantic black arms, and was as helpless as if within the coils of a huge serpent. He felt himself lifted from his chair, he was borne swiftly across the room, and he knew he was being carried down the gallery stairs.

Eric was terribly frightened; he knew not who his assailants were or their purpose in capturing him, and he was filled with terror at what might be in store. The cloth wrapped tightly about his head kept all sounds from his ears; not a word was spoken

by his captors as he was borne rapidly onward, and he could not even guess in which direction they were moving.

Presently he was placed upon some hard surface, ropes were tied about his wrists and ankles, and by the unsteady motion of his resting place he realized he was in a boat. Now and then, through the suffocating folds of cloth, he heard the rattle of paddles on gunwale, and once or twice he felt, rather than heard, rocks or tacubas bumping and grating along the bottom of the craft beneath him. His head swam and ached, his breath came in gasps and with an effort, his heart thumped and pounded, his veins seemed bursting, his ears roared and he knew that he was smothering,—dying a terrible, lingering death.

With all his failing strength he strove to cry out, to scream,—anything to relieve this awful torture, to cause his inhuman captors to kill him quickly or to give him air, but he was pitifully weak, and he realized that all attempts to make an audible sound were hopeless. Then the boat grated upon the shore, some one raised him to a sitting posture, and the cloth was snatched from his head.

With a great gasp of relief he once more felt the fresh night air fill his lungs, and he gulped it down

in deep, long breaths. How good it was, how little had he appreciated it before. New life coursed through him, and in the mighty relief of his sufferings his fear left him, and he all but forgot that he was still a bound and helpless captive, destined for some unknown fate.

Eric glanced about; it was very dark, but the stars shone brightly, and by their faint light he could see that there were six men in the canoe, which had been drawn upon the shore of a small rocky island in the center of a broad river. In the darkness the features of the men were not distinguishable, and Eric could only see that they were black, that they appeared to be naked, and that they wore no coverings upon their heads. Now and then he caught the glint of metal as the fellows moved about, and he heard them speaking in a language utterly unknown to him. He was sure they were not Indians,—they were too dark-skinned and too large for Bucks,—he could not believe them to be negroes, for they seemed too wild and savage and spoke a strange tongue, and he racked his brains in a vain attempt to solve the mystery of their identity.

He wondered why these strangers had seized him and carried him away from Ratura, where they were taking him, and what was to be done to him and,

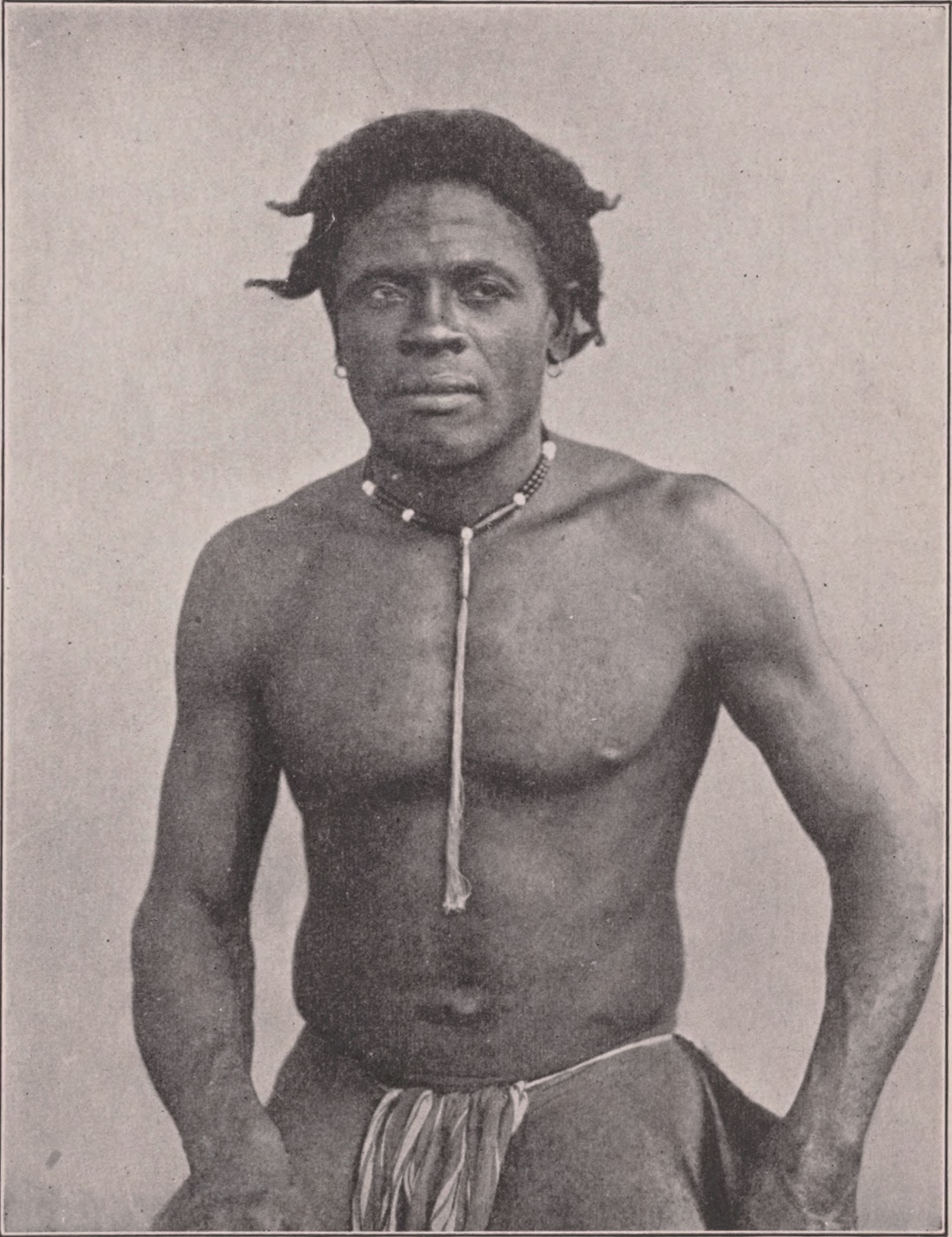
finally, mustering up all his courage, he addressed them, first in English, then in the jargon Hermanas used, and finally in the few words of Arekuna he had learned. But no reply was made to his inquiries, his captors laughed and chuckled at his anxious tones, and realizing that they either did not understand, or would not answer, Eric relapsed into silence.

Presently the canoe was shoved from the shore, the men grasped their paddles, and with long, powerful strokes the craft was forced rapidly onward through the night.

Hour after hour passed, mile after mile was left behind, and as the coming dawn brightened the eastern sky Eric knew that they were headed southward.

Rapidly the darkness fled before the rising sun, and Eric now saw his captors plainly for the first time. As the six men were revealed to him he could scarce believe his eyes, could scarce convince himself that it was not all some terrible vivid nightmare. Surely these wild, strange beings in the canoe could not be real, could not belong in Guiana,—they savored more of African wilds and cannibal feasts.

Black as ebony, gigantic in stature and naked save for loin cloths, they were splendid specimens of men. Upon their knotted, muscular arms and legs were



A Bush Negro with kinky hair braided into pigtails

wrapped coil after coil of bright brass and copper wire; their short, kinky hair was braided into innumerable tufts and pigtails; their teeth were filed to sharp points, and their fierce, wild faces were made hideous by great scars or welts filled with colored pigment.

Eric had never seen anything like them, he had never read descriptions or viewed pictures of such men, and he wondered if he was not suffering from some strange hallucination, some disorder of the brain brought on by the fright and suffering he had undergone.

But whoever they were, his strange captors did not intend that he should die of thirst or hunger, and presently they ran the light canoe ashore, lit a fire, and soon were roasting a joint of meat and several yams over the coals. Without a word being addressed to him Eric was given food and a cup of strong hot coffee and then, the meal over, the trip was resumed.

An hour passed by, the canoe slipped between scores of little rock-bound islets, great masses of strangely-worn, grotesque-shaped stones jutted upward from the water, there was an odd exhilarating feeling in the air, and Eric noticed that the canoe was being forced against a strong current. He had

no idea where he was, which river they were traversing or how great a distance had been covered since they left Ratura. Then a dull, subdued roar was borne to his ears; it grew louder and louder, and Eric, gazing ahead, saw a wall of tumbling, rushing white water stretching across the stream from shore to shore. Instantly it dawned upon him that they had reached the falls, that before them were the foaming rapids of the upper river, and that civilization, friends, father and help had been left miles and miles astern.

But he had little time for such dismal thoughts; already the canoe was bobbing and leaping to the eddying, racing water at the foot of the falls, and an instant later it was run close to a jutting rock and then some of the men sprang lightly ashore. Rapidly two long, light ropes were uncoiled, and one was attached to the boat's bow, the other to the stern. Seizing the bow line two of the men leaped into the boiling water and waded and swam to a ledge of rocks further upstream, while the one remaining on the shore secured a firm grip of the stern line. In the canoe one man stood at the bow, a huge paddle grasped firmly in his muscular hands, while at the stern stood another, with a great steering paddle in his grasp. Then at a shout from the

bowman, the men ahead strained at the rope, the other hauled on the stern line, the bowman paddled furiously, the steersman swung the stern this way and that. Loud roared the churning water against the boat's bow, higher and higher it seethed about the sides, as the men strained and tugged at the lines, exerting all their gigantic strength. For an instant the boat remained stationary, and then, with a lurch and a rush, it tore forward; human strength and skill conquered the power of the stream and a moment later the canoe floated safely upon a tranquil backwater above the falls.

In the excitement of the few tense moments Eric had forgotten his own troubles, his heart beat fast with the thrill of the battle with the stream, and he cheered lustily when the savage blacks won.

For an instant the fellows looked at him in amazement, then they broke into hearty laughter, one of them clapped Eric good-naturedly on the back, and after a few words in their odd tongue they unloosened the ropes which bound his hands.

Eric began to think that after all they were not so bloodthirsty and wild as he had thought from their appearance, and he began to wonder if it was not all some mad prank on the part of half-drunken negroes. But this theory was instantly rejected,

for the men were perfectly sober, no one would dream of carrying a joke so far, and no civilized man, white, black or brown, would have the hideous tattooing and the sharply-filed teeth of these strange beings. Then the memory of what the overseer had said about Obeah occurred to Eric. He knew nothing about Obeah, he had not the least idea what an Obeah man was like, but in a vague way he had heard of the strange form of witchcraft and it seemed to him that his captors might well be Obeah men. Certainly they were wild and weird enough, and the more he thought about the matter the more firmly he became convinced that he had been kidnaped by the Obeah men, and that Leggett was responsible for his predicament.

Meanwhile the canoe was being driven through the swift current, following crooked passages among the rocks, while all about the roaring water tore like a mill-race between the ledges. Then another fall was reached; once more the men hauled and strained at the ropes while buried to their shoulders in the torrent, and again smooth water was safely gained above the cataract.

A score of times the frail craft was seized by the current and despite every effort of the men was swung broadside to the swirling waters and carried

upon submerged rocks, where it hung as on a pivot. Each time Eric thought would be the last, each time he expected the canoe to capsize and to feel the waters closing above his head, but every time the men sprang instantly into the river, and half swimming, half wading, lifted the boat from the rocks and guided it into a safe channel.

Eric was amazed at the marvelous skill of the men, he was exhilarated with the excitement, and he tingled at the constantly recurring hair-breadth escapes from being dashed on the rocks.

As mile after mile of rapids were traversed, as innumerable falls and cataracts were safely passed, his interest waned, he became accustomed to the ever-present dangers, and the men's remarkable skill, and he wondered if the rapids would ever come to an end.

He had been under a fearful strain, he had suffered much, he had not slept, and he longed for rest and a chance to sleep. Nothing else seemed to matter, his brain was benumbed, he could not concentrate his thoughts and whither he was going or what his fate would be had ceased to trouble him.

By mid-forenoon the last falls were passed, a broad, smooth stretch of river lay ahead and, turning to one side, the men ran their craft close to

shore and presently passed through a screen of foliage and entered a tiny, hidden creek.

Here, safe from the sight of any passing boat, a shelter of palm leaves was built, hammocks were slung and camp was made, and the men prepared to spend the remainder of the day. Eric was given a hammock, and flinging himself into it instantly he dropped to sleep.

Late in the afternoon he was aroused by one of the men, and was given a hearty meal of fish, yams and game, and as darkness fell the hammocks were rolled and stowed in the boat, the fires were extinguished and once more the canoe slipped out from its hiding place and was headed up the river.

The men now began to talk to Eric,—to ask him questions, he judged by their tones,—but not a word of their uncouth jargon could he understand, and finally pillowing his head on the hammocks, he fell asleep. The sun was just rising when he awoke, and the canoe was threading its way up a narrow creek, and soon afterward the men again went into camp for the day.

For a week and more the trip up river continued, the men traveling by night and camping by day, and Eric lost all sense of direction, all idea of where they were. Several times the main stream had been

abandoned and branches followed; for many hours forest-lined creeks had been navigated until the canoe had come forth upon other large streams, while falls and rapids innumerable had been traversed.

Gradually the character of the country had changed. Rounded forest-clad hills had taken the place of the low, flat lands, and beyond these could be seen the loftier mountains. The thick jungle had been succeeded by more open forests of great trees, and in many places the earth beneath these was flooded and the canoe was paddled for mile after mile through the dim forest. On all the trip no human beings had been seen, not a boat met. Sometimes, in the dead of night, Eric heard the barking of dogs and knew an Indian village was being passed; or the distant glow of fires told him that camps of fellow human beings were near at hand. But his captors took no chances, and kept as far from such signs of mankind as possible, and skirting the opposite shores crept silently by in the shadows, while the fact that they traveled only at night reduced the chances of meeting boats to a minimum. Once or twice Eric had thought of shrieking for help as camps or villages were passed, but he realized that any such action might result in swift and awful

death or that the suffocating cloth might once more be wrapped about his head.

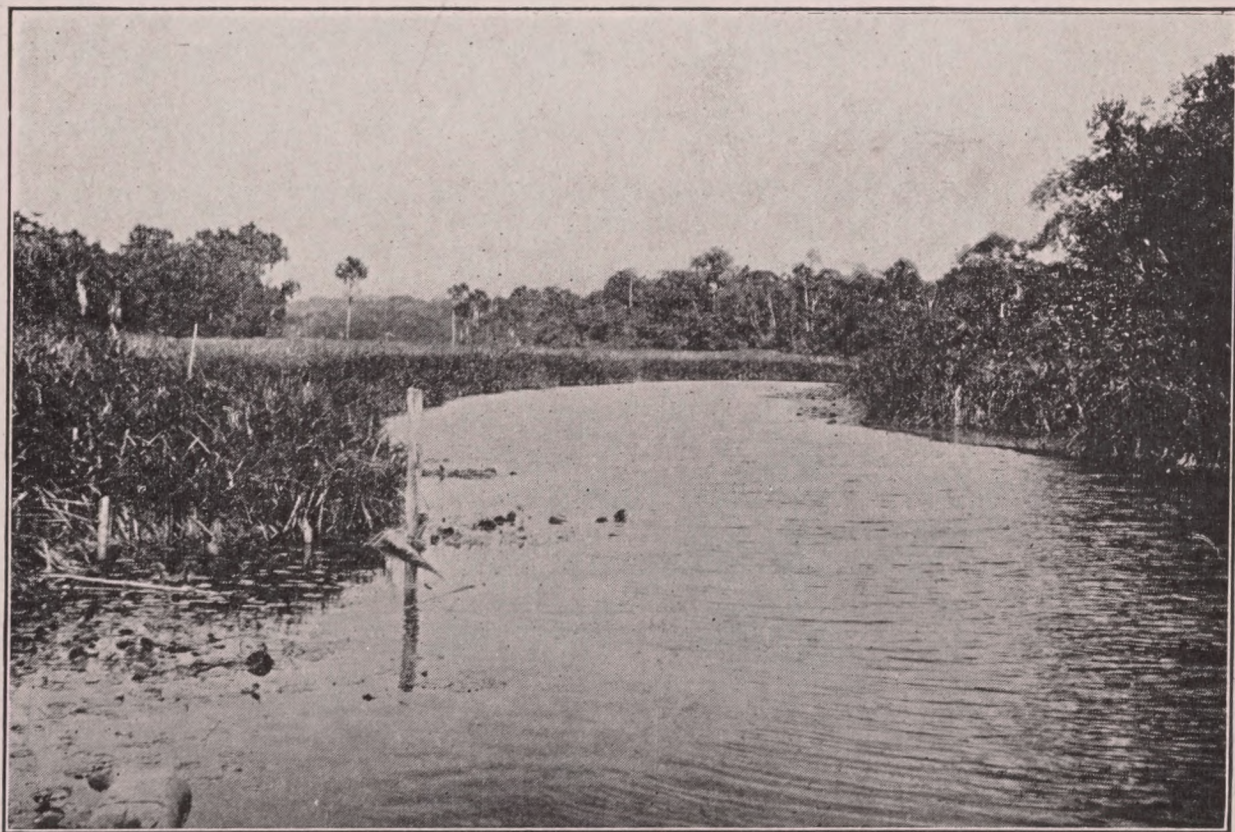
After the eighth night no signs of either camps or villages were seen or heard, only the vast forest stretched on every hand, and the men, seeming to know that they had reached the very heart of the primeval, uninhabited wilderness, went boldly on by daylight.

Two days later the forest began to recede from the river's banks; soon great areas of waving grass appeared, and on the twelfth day Eric looked upon wide savannas stretching like a sea of green to the cloud-like mountains on the horizon.

Through it the river wound in great, sinuous curves, and innumerable creeks led from the main river into the waving grass. Entering one of these the canoe pressed onward, swept by the rustling grass that rose for a dozen feet on either side and startled great flocks of water fowl from their haunts amid the reeds and lilies. Narrower and narrower became the creek and only the practiced eyes of the men could distinguish the channels, that choked with grass and weeds, seemed but a part of the savanna itself. Suddenly the canoe slipped from the weeds and shot forth upon the surface of a great lake, its further shores but dimly visible in the dis-



A broad smooth stretch of river lay ahead



Great areas of long grass appeared

tance. Following close to the shore the men paddled for an hour or more and, as they proceeded, Eric noticed that the ground rose higher and higher, that the grass became shorter and that shrubs, low bushes and clumps of trees grew here and there. Rapidly these increased in number, the grassy savanna receded, and by the next afternoon the canoe was once more within the forest and moving swiftly along a narrow creek, with the great lake and the savanna-lands far behind. Presently Eric realized that they were traveling downstream with the current, while hitherto they had been ever traveling against it, and it dawned upon him that they were following the outlet of the lake and must be headed back towards the coast.

At nightfall camp was made upon a low, sandy knoll, covered with great trees, and when the following day dawned Eric was greatly surprised to find that the men showed no signs of continuing on their way. Instead, they commenced felling trees and cutting palm leaves, and soon Eric discovered that they were preparing to build a large benab. He was consumed with curiosity to know what this meant,—if the men intended to remain here permanently,—and he tried to question his captors, but to no purpose, for they shook their heads, professing

not to understand, and continued diligently at the labors. By sundown the big shed-like house was complete, but the men did not occupy it, contenting themselves with the shelter of their rude camp, and adding to Eric's perplexity by this behavior and by the fact that throughout the night they kept a huge fire burning so brightly that it illuminated the forest for many yards and cast a deep ruddy glow upon the sky.

The following day they still remained in camp, one of them going forth with bow and arrows and returning with a labba and two powis. All through the day the men seemed happy and in good spirits, laughing, joking and singing weird songs, the while drinking copiously from a demijohn of liquor in the canoe. Eric feared that their savage passions would be aroused by the drink, that their good-natured frolic would become a mad orgy, and that he would be made a victim of some horrible cannibal feast, for only by such a theory could he account for the big benab, the great blazing fire and the dances and songs with which his captors were celebrating the occasion.

But his fears were groundless; the men refrained from over-indulgence and soon after nightfall all went quietly to their hammocks, save one who at-

tended to the big fire, and, greatly relieved, Eric at last fell into a troubled sleep.

He awoke with a start as a frenzied scream of agony and fear reverberated through the forest. Filled with mortal terror at the awful cry, he sprang from his hammock and gazed transfixed at the sight which met his uncomprehending eyes. Beside the fire one of the men was writhing in agony, clutching wildly at his neck and screaming, while all about the others were running, first one way, then another, chattering and yelling and beset with some awful fear. One darted towards the river and the boat, but before he covered a dozen steps he threw up his hands, stumbled forward and fell shrieking into the stream. At the sight the others turned and rushed back towards the forest, but again one uttered that awful cry and rolled upon the earth. The three remaining now cowered trembling for an instant, and then a slender tufted object appeared to spring as by magic from the chest of one, and at his scream the others fled madly towards the canoe, stumbling across the corpses of their fellows as they ran. The foremost fell just as the boat was reached, but the other leaped in, cast loose the painter and shoved the canoe from shore, only to fall back in his death

throes as another dart buried itself in his back.

It was all so sudden, so amazing, so like a nightmare, that Eric stood riveted to the spot. Dimly he realized that the men had fallen victims to the awful Wurali-tipped darts of an Indian's blowgun, but not a sound betrayed the presence of an enemy, and who or where the unseen assassin might be he could not surmise. He was alone, free and unguarded; his six captors had been wiped out of existence in a few brief seconds, but he was helpless in the midst of an unknown wilderness with no boat, no means of reaching civilization, and each moment he expected to feel a poisoned arrow bury itself in his own flesh. But to move was useless; he had seen how futile were the others' attempts to flee, and he stood there motionless awaiting his fate.

Suddenly from the silence of the forest came the clear, querulous cry of a goatsucker. Eric turned at the sound, and the next second uttered a glad shout of happiness and surprise. From the shadows of the trees stepped four naked Indians, their faces daubed with white and scarlet, long blowguns in their hands, and cases of poisoned arrows slung over their shoulders, but despite the war paint which hid his features, Eric recognized the leader as Hermanas.

CHAPTER XII

THE ESCAPE

UPON the unknown upper reaches of the Corantyne River, Leggett sat in the stern of a canoe propelled by four stalwart Bush Negroes. It was night and far ahead a lurid glow could be seen upon the sky. "That's their signal fire all right," muttered the solitary passenger to himself. "They've got the kid safe enough and pretty close on time too. Lucky old Sarmacca knew that hidden lake and the way across to the Essequibo. Well, everything comes to him who waits. Reckon it's my innings now and we'll just about have that sneaking Marvin where we want him. Perhaps he won't get down on his knees and come to terms when he knows his kid's in our hands."

Presently the light began to fade, the glow left the sky and no beacon remained to guide the boatmen. Leggett cursed loudly and fluently. "Hang those lazy, sleepy niggers," he exclaimed. "Just like 'em to go to sleep or get drunk and let the fire burn out."

But in the starlight the river was easily followed, the camp would not be hard to find, and the men paddled onward through the darkness in silence. Suddenly one of them uttered a cry of surprise and swung the craft sharply to one side, for his keen eyes had detected an apparently empty canoe floating down the stream. An instant later they were alongside; the bowman reached forward to secure the painter and the next second tumbled backward with a cry of terror. Face down upon the bottom of the derelict was the form of a Bush Negro with a poisoned arrow between his shoulder blades. Leggett reached into the drifting canoe and turned the dead man over. It was the body of Sarmacca, the chief of the gang which had kidnaped Eric, and with a curse Leggett let the corpse drop back, and casting loose the canoe, ordered his men to hurry on at all speed. Within ten minutes the glowing coals of dying fires were seen among the trees, and, running the canoe upon the bank, Leggett leaped ashore, closely followed by his men. Stumbling over the bodies of two more of their fellows they dashed forward to the benabs, only to find the camp lifeless and deserted and to see the dead bodies of the three other men sprawled in awful, grotesque attitudes where they had fallen. Leggett was furious. He

had spent much money and a great deal of time and had undergone many hardships and not a little suffering to capture Eric and bring him to this remote and secret spot in the great unknown, unexplored district between the headwaters of the Corantyne and Berbice Rivers. All had gone well; the Bush Negroes sent forward from the wilds of Surinam had reached Ratura unseen; had captured Eric and had returned with him in safety. Their fire had guided Leggett from his hidden camp on the Corantyne to the prearranged meeting place in the forest and he had felt confident that Eric was at last within his grasp and had looked forward to gloating over him with keen anticipation.

And now, at the very moment of his triumph, the boy had escaped, his savage bushmen had been killed to a man, and among the dead was Sarmacca, the only man who knew the hidden channels through the savanna to the uncharted lake and hence to the upper Essequibo.

How the rescue had been carried out, how his men had been trailed to this remote spot, Leggett could not guess, but there was no question as to who had been responsible for it. The poisoned blowgun darts told the story as plainly as words, and Leggett had not the slightest doubt that Hermanas had formed

one of the party of Indians. It was the second time he had been balked by the Buck boy, and he swore vengeance, and vowed not to rest until he had destroyed the Indian. It was useless to attempt to track the rescue party through the forest at night, for he and his men could be picked off by unseen Indians without the least chance of resistance. Even as they stood there by the empty benab they were exposing themselves to the gravest danger and, realizing this, Leggett hurried his crew back to the canoe, shoved the craft from land and paddled to a safe hiding place on the opposite shore of the stream.

His very helplessness added to Leggett's fury and he cursed and swore, abused his men in the vilest words of their "talkee-talkee," and strove to drown his discomfiture by copious draughts of raw rum.

Had he known how little real harm had been done by his attempt to burn Ratura and drive off the laborers, he would have gone absolutely mad. But he had received no word from the Boviander, to whom this work had been delegated, and he little dreamed that the fellow was at that moment lying helpless in his hut on Kurei Creek, whence he had fled after being riddled with bird shot from Hermanas' gun. At last even Leggett's stock of blasphemy was ex-

hausted, the rum calmed his anger somewhat, and he realized that, if anything was to be accomplished, he must act rationally and must plan for the future. He was a skilled woodsman and before taking charge of Ratura had followed the calling of a Balata-bleeder, and knew much of this unexplored portion of Guiana which no other white man had ever penetrated. That the Indians could have followed the Bush Negroes' canoe over the intricate watercourse and had approached the camp by boat, seemed improbable. More likely, he thought, they had left their craft on some well-known creek or river and had cut across the divide through the bush to head off the kidnapers on their journey down the Corantyne, and his first idea was to follow their trail and strive to overtake them ere they gained their canoe. But this scheme he at once abandoned as he realized how utterly hopeless it was. By morning, no doubt, the Indians would be many miles away; he knew them too well to expect to come upon them unawares, and he shivered as he thought of the fate that would befall him if the Arekunas suspected he was on their trail, and should lay in wait for him and his men. More than all, if the Indians succeeded in reaching their boats in safety, he would be unable to follow; and finally he decided that the only course left open

was to make all speed possible by boat, trusting to luck and instinct to thread the canals through the savanna, and then, if chance favored, surprise the Indians in one of their camps upon the upper Essequibo.

The only drawback to this plan was the possibility of going astray in the labyrinth of waterways that lay between the Corantyne and the rivers to the west, and he felt that if he succeeded in navigating these in safety his chances for overtaking Eric and his friends were excellent. Probably, he reasoned, the Indians knew nothing of the kidnapers' plans; they would never dream that he was close at hand and, having accomplished their purpose and rescued Eric, they would take their time in going down to Ratura and would fail to keep a sentry on watch for enemies in their rear.

Somewhat cheered and encouraged by these thoughts Leggett aroused his men, and before day dawned was far above the fatal camp upon the knoll. Luck favored him, and by broken and bent branches, the remains of camps and the marks left by the passage of the other canoe through the savanna, his men followed the course taken by Eric's captors and reached the lake and came out at last upon the upper reaches of the Essequibo in safety.

In the meantime Eric and his Arekuna friends were making their way swiftly through the great forest. Behind them lay the camp with the dead Bush Negroes, over whose bodies the vultures were already fighting, and before them lay the headwaters of the rivers that led to Ratura and home.

No time had been lost in getting away, once Eric's captors had been destroyed, for the light which had guided Hermanas and his friends to the Bush Negroes' camp had aroused the suspicions of the Arekunas, for they knew such a fire must be kindled for some purpose and surmised that it was a signal agreed upon to summon others to the camp.

They had surprised the kidnapers in the night, had accounted for them all with their Wurali-tipped darts, but they had no desire to run the risk of facing others, while encumbered with the white boy, and their one idea was to reach their canoe and dash down stream as rapidly as possible. Eric was an excellent walker, he had been hardened and toughened by his out-of-doors life, but every ounce of his strength, every atom of his energy and all his fortitude were required to enable him to keep pace with the Arekunas on this forced march through the wilderness. It seemed as if his aching, tired legs could no longer support him, as if he must sink down by

the way, as if he would succumb to utter exhaustion; but still he kept doggedly on, spurred forward by the fear of those who might be close in the rear and ashamed to let Hermanas know of his weakness. All through the forest night they tramped on; dawn found them still hurrying forward and, save for a brief stop at noon to eat, they continued on their weary journey until nightfall.

Then camp was made and Eric threw himself upon the earth utterly exhausted, while the Indians rapidly prepared a meal and then extinguished the fires so that their lights might not betray the presence of their camp. As they had trudged along Hermanas had given Eric a rough outline of the events which had transpired since he was captured and now that they were in camp for the night he related the whole story in detail. Tired and sleepy as Eric was, yet he became wide awake and forgot his weary limbs as he listened to the stirring tale of almost superhuman endurance and savage cunning told by the Indian boy in his quaint, matter-of-fact jargon.

Hermanas, it seemed, had returned to Ratura from his home early in the morning to find the house servants and the hands in an uproar. They had found the light still burning in the living room, the easy chair overturned, and Eric's book lying upon

the floor, and further investigation showed that his bed had not been occupied. At first they feared some wild animal had attacked and carried him off, but there were no signs of blood, no tracks of beasts of prey, and instantly their simple minds had reverted to the Obeah signs and they became convinced that Eric had been spirited away by supernatural means. Then Hermanas had discovered muddy footprints on the steps and floors; he had traced them along the path to the creek and by their depth and their position had deduced that they had been made by two strangers who were carrying some heavy object. Nothing was missing save Eric himself, and hurriedly calling his tribesmen to aid him, Hermanas had started forth in chase of the kidnapers. He reasoned that they would not go down river; the fact that they were barefooted assured him they were not Europeans, and at the close of the day he had discovered the remains of their first camp.

Then, for the first time, Hermanas realized that the abductors of his chum were neither Indians nor common negroes, for at their camp he picked up a broken arrow which he recognized as belonging to the wild Bush Negroes of Surinam.

The Indians were amazed at this discovery, for

there were no Bush Negroes in British Guiana and they knew that those who had captured Eric must have come from the far-off Dutch boundary. Hermanas had heard vague rumors of a great inland lake from which both the Corantyne and Berbice rivers flowed, and he knew that waterways connected the Essequibo with the Berbice. Thus he reasoned that the raiders must have reached Ratura by this route, and that they would return the same way.

It would be hopeless to attempt to overtake the Bush Negroes by water, especially as the Arekunas knew nothing definite of the lake or the channels to and from it, and they decided upon a bold scheme. This was to cut across the country through the bush and thus reach the Corantyne ahead of the Bush Negroes, where they could lie in wait for them. But to attempt an overland trip at the point where the Bush Negroes had first camped was out of the question,—the distance was too great and the difficulties insurmountable, and the Arekunas determined to proceed as rapidly as possible to the headwaters of the Berbice and then tramp through the comparatively narrow strip of forest to the Corantyne.

No time was lost by hauling their craft up the rapids; instead they followed a portage around them, carrying their canoe on their shoulders. Then,

snatching their food as they traveled, they hurried forward day and night. Twice they hailed Indian camps and asked for news and while the inhabitants had seen nothing of the Bush Negroes or their boat, yet the fact that their dogs had barked during the nights assured Hermanas that the abductors had passed that way. At many of the falls there were no portages, and in such places the Arekunas had abandoned their boat, tramped around the rapids and had secured new canoes from Indian camps beyond.

Throughout the trip camp was never made,—the Indians taking turns sleeping in the canoe, and securing provisions at the camps they passed. At one spot they spied a wisp of smoke rising from the jungle and, investigating, found a camp so recently abandoned that the fire was still smoldering. At this discovery Hermanas felt assured that the Bush Negroes were but a short distance ahead and that it would be easy to head them off on the Corantyne. At last the flooded forest and the numerous creeks were reached, and not knowing which channel the fugitives had taken, the Arekunas abandoned the chase, and following a creek they knew, passed through to the divide where they started on their overland trip. Then one night they saw the lurid

glare of the beacon fire and, hurrying forward, crept upon the unsuspecting camp, and, hiding in the trees, picked off the kidnapers with their poisoned darts.

Neither Hermānas nor Eric doubted that Leggett or his fellow conspirators instigated the raid which had so nearly proved successful, for they knew that Davison had gone to Paramaribo and that Leggett had no doubt fled the country and probably knew where to find his friends. Moreover, it was inconceivable that the Bush Negroes should have made the amazing trip from Dutch Guiana into the heart of the British colony to capture Eric without the promise of great reward for, wild as they were, they were not hostile, and years before had abandoned the savage raids which had made them dreaded by whites and Indians alike.

Convinced that this was the case and that Leggett himself, or one of his confederates, would follow close on their trail when Eric's escape and the death of the negroes was discovered, the Arekunas maintained a strict watch throughout the night and at dawn again resumed the weary march through the forest.

But the worst of the journey was over and before midday the edge of the jungle was reached and the

canoe was found undisturbed where it had been hidden. Once upon the river and speeding swiftly northward with the current the Indians felt comparatively safe, but they took no chances and hugged the shores while ever maintaining a sharp lookout astern. There were no signs of pursuers, however; nothing disturbed their camp that night and the second day passed safely by. Little effort was required to make good time down the stream, for the current ran swiftly; they flashed through rapids at a speed which fairly took Eric's breath away, and only when taking short cuts through the innumerable creeks were the men obliged to exert themselves at the paddles. The relief and rest were welcome, indeed, for the Arekunas had endured a terrific strain on their trip to rescue Eric, and every man was wearied to the point of utter collapse. At last the Essequibo was reached, the unknown wilderness had been left behind, no pursuing boat had been sighted, and all felt that danger was over.

Camp was made within the shelter of a small creek as usual that night, and at sunrise the canoe crept forth to resume its way towards Ratura. Scarcely had the prow issued from the foliage that screened the creek when the bowman uttered a low cry of warning and alarm; within two hundred yards and

rapidly approaching was a canoe, manned by four naked blacks, and in its stern sat Leggett!

To retreat within the creek was useless; a shout from the Bush Negroes told they had been seen. Their only hope of escape lay in speeding down the river, and without an instant's hesitation the Arekunas dug their paddles into the water and dashed away.

Twice Leggett raised his gun to fire at the fleeing Indians, but the canoe was dancing crazily upon the river; it was impossible to secure a steady aim and, confident that he would soon overtake the fugitives, he contented himself with waiting and cursing his crew to redoubled efforts.

In speed the two boats were almost equal, for Leggett's craft, though heavier than that of Hermanas, was handled by men who have no equals as river boatmen, while the superior knowledge of channels and currents possessed by the Indians was more than offset by the fact that they had undergone great hardships and were in need of rest and sleep, whereas the Bush Negroes were fresh and in the pink of condition.

It was a mad, wild race and much as Eric feared the result, yet he thrilled with the excitement, and, grasping a spare paddle, did his utmost to add a

little to the canoe's speed. Now and again he glanced furtively back and each time he realized that the space between the two craft was rapidly decreasing.

Onward they swept; now they rounded a sharp bend, anon they dashed diagonally across the stream, the Indians taking advantage of every current, every eddy to aid them in their flight, while close in their wake hung the sharp-prowed Surinam canoe following their every turn and ever creeping closer and closer.

Each second Eric expected to hear the roar of Leggett's gun, to feel the sting of shot or ball, and then it dawned upon him that his pursuer could not fire without endangering his own men,—that as long as he was compelled to follow bow on, the Indians were safe from his gun, and that to swing his boat side to and fire at the fugitives would mean such a loss of time that there would be no hope of overtaking the Arekunas' craft.

But despite this Eric knew that the end must soon come,—even now the distance between the two canoes had been lessened by half, and in another half hour Leggett's boat would be alongside and resistance would be hopeless. Even as these thoughts came to him, he heard the roar of falls ahead; the

canoe leaped forth like a frightened bird at the drag of the current and an instant later they were tearing madly, furiously through the rapids, grazing jagged rocks, leaping over miniature cataracts, grinding over submerged reefs and escaping annihilation by a miracle, while all about the water was churned to foam that dashed high in air in showers of spray. The boat jumped, rocked, swung dizzily, whirled like a teetotum and water poured over the gunwale; but unflinchingly, steadily the Indians kept on, the bowman perched aloft on the sweeping, swaying stem, and the men plying their paddles furiously to add to the boat's terrific speed.

Eric strove to glance back and in the seething torrent behind caught a fleeting glimpse of Leggett's boat gleaming black amid the white water and leaping after them like a thing of life.

The next instant they swept through a narrow channel between two islets, and Hermanas shouted to Eric to hold fast, that they were about to try a final and perilous expedient to escape. Hardly had he uttered his few terse words of warning when the frail canoe swept past the islands and into an area of smooth open water from which two channels led. Into the left of these dashed the Arekunas, and Eric's heart seemed to cease beating as he saw that

the canoe was headed for the brink of a cataract. The roar of falling water filled his ears, clouds of spray rose above the spot where the river appeared to drop into space, and Eric knew that their chances of life after plunging over the falls were not one in ten thousand.

But he felt perfect confidence in his Indian friends. If they could take the risk, so could he, and he gripped the sides of the boat, crouched low and with compressed lips awaited the sickening drop.

Now the verge of the cataract was close at hand, the smooth green crest seemed almost within arm's reach and then, with all their power, the men backed-water furiously, the bowman strained at his paddle, the canoe spun about as on a pivot, and it darted to one side so close to the verge that Eric could see the tumbling, churning waters and the jagged rocks full fifty feet below. Then, ere he realized what had occurred, the canoe was swept in safety to a quiet backwater to the right of the cataract.

In the meantime, Leggett's men, intent upon the chase, had not noticed their danger 'till too late;—they did not know the eddy which allowed them to check their mad rush as did the Indians, and as the

Arekunas' canoe reached the backwater the pursuers were swept onward to destruction.

Although Hermanas' ruse had succeeded, the fugitives did not escape unscathed, for as the Bush Negroes flung themselves from their canoe and strove in vain to save themselves by swimming, Leggett leveled his gun and fired. At the report the Arekuna bowman threw up his hands and staggering back plunged lifeless into the river, while his murderer, with a shout of triumph and a curse, shot over the brink of the cataract and into the maelstrom beneath.

CHAPTER XIII

KENAIMA

LEGGETT escaped death by a veritable miracle. His canoe shot far beyond the tumbling mass of water and landed right side up between the jagged rocks, and an instant later was swept unhurt down the river. But he had not escaped unseen, for the Arekunas had leaped ashore and hurrying to the brink of the cataract peered into the aybss to learn the fate of their pursuers. From the hunted the Indians had been instantly transformed to the hunters by the death of their fellow, for tribal law demanded that he must be avenged. If Leggett came to his end in the falls all was well—the Great Spirit had taken the matter from their hands—but if by chance he survived he must be followed, tracked down, and blood vengeance obtained in full.

No court of justice would be resorted to; no white men's laws invoked. By the methods established through untold centuries of tribal custom, by tradition sacred to their minds, there was but one way in

which the debt could be paid—death at the hands of the Kenaima, or Avenger of Blood.

And when, from the turmoil and the spray, the Arekunas saw the black form of the boat emerge with Leggett, white-faced, terror-stricken and half-stunned, crouching upon the bottom, a subdued cry of joy and exultation sprang from the Indians' throats.

For a moment the Surinam canoe gyrated wildly in dizzying circles within the grip of the whirlpools below the falls and then, seized by the current, it was swept clear and darted out of sight beyond a bend in the stream.

Satisfied that Leggett still lived, the Arekunas returned to their boat, covered the body of their slain comrade with broad leaves, and, bearing their dead, paddled from the scene of the tragedy. By swift-flowing channels between the rocks the canoe slipped down the river and ever and anon, as the Arekunas talked together, Eric caught the word "Kenaima." So great had been their danger, so swiftly had death come to both enemies and friends, that Eric had sat silent, dazed, awed and confounded. But now he spoke, enquiring of Hermanas if Leggett had been killed, expressing his sorrow at the death of the young bowman and complimenting the Indians

upon the success of their daring trick which had enabled them to escape.

When he learned that Leggett had survived, that he was unhurt and had been carried down the river ahead of them in his canoe, he felt that still more dangers must be faced and that Leggett would lie in wait for them, and his heart sank.

But Hermanas laughed at his fears; and in positive tones declared: "Me tellum Leggett all same dead like so. Kenaima must for killum. No can makeum walk from Kenaima. Mebbe long time, mebbe same day, all same Kenaima catchum."

Eric did not understand. "What *do* you mean by Kenaima?" he asked.

Hermanas spoke rapidly to his two companions and then addressing Eric, replied: "You good friend, all same Buckman,—all same brother. Me tellum how makeum Kenaima for killum." Then, as he plied his paddle and the canoe shot swiftly down the river, Hermanas told Eric of the Indians' code of vengeance. He explained how blood must be paid by blood; how Arekuna law demanded an eye for an eye, a life for a life,—aye more, for not only must he who slayed another be killed, but all his relations must also pay the penalty

of his act. He related tales of whole families wiped out through this law and of tribes decimated by the feud of blood vengeance. In his crude, broken English he described the Kenaima—the one selected to wreak vengeance for the slain—how there were various kinds of Kenaimas, the commonest of which were the “Camudi Kenaima,” and the “Tiger Kenaima,” and how they killed their victims; the first by strangling like his namesake, the great boa or camudi; the other by striking them down like a tiger by means of a short club of heavy wood. He dilated upon the impossibility of any one escaping from the Kenaima, and the patient, unceasing, unremitting determination with which the avenger trailed the doomed man for weeks, months, or years, if need be, until the execution was accomplished.

“But don’t the Kenaimas get killed?” asked Eric, who had listened spellbound to the vivid dramatic description of the Indian.

“Mebbe some time make for killum,” replied Hermanas. “Spose killum one Kenaima, other Kenaima make for catchum same way. Me tellum no good try for run from Kenaima; Kenaima he all same like Hori.”*

“And a Kenaima will follow Leggett?” asked

* A devil or supernatural creature.

Eric. "Ugh! I wouldn't want to be in his shoes. He'd better have been killed in the falls."

Hermanas nodded. "When gettum Buck camp, makeum Kenaima," he remarked, and relapsed into silence.

While the Indian had been talking, the canoe had been sweeping past wooded shores, but no sign of Leggett or his craft were seen, for the river forked just below the falls and the Arekunas had descended the right-hand stream, while Leggett had been carried to the left.

By midday the Indians' canoe had passed the rapids; it floated upon a broad, tranquil, lake-like expanse of river, and paddling rapidly across this the Arekunas entered a small creek. For several miles the stream wound through the forest and then a small clearing was reached with an Indian logi upon the bank. Here the canoe was run ashore and Hermanas and his two tribesmen uttered a long, mournful, wailing cry. An instant later a score of Indians came hurrying towards the boat, and in excited tones and with many exclamations held converse with the new arrivals. Then, reverently lifting the body of the dead Indian from the bottom of the canoe, they moved rapidly up the trail, with Eric following in the rear.

Every one was too busy, too excited, too angry to pay any attention to the white boy, and Eric sat alone in a hammock in a benab, watching the Indians, who buzzed and swarmed about the hut wherein the body had been placed, like so many angry bees.

At last order was restored, the people quieted down, and presently the dead Indian was carried forth, a deep grave was dug in the sand beyond the village; he was placed within and rapidly covered over, and while the women and girls went about preparing the evening meal the men gathered in a large benab. Hermanas now approached and explained to Eric that a Kenaima was being selected, for, as the dead man had no male relatives to avenge him, the duty fell upon the tribe as a whole, and one member would be chosen as a Kenaima by drawing lots.

Eric was most anxious to witness the ceremony, but Hermanas assured him this was impossible, that friendly as the Arekunas were towards him and much as they had risked to rescue him, no white man would be permitted to go near the council or to see the secret ceremonies that would follow.

As Hermanas was too youthful to take part in the selection of the Kenaima, he remained with Eric,



In one hand he grasped a bow and arrow, in the other a club of carved wood

and presently the men in the neighboring benab rose and separated. One man remained, and Hermanas whispered that he was the Kenaima, that ere darkness fell he would set forth on his mission and that Leggett's fate was sealed. Presently the Kenaima disappeared behind a screen of plaited palm leaves, and the two boys gave their attention to the food now spread before them.

Suddenly a low, chanting song issued from the Kenaima's benab, and, glancing up, Eric beheld a strange and striking figure stepping from behind the palm-leaf screen. His bronze skin was daubed with white, black and scarlet; he wore a kirtle of long black powi feathers, a girdle of bright beads was about his waist, a necklet of teeth was draped across his chest and shoulders, strings decorated with toucans' breasts hung down his back and upon his blue-black hair was a magnificent halo-like feather crown of blue and yellow feathers above which waved three long scarlet plumes from a macaw's tail. In one hand he grasped a long bow and arrows, in the other he bore a short and heavy club of carved wood, and as he stalked majestically from his benab he chanted a low song in which the other Indians joined. The Kenaima reached the edge of the clearing, instantly the chant ceased and the Kenaima halted

and faced the setting sun. Dropping his bow and arrows and club he drew his knife, scratched his arms until the blood flowed, and plucking a broad red leaf from a nearby plant, he rubbed it upon the wounds. Then, removing his feather crown and placing it upon his bow and arrows, he seized his club, uttered the hair-raising scream of the jaguar and with a bound disappeared in the jungle.

Eric had watched the ceremonies and dramatic departure of the Kenaima with the deepest interest and now, turning to Hermanas, he asked why the Kenaima had left his bow and arrows and crown and why he had cut his arms and had rubbed them with the leaves.

The Indian boy explained that the leaf was a "beena" or charm to bring good luck and success in the undertaking; that, choosing the rôle of "Tiger Kenaima" rather than "Camudi Kenaima," the man had carried the club as his sole weapon, and that by discarding the crown and bow and arrows he had signified that he left friends, family and home life behind, and abandoned all thought of the chase or of pleasures until his mission was accomplished and he returned to the spot from which he departed.

Now that the Kenaima had gone the Indians resumed their usual ways, and the evening meal over,

they retired to their hammocks as if nothing unusual had occurred.

At daybreak the journey was resumed, an Indian from the village taking the place of the dead bowman, and soon the canoe was once more speeding down the river towards Ratura. Day after day, they swept onwards, running rapids by the score, paddling through broad reaches of tranquil water between the falls, and each hour drawing nearer to civilization. Many an Indian camp and village was passed and many stops were made to secure provisions or to hunt game. The Arekunas laughed and sang, they chanted refrains that marked time to the beat of their paddles and they gave no heed to the chances of meeting Leggett. At sundown they made camp; at dawn they started forth and one day was so like another that Eric lost all count of time. At last signs of civilization appeared. Canoes and corials were met or passed, a little launch was seen puffing up the river, cleared areas appeared along the banks and the scattered buildings of Rockstone were sighted on the opposite shore.

Only one stretch of falls now remained and, in the hope of reaching Ratura the next morning, the Indians decided to run the rapids at night instead of camping as usual. Eric had grown so accustomed

to the boat, had become so used to running rapids and had acquired such a supreme confidence in the Arekunas' skill and knowledge that he felt no fear and made no protest when he learned of their plan. Lulled by the subdued roar of the rushing stream, rocked by the swaying boat and happy in the thought that the journey was almost done, he curled up in the canoe and ere half the rapids had been passed was sound asleep.

He was aroused by a lusty shout from Hermanas and but half awake raised his head and glanced wonderingly about. It was still black dark, wooded shores rose close ahead and lights glimmered through the foliage. With a grating sound the canoe ran upon a sandy beach, there was a glad cry in a hearty voice that Eric knew well, and the next instant he was clasped in his father's arms.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SECRET OF RATURA

ERIC was received like one risen from the dead. In fact no one save Mr. Marvin and Raj Sawh had expected ever to see him again, but neither his father nor the Baboo had abandoned hope; both were convinced that Eric had been spirited away by Leggett or his hirelings to be held for ransom, and they both expected that a demand for the boy's redemption would be received soon.

Upon Mr. Marvin's return to Ratura he had been met with the tale of his son's disappearance, and was almost prostrated by the news and blamed himself for having left Eric alone on the estate. Then he was told of Hermanas' departure with the three Arekunas and he felt somewhat relieved, for he knew that none had better chances of finding and rescuing Eric than the Indians. He at once sent word to the Bartica police and dispatched long letters to both Mr. Prince and Raj Sawh, acquainting them with the facts and asking them to enlist the

services of the Georgetown authorities in the search.

Raj Sawh spared neither trouble nor expense, and Mr. Prince brought all his knowledge and influence into play to gain tidings of the missing boy.

Rewards were offered, notices were posted throughout the colony and messages were sent far and near to every outlying police station between the Northwest and the Corantyne and from the Brazilian border to the coast. Over the cables word was flashed to Paramaribo, Venezuela and Brazil, and everywhere a strict watch was maintained on each boat that came or went upon the rivers.

Then, having done all in his power, Mr. Marvin strove to be patient and to maintain a cheerful, hopeful demeanor while awaiting news of his son. But it was a fearful blow, and as the days dragged by he began to lose heart; he brooded day and night over his terrible loss and only the timely arrival of the Baboo saved him from an utter nervous breakdown.

Raj Sawh was a fatalist and an optimist combined. He was a Hindu, to be sure, an idolater and a pagan; but, despite all this, he possessed a sublime faith, a kindness of heart, a devotion to friends and an utter unselfishness such as few Christians can boast.

His companionship was welcome indeed to Mr. Marvin in his time of trouble, and the Baboo's unfailing cheerfulness, his firm conviction that Eric would return safely, and his absolute faith in all turning out well did much to revive Mr. Marvin's spirits. But as the days dragged into weeks and no tidings were received of either Eric, Hermanas or Leggett, even the Hindu began to be assailed by doubts. Then late one night, as the two men sat together in the gallery, they heard a glad shout from the river and hurrying to the landing found Hermanas and his Indians just running their canoe upon the beach. For an instant Mr. Marvin's heart almost ceased beating and he steeled himself to hear the worst and then a ragged, unkempt form rose from the boat and with a hoarse cry of unutterable joy he rushed forward. His son had returned!

It was a triumphal procession that marched up the shaded pathway from the landing place to the bungalow. The news of Eric's return had spread as if by magic, and coolie laborers, Indian woodcutters, house servants and overseer swarmed from their quarters; some carrying lanterns, others bearing flaring torches of resinous wood, and all shouting, laughing and crying by turns. They gathered about Eric and his rescuers as about conquering

heroes and Eric, gazing at the circle of happy, delighted, dark faces, felt a lump rise in his throat at the joy these faithful folk showed at his return.

Late as it was no one thought of going to bed; the cook busied herself preparing a sumptuous meal, the grounds were illuminated by torches and lanterns innumerable, and soon the deep boom of a Hindu drum echoed through the tropic night and the coolies celebrated the home coming by strange Oriental dances.

To his father and the Baboo, Eric related the story of his adventures and his hearers listened spell-bound to the tale.

“It’s the most marvelous thing I’ve ever heard,” declared Mr. Marvin, as Eric finished his story. “The man must be absolutely mad to conceive of such a desperate scheme. It’s worthy of being ranked with the most daring exploits of the old Buccaneers.”

“The mostly regretted incident are Leggett his escape managed,” remarked Raj Sawh. “Truly fate must in reserve a more suitable dying for him have. But it matters not what of him becomes. For the matter at the time present we must most highly rejoice, that Sahib Eric his safe return has accomplished.”

“I wouldn’t have accomplished it without Hermanas’ help,” declared Eric. “If he hadn’t arrived when he did, I’d have been in Leggett’s hands now. What can we ever do to repay him for what he’s done, father?”

“I have been considering that matter,” replied Mr. Marvin. “Do you think Hermanas would care to return to the United States with us? He could receive an education in an agricultural college, and with capital I would furnish him he could buy a place in Guiana and become prosperous. He’s too good a boy to spend the rest of his life as a semi-civilized Indian.”

“I don’t know how that would strike him,” said Eric. “I’ve no doubt he’d love to see New York, but I’m afraid he’d be terribly homesick for the jungle and the rivers. Do you really think he’d be better off by being educated?”

Mr. Marvin smiled. “I really don’t know,” he answered. “We can leave the matter to him—if he doesn’t accept I’ll give him a tract of land here and furnish him with the capital to work it. For the present the matter can rest. I’m afraid it will be some time before we are ready to leave ourselves.”

“To Hermanas also in debt am I,” said the Baboo.

“I an old man am, and much necessity do I find to obtain help which to depend upon I am able. Does the Buck-boy not to the great America go, employment with me will he find. Also my mind tells me that foolishness it is for to own cattle so much. To him will I cattle give and ever in Raj Sawh will he a friend possess.”

“Well, I guess Hermanas is fixed for life then,” said Eric, “but you two forget that I’ve first claim on him. He’s been my chum ever since I’ve been here, but henceforth he’s to be my brother—even if he is a brown-skinned savage.”

Mr. Marvin’s eyes twinkled. “Good for you, my boy!” he exclaimed. “I’m glad to see you’ve found a man’s color doesn’t affect his worth. We’ll make Hermanas your brother, in fact as well as name, if you wish. I can adopt him legally, which will no doubt safeguard his future greatly, provided he agrees.”

A hearty meal was now ready and Eric, who had eaten little save half-cooked game and cassava for many days, thought nothing had ever tasted half so good as the food set before him that night at Ratura. When he had finished it was almost dawn and Mr. Marvin and Raj Sawh both insisted that Eric must go to bed and secure a few hours’ sleep, despite his

protests that he was not at all sleepy and felt perfectly fresh and strong.

“I *would* like to know why Leggett and his friends were so keen to get Ratura and tried to make so much trouble for us,” remarked Eric, as he sat talking over events with his father and the Baboo on the morning after his return.

“Mr. Prince seemed to think there were rich mineral deposits here,” said Mr. Marvin, “but even that supposition would scarcely account for the men’s actions unless their idea was to drive me away, force the company to sell out, and thus secure the property for a mere song. Possibly they planned to work under the rôle of planters, and smuggle the gold from the country without paying the Government tax.”

“I don’t believe there’s a speck of gold on the estate,” declared Eric. He proceeded to relate the story of his attempts to find gold with Hermanas’ help.

“And you no sign of the gold found?” asked the Hindu. “It may happen that in rockstone the gold hidden is. Did you the stones in the earth of an examination make?”

“No,” replied Eric, “we didn’t examine them, but I’m quite sure we didn’t run across any that had

gold in them—that is, anything that looked like gold. I saved some of the prettiest pebbles. I'll bring them out and let you look at them." Rising he went to his room and presently returned, carrying his box of curios.

"Here they are," he said, picking out several rounded white and yellowish pebbles with a glassy semi-transparent appearance.

Raj Sawh looked at them intently, turned them over in his palm and held them to the light and a curious expression of mingled amusement and surprise spread over his features.

"No," he remarked as he held out the pebbles for Mr. Marvin to examine. "Gold I see not in the stones, but to be expected it is not—they are of size insufficient and gold grows not in diamonds."

"Diamonds!" cried Eric in amazement. "Surely you don't mean,—Oh, come now, Mr. Sawh, you're trying to jolly me."

"Of uttermost sureness, no," declared the Baboo. "No more wonder do I now possess that Leggett should Ratura have the desire for. The stones diamonds are and of value of many thousand dollars."

"Raj Sawh is undoubtedly right," announced Mr. Marvin. "You have discovered the secret of Ratura."

Eric could scarce believe his senses and stood, open-mouthed with amazement, staring at the pebbles in his father's hand.

“It doesn't seem possible,” he gasped at last. “Just imagine diamonds lying loose in my room all the time I've been away, and to think of just having to wash them out of the dirt. Hurrah! father, we must be millionaires. Oh, I must hurry and tell Hermanas.”

His father stopped him with a gesture. “Wait,” he said. “Say nothing at present. There are certain legal formalities to be attended to, and to spread the report of your amazing find would do a great deal of harm.”

“I suppose you're right,” admitted Eric reluctantly, “but I *would* love to tell Hermanas. How much *are* these worth, Mr. Sawh?”

The Hindu examined the diamonds carefully, weighed them in his fingers and finally announced that he could not tell their exact value as he had no scales and the color of the stones varied; but that none of them were worth less than two hundred dollars and many were worth more.

“Whew!” exclaimed Eric. “At that rate I've almost enough right here to have paid that note and there's plenty more in the place where we found

these. No wonder Leggett and Davison wanted to get the estate."

The conversation then turned to the legal steps to be taken in order to obtain a clear title to the diamond rights on the estate and the Baboo explained in detail just what must be done. As Mr. Marvin would not listen to leaving Eric alone on the estate again, and as all agreed that the formalities must be complied with immediately, it was decided that both Eric and his father should accompany Raj Sawh when he returned to town the following day.

* * * * *

At the very hour when Eric was learning of his amazing discovery, Leggett was in a terrible plight.

For a few moments after he had shot over the falls he had been too dazed to think of guiding his canoe and sat clutching at the sides, unable to believe that he had actually survived the terrible plunge.

Then realization came to him and sitting up he seized a paddle and guided his craft down the stream. But while his life had been spared, he was in a most precarious position. His companions had all perished; he was alone in the wilderness and to seek his fellow men meant arrest and imprisonment. To attempt to force his way up the rapids and back to the Corantyne was impossible. He must either con-

tinue down the river or take to the bush and strive to win his way to some safe refuge beyond the boundaries, a task he knew to be well-nigh impossible. Luckily he still had his gun and a limited amount of ammunition and he would not starve for the present. Then he realized that he was desperately hungry, and running his canoe ashore he started into the jungle in search of game.

There were plenty of birds about, he saw several agoutis and even a labba, but he was seeking larger game, something to last him several days, and he wasted no shots on smaller creatures. At the end of an hour's hunt he secured a peccary and, returning to his canoe, cooked and ate a hearty meal of broiled wild pork. The balance of the carcass he suspended above a smoky fire to cure or "bucan" after the method of the Indians and, while this was taking place, threw himself upon a bed of palm leaves to rest.

With all his faults, Leggett had a supreme confidence in himself and he at once commenced planning for the future. If he could win his way eastward to the Corantyne, all would be well, and he had little doubt that in time he could discover a waterway that connected the various rivers. But this would mean long delays and great hardships, unless

he secured men to act as boat hands. He doubted if the Indians in these upper districts knew of him or his deeds, save those along the Essequibo whom Eric or his Indian friends might have met. If he could avoid being seen until the Berbice was reached he could doubtless secure boat hands or, failing in this, could dispatch an Indian or a Boviander with a message to Davison or his friends in Surinam.

Despite the ill luck which had followed him, he did not despair of yet accomplishing his purpose. The reward was enormous, the diamond bed at Ratura was wonderfully rich, and no one but he and his two most trusted friends dreamed that the stones existed. If they could only drive Mr. Marvin and the company from the colony, and secure control of the estate, their fortunes were made. Under the guise of cultivators they could surreptitiously dig the diamonds at night and, embedded in cakes of rubber, the stones could be smuggled from the colony without paying the tax imposed by the government and without complying with the law which prohibited the exportation of diamonds to any country other than England.

Despite his confidence in ultimately succeeding in his plans, he was still furious whenever he thought of Eric's escape and the manner in which the In-

dians had outwitted and had all but destroyed him, and he cursed Hermanas and the Arekunas as vociferously as though they had been present to hear him. But he had squared accounts with one Buck at any rate; he had seen the man plunge forward at the report of his gun, and this knowledge did much to cheer him. Little did he dream, while he sat there waiting for his meat to cure, that only a few miles distant, plans were already being made to avenge his victim.

At last the pork was smoked to Leggett's satisfaction, and as the afternoon was still young he decided to continue down stream before camping for the night.

For several days he proceeded down the river, camping wherever he found a suitably dry spot, killing game for food and maintaining a keen watch for waterways which might lead to the eastern rivers.

Then one morning he reached the mouth of a large creek which seemed to promise well, and abandoning the main river he paddled into the smaller stream.

His supply of meat was getting low and game seemed very scarce; but early in the afternoon of the next day he spied a large water-haas, which he secured by a lucky shot.

Had he but known that the report of his gun served to betray his presence to a grim figure paddling down a neighboring creek, the capybara would have been left in peace and Leggett might have met a very different fate.

But such a thought never crossed his mind, and, reaching a good spot to camp, Leggett drew his canoe ashore, built a large fire and prepared to spend the night. He dined well, hung the rest of the meat to smoke and lounged beside the fire, but as darkness came on he commenced to feel uneasy and nervous. Never in his life had he been troubled by nerves; he had never acknowledged that he was afraid of man or beast, and he scoffed at the supernatural. But here in the solitude of the jungle a vague, unreasoning fear crept over him.

In vain he tried to shake it off, to laugh at his sensations, to reason with himself. Then it occurred to him that he had been without liquor for several days, that he had undergone an experience which would have unstrung most men, and that no doubt his unusual nervousness was due to these causes.

Relieved somewhat by these thoughts he threw himself down to sleep, but each time he dozed he awoke with a start to find himself staring into the

blackness of the forest, listening with straining ears and trembling with nameless dread.

He cursed himself for his foolishness, wondered if by any chance he had an attack of fever, and then, finding sleep impossible, piled fuel on the dying fire and, crouching beside it with gun within reach, he spent the hours till dawn in abject misery.

With the coming of daylight much of his nervousness left him and, having eaten, he again pushed his boat into the stream and paddled onward through the forest. But presently, the same unaccountable, tingling sensations again assailed him; he found himself glancing furtively to right and left, turning often to look behind and unconsciously hurrying forward and paddling furiously. His senses told him nothing more dangerous than the ordinary wild beasts could be near; he knew that he had nothing to fear from them, and yet somehow he could not rid himself of the idea that he was being watched, that some danger lurked near, that something was following him.

So strong did this feeling become that twice he ran his canoe into a hiding place among the foliage and waited with cocked gun for his pursuers to appear. But he saw nothing, no unusual sight nor

sound broke the silence of the wilderness and he again continued on his way.

By mid-afternoon he was trembling, shaking with terror of an intangible something, and when the cry of a jaguar came from the forest in his rear, he shrieked aloud with fright. The sound of his own voice somewhat calmed him, however, and he even felt relieved at the tiger's scream, for here at least was something real, and to keep up his courage he commenced to shout and sing.

He longed to escape from the creek—it seemed interminably long, and each moment he expected to see open water ahead and to find himself upon a river, but the sinking sun found him still upon the forest creek and he realized that he must pass another awful night in the jungle.

There was a tiny island in the stream and here he made his camp, first examining every inch of the ground, every clump of brush and each tree to assure himself that nothing was there to disturb him or to cause him fear. Despite all this he was still haunted by the feeling that danger menaced him, that watchful eyes were peering at him from the surrounding forest and, when an unsuspecting owl winged softly to a branch above his head and uttered its mournful call, Leggett was so startled that he

involuntarily discharged both barrels of his gun. As if in answer to the roar of the explosion, the jaguar's scream reverberated through the forest, seemingly from close at hand.

Swearing at his carelessness, Leggett reloaded his gun, for he now had no ammunition to waste, and at last, too weary and overwrought to remain awake, he dropped into a fitful, troubled sleep. Several times the jaguar's cry disturbed him, but he was only semi-conscious of the sound, and not until the sunlight streamed through the tops of the trees did he really awake.

He felt much better—a great deal of his nervousness was gone, and he ate a hearty breakfast. Then, rising, he started towards the canoe, but the next moment sprang back, trembling and shaking at what had met his eyes. Upon the soft brown earth were the imprints of human feet! Leggett was dumfounded, paralyzed with nameless terror. The night before the earth had been smooth, unmarked by footprint of man or beast, and now everywhere about his camping place were the impressions of naked feet forming a perfect circle around the spot where he had slept.

Who could have been there during the night? No boat, no canoe, not even a woodskin, was drawn

upon the shores; there was no sign of campfire other than his own, and as he searched more closely his terror increased, for no trail led downward to the only landing place upon the islet. Summoning every atom of his self-control, Leggett tried to reason it out, but it was inexplicable, incomprehensible. No human being could have landed and approached his camp without leaving a trail upon the soft earth, for fully fifty feet of bare muddy ground lay between the little knoll on which he had camped, and the only spot on which a boat could land. And yet the fact remained that it had been done, that some man *had* been there, had walked, not once but many times, about his sleeping place, and had disappeared as mysteriously as he came.

But *was* it a human being after all? He called to mind weird tales he had heard of strange, half-human beings who inhabited the forests; tales told by the half-breed balata gatherers around many a camp fire, stories of Jumbies, Didoes, and Wild men. Perhaps, after all, he thought, some of these tales might be true—perhaps such beings *did* dwell in the jungle and tracked down and destroyed the solitary wanderer. Such a thing might account for his fears, for the instinctive feeling that he *was* being followed, and each moment, as his mind dwelt upon

the matter, his terror increased by leaps and bounds.

He had never been superstitious, but now that superstition had gripped him, fear of the supernatural drove every atom of reason from his brain. He strove to recall each detail of the stories he had heard, what the weird beings were like, how they sought and killed their victims, by what signs they were known and then, amid the confused jumble of memories that filled his terrorized mind, came the thought of the Kenaima.

Instantly the vague idea became a certainty; he had killed an Indian and the dreaded avenger of the blood was on his trail. Fool that he was not to have thought of it before. Yes, that was it beyond a shadow of a doubt; he had been followed, unseen eyes had watched him, deadly peril lurked in every tree, every bush, every thicket; even now the Kenaima might be ready to strike; and, dashing to his canoe, he leaped in, shoved it from shore, and paddled furiously away from the accursed spot. As he went the scream of the jaguar sounded from the jungle behind him, and at the sound the blood seemed to freeze within his veins, cold chills ran up and down his back, and like a madman he strove to make better speed, for now he knew the wailing cry issued

from no creature's throat, but was the mocking yell of triumph that sealed his doom,—the Tiger Kenaima was on his trail!

With a white man's contempt for the brown-skinned primitive men with which he had been thrown in contact, Leggett had never paid any particular heed to the beliefs or customs of the Indians. Only by chance had he ever heard of the Kenaima, and he knew nothing whatever about the methods, the character or the real identity of the blood avengers. Surrounding it with the mystery and imagery of which the aboriginal mind is so fond, the Indians always spoke of the Kenaima as a semi-supernatural being; and, while they knew full well that any one of their number might be called upon to fulfill the rôle of the avenger, and while every man owned a Kenaima Club, yet they firmly believed that, through the ceremonies enacted when a Kenaima set forth on his mission, he became endowed with superhuman powers and acquired something of the real character of the serpent or the jaguar, as the case might be.

Thus to Leggett the Kenaima had been represented as a mysterious being, a man who assumed the form of the camudi or the tiger at will, an embodied spirit of vengeance who was invulnerable and

immortal, and against whom no human power and no weapon could avail.

At the time Leggett had laughed in the face of him who told the tale, had cursed him for a superstitious, heathen savage, had declared such stories utter bosh and nonsense, and then had dismissed it from his thoughts.

But now, alone in the forest upon this dark and dismal creek, knowing himself a murderer and terrorized with his fear of the unknown, haunted by the mysterious footsteps about his camp, and with the cry of the jaguar ringing in his ears, the story of the Kenaima came back to him in its every detail.

Onward he sped; his canoe grated upon tacubas, it plunged through overhanging vines and drooping limbs. The poisonous spines of palms and tree-ferns pierced his shoulders and his hands, the great recurved hooks of armed creepers raked the hat from his head and tore his clothes to ribbons, and razor-grass left bleeding welts across forehead and cheeks.

But he never paused; unheeding pain, oblivious to all save the terror of the unknown, awful thing behind him, he dashed on; his one thought to win his way from the terrible forest, his one hope that

by some miracle he might escape from the Kenaima.

No longer was he a rational being; his flesh was insensible to pain, his mind a blank, save for the mortal terror that consumed him. He was scarce more than an automaton driven onward by the relentless power of fear.

Suddenly through the foliage ahead the maddened man saw the silvery glint of sunlit water. He shouted deliriously; the river was ahead, the forest would soon be left behind, and recklessly he drove his craft towards his goal. Then, just as the mouth of the creek was gained, when another stroke of his paddle would have carried him free, his canoe struck full upon a submerged log, the craft careened, water poured over the gunwale, and in the twinkling of an eye Leggett was struggling in the river.

The sudden shock cleared his brain, the cool water soothed his aching head and lacerated skin; it was wonderfully pleasant, marvelously refreshing. From the soft blue sky the sun shone bright and warm, and free from the depressing effect of the dark forest his insane terror in a measure left him and he swam slowly towards the capsized canoe which drifted just beyond.

Suddenly he uttered a piercing howl of pain, and, turning, struck frantically for the shore, for the ter-

rible perai fish—savage as wolves and attracted by the scent of blood from Leggett's thorn-torn hands—were swarming about him and snapping at his flesh with knife-like jaws. Instantly he realized that here he faced a death more awful than that he had feared from the Kenaima. In a few brief moments he would be devoured alive—the living, palpitating flesh stripped from his bones, and madly he strove to gain the land.

Weakly, he crawled upon the bank at last, and bleeding from a score of wounds, he drew himself up among the trees. Human flesh and endurance could stand no more; he was beaten, trapped, done. Either within the water or upon the land lay certain death; there was no escape, and little caring what happened, he threw his suffering, wearied body upon the ground to await his fate.

As he sank back among the dank leaves a mottled, root-like object writhed to one side; swiftly it coiled and a flat, diamond-shaped head darted forward with the speed of light. But Leggett's eyes were closed, his dulled ears failed to hear the slight rustle or the angry hiss; his swollen, lacerated arms scarce twitched at the sharp prick of the fangs.

Rapidly an overpowering drowsiness possessed him; the fear of the Kenaima fled from his mind,

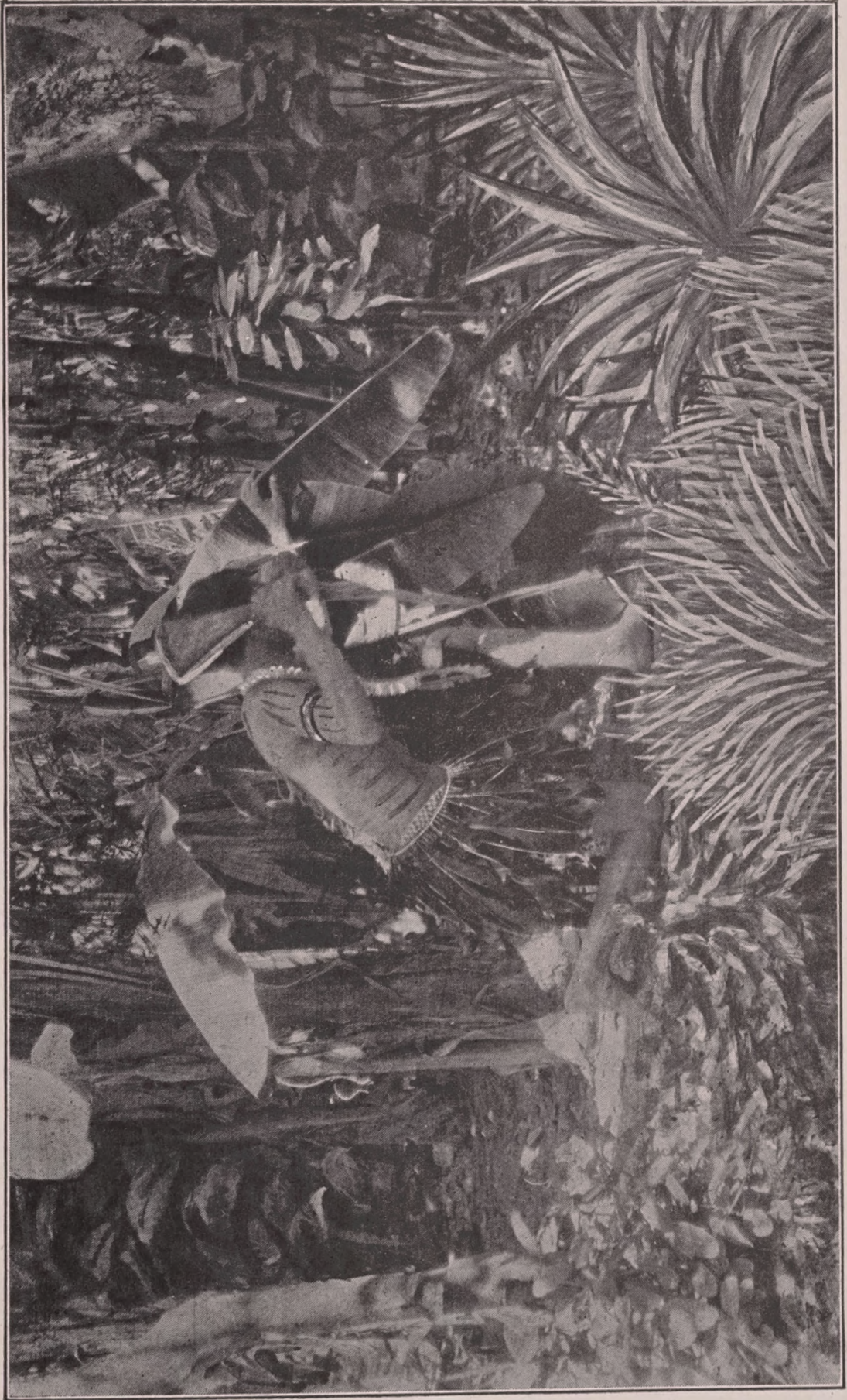
and peacefully, painlessly he drifted into everlasting sleep.

As the sinking sun gilded the tranquil surface of the Essequibo a strange figure crept from the forest near the mouth of the creek. About its bronze shoulders hung a necklet of tigers' teeth; about its middle was a girdle of black feathers, and in one hand it grasped a short, carved club of peculiar form. Stealthily as a jaguar it stole forward; black, piercing eyes glancing first here, now there, until among the tangled shrubbery it spied a sleeping man.

A grim smile of satisfaction flitted across the figure's face and, inch by inch, it drew itself towards the unconscious white man. Without a sound it reached his side, and, crouching by a clump of coarse lilies, it lifted the deadly club to strike.

But the blow never fell. Slowly the upraised arm was lowered; silently as it had come the sinister form crept away and disappeared.

Coiled upon Leggett's breast was a great Bushmaster; upon the lifeless arms were the marks of its deadly fangs. The Kenaima had arrived too late.



Stealthily as a jaguar the Kenaima crept with upraised club

CHAPTER XV

A DISAPPOINTING DISCOVERY

THE news of Eric's safe return spread rapidly and when, in company with his father, Raj Sawh and Hermanas, he reached Georgetown, he found himself the cynosure of all eyes. Every one, from the ragged "centipede"* boys to the highest officials, was talking about him; wherever he went he was showered with congratulations and all were anxious to hear the true story of his adventures.

Before he was fairly ashore reporters from the *Argosy* and the *Chronicle* were clamoring for interviews, and a motley crowd constantly lined the street before the Baboo's house, waiting to catch a glimpse of the American boy who had been kidnaped by Bush Negroes and the Buckboy who had rescued him.

But acting on his father's advice Eric would answer no questions and would give no details of his experiences until a conference had been held with

* Street gamins.

Mr. Prince, and as soon as possible the party hurried to the attorney's office.

"It's a marvelous story," declared Mr. Prince. "Conclusive evidence that truth is stranger than fiction; but you appear to have won out as completely as you did in the matter of the Van Pelt note. I scarcely think there will be complications, but technically your Indian friends have committed murder."

Eric gasped. "Committed murder?" he cried. "Surely the law can't call it murder to kill those savages to save me. Why I never dreamed of such a thing."

Mr. Prince smiled. "You need not fear," he replied. "As I understand it there were no witnesses; the law provides that no man can be compelled to testify against himself and even the 'corpus delicti' is wanting—in other words, the bodies have not been found and probably never will be. Hence we have only your word for the fact that the 'Juockes' * were ever killed. Of course the bodies of those who went over the falls may be recovered, although it's doubtful, as the perais will devour them; but *their* death cannot be laid to you. There is a remote possibility that the Dutch officials may demand

* The creole Dutch name for the Bush Negroes.

an explanation, provided Leggett returns to Surinam and tells the story, which is inconceivable, but a few Bush Negroes more or less are of little consequence and they came to their end while committing a felony. No; you need not worry over any charge being brought."

"Well, I'm glad of that," declared Eric, "but how about the Kenaima; will he be arrested if he kills Leggett?"

"If some one saw the deed and brought a charge the man would unquestionably be prosecuted," replied the solicitor; "but you may rest assured that there will be no witness of the execution if the Kenaima succeeds in his mission. Of course every one here has heard tales of the 'avengers of the blood,' but I doubt if any one, save the Indians, has definite, unassailable evidence that such a thing exists; certainly there is no legal recognizance of the Kenaima, and from what I have heard he never reports what he does and no questions are asked by his tribesmen. Leggett will probably drop out of sight forever and no living man, save the Kenaima, will have definite knowledge of how he met his end. I don't think we need waste pity on him."

The matter of the diamonds and of Hermanas' future was then taken up and discussed, and Mr.

Prince agreed to attend to the legal formalities necessary to secure a title to the diamond beds at once.

“I think your proposal to adopt the Indian lad a very wise one,” he announced when Mr. Marvin told of his intentions to provide for Hermanas’ future.

“There are no difficulties involved,” continued Mr. Prince. “Of course, the Indians are wards of the government and both the official permission and the consent of the boy’s father must be obtained. He will be much better off, for if you carry out your expressed intention of making him a half-owner of the diamonds, he will come into quite a large sum of money. In the hands of the Indians this would soon be lost, but with you as the boy’s legal guardian his interests will be safeguarded. He is certainly to be congratulated upon his good fortune, but I confess he richly deserves it.”

Mr. Marvin had many friends and acquaintances in Georgetown and when, everything having been arranged with Mr. Prince, the party returned to the Baboo’s house, they found an invitation to a dinner to be given in honor of Eric’s return.

The banquet was an enjoyable and elaborate affair; the military band played, masses of gorgeous flowers covered the tables and the Union Jack and Stars and Stripes were draped above Eric’s chair.

The part that Hermanas and Raj Sawh had played in the Marvin fortunes had been duly chronicled in the two newspapers, and on top of all had come the still more amazing news of the diamond discovery, for application to the government having been duly made and published, the secret of Ratura had become public property.

Thus the old Baboo suddenly found himself transformed from an obscure, if well-to-do, Hindu to a famous character, while the shy barefooted Indian lad became the son of a wealthy American, the brother of the most-talked-of person in the colony and half-owner of what promised to be the richest diamond field in Guiana.

Wealth and fame are wonderful powers for destroying prejudice and social barriers, and thus the Baboo and the Buck boy found that the color of their skins had been forgotten and that many, who had once been oblivious to their existence, now sought to win their friendship.

To Raj Sawh, keen student of human nature that he was, this sudden change of attitude was highly amusing, and while he was courteous to all, in his heart he despised the fawning hypocrites for what they were. Hermanas, on the other hand, looked upon the whites from quite a different point of view.

He possessed the American aborigine's pride of race and had none of the negro's inherited feeling of inferiority to the white man. To his mind certain respect was due the Europeans as owners of the land and the ruling power, but he knew no envy of their white skins, no shame of his ancestry or his color, and he realized that in many ways he was the superior of the white man. To Mr. Marvin he paid homage as Eric's father, and for love of his white chum he would gladly have laid down his life if necessary; but from all others he held aloof—shy, suspicious and reticent, an independent son of the forest and rightful heir to the land.

At first he had demurred somewhat at donning shoes or hat, but good clothes appealed to him and when Eric explained that such incumbrances were only for town use, he readily agreed. Clad in well-made garments Hermanas appeared far more like a Japanese than an Indian, and Eric could scarce believe he was the same being who tracked down and slew the Bush Negroes in the far-off forests of the interior.

Pleasant as their stay was made in Georgetown, the boys longed to get back to Ratura, to paddle on the dark, mysterious creeks, to hunt in the jungle and, more than all else, to wrest a fortune in dia-

monds from the sand. Mr. Marvin was also anxious to return to the estate, and as soon as the various business and legal matters had been settled, the three bid farewell to their many friends in the capital and boarded the steamer for Bartica. Everything was going well at Ratura when they arrived, although the overseer reported that he had been hard put to keep trespassers in search of diamond claims from the estate. Even as it was, several prospectors had established themselves upon the property in isolated localities, and Theophilus stated that claims had been taken up all over the surrounding country.

But none were successful in their search; the only diamonds in the vicinity appeared to be those on Ratura, and one by one the prospectors gave up and went their way, convinced that further efforts were hopeless.

As soon as they reached Ratura, Eric and Hermanas set diligently to work at the spot where the diamonds had been found, and their excitement ran high as the sand was washed and the coarse gravel and pebbles were exposed to view in their pans. At first their efforts were richly rewarded; stones of various sizes were secured, and in fancy the boys saw vast fortunes within their grasp. Then their

luck turned; no diamond large or small could be discovered, and even when Mr. Marvin and the overseer joined in the search the result was the same. Bushels of sand were sifted and washed, and a gang of laborers were put to work digging, but despite every attempt and although tons of material were gone over, not another stone was found.

“I guess we’ve found them all,” declared Eric as, convinced that further work was a waste of time, the mining was abandoned.

“It certainly appears so,” agreed his father, “but it’s very strange. From what I can learn there should be more diamonds, for the same quality of gravel and sand exists wherever we have searched. I understand there is a geologist in Georgetown who has had practical experience in diamond fields. It might be well worth while to have him come here and give us his opinion as an expert.”

But there was no necessity of sending for the geologist; he had heard of the Ratura diamonds, and, curious to see the deposit, wrote to Mr. Marvin requesting permission to visit him.

A few days later he arrived and, after listening with interest to the story of the boys’ discovery and the sudden exhaustion of the bed, he made a careful examination of the locality.

Eric watched him expectantly as he tested the sand, broke open bits of rock with his hammer and squinted through his lens at the various specimens he picked up.

“Is this the only spot where you found the diamonds?” he enquired at last.

Eric assured him that it was and waited anxiously for the other’s decision.

For a moment the geologist remained silent, looking thoughtfully at the pit and the piles of sand. Then he laughed. “You are very lucky to have found these diamonds,” he said, “but you discovered a treasure trove—not a diamond mine. There are no diamonds found here naturally and there never were; there’s not the least indication of diamantiferous gravel nor of auriferous sand.”

“Why, what—what *do* you mean?” stammered Eric. “I don’t understand; how *could* we find diamonds if they’re not found here?”

“I don’t wonder you are puzzled,” replied the other. “I was rather at a loss myself at first. But the explanation is simple. Your diamonds were no doubt concealed here long ago—very likely before the land was cultivated—by some one who had stolen them or who had taken them from an unlicensed claim. There are countless ways to account for their

having been hidden, and the owner may have died; he may have been arrested, or he may have met with accident or death which prevented him from returning to secure his property."

"But Leggett and Davison must have thought there was a diamond mine here. How do you account for that?" objected Eric.

"They never investigated," replied the geologist. "They may have discovered the stones; they probably secured some and managed to dispose of them. But they were afraid to take out many, and trusted to getting them at their leisure, when the place was in their hands. To have made an extended search would have divulged their secret. They were fooled just as you have been."

That Eric was disappointed cannot be denied, but he took the matter philosophically. "Well, I don't suppose we ought to complain," he said. "We've made about ten thousand dollars as it is and that's some find for a couple of boys."

"And you really have Leggett and Davison to thank for your good fortune," remarked Mr. Marvin.

"Not forgetting Raj Sawh," Eric reminded him, and added: "But most of all my Jungle Chum."

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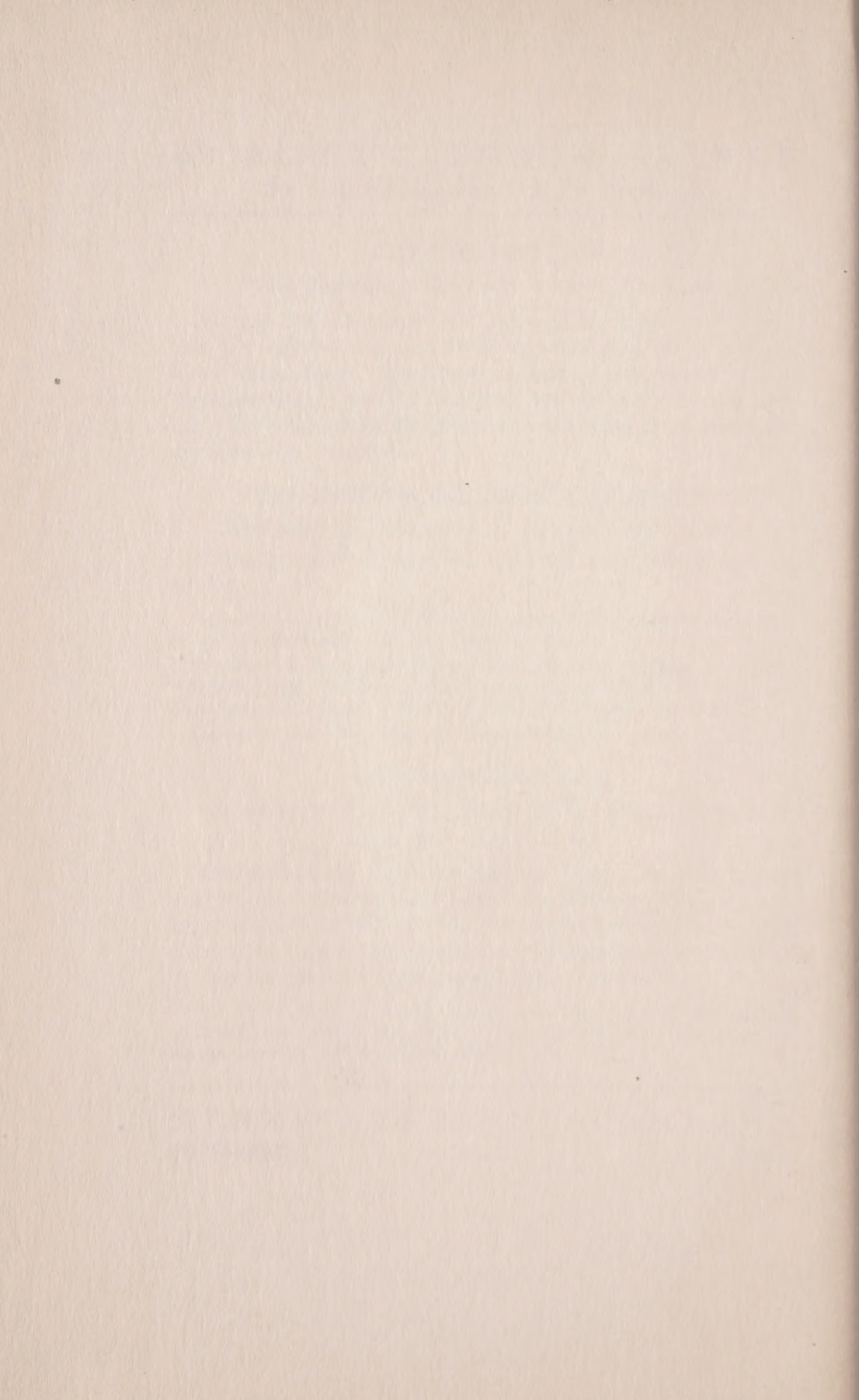
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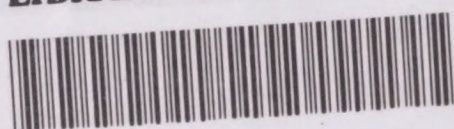
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