

## IN A HOTTENTOT'S TRAP.

HORSE THIEVES FOILED BY A BLACK BOYS CUNNING.

They Were White and He Was Only a South African Native, but He Left Their Bones to Bleach White He Took Back Their Plunder to their Owners.

Just sat in the sun, unspeakably lonely, and felt depressed beyond measure, for, although a Hottentot delights like a lizard in the warmth of an African day, revelling in it, yet he also desires company. So was it with July, for his case was unusually previous.

July looked after the relays of horses temporarily. His father had done so, helped by the boy, but since his death, a week ago, the superintendent of the company, 300 miles away, had sent word to July that a new man would be sent to relieve him. And then July would be sent adrift, where he did not know and nobody cared.

It was in the hot afternoon, and the only thing stirring was a cloud of dust in the distance, and from that cloud, louder and shriller as the stage drew near, came blast after blast of the guard's horn. Rattle and clatter and dash, a shout from the driver, a prolonged series of artistic but purely ornamental flourishes from the great whip, and the coach stopped, its horses all foam and flutter.

'Ho, July! Now, you little black rascal! All by yourself, still, hey? Well, it's the last time. There's a man coming up the road to relieve you—a white man, too, leastways, half and half. So you'd best be packing up, July, though for me, nigger if you be, I'd sooner see your ugly little landmark of a phiz than some surly black-guard full of Cape Smoke all the time. Horses all right—as usual, fresh and frisky—as usual. Good boy, July. Blowed if I ain't sorry to see the last of you. There's a cigar for luck. Look out for your relief—he's a-riding his own horse.'

Taroot-tatoot-rata tool-tooray! The horn blew, a passenger began again 'The Song that Reached My Heart' on a cert-certain and the stage was off again.

About sundown he came, as July expected, but he did not seem a half-breed. 'Maru, baas! Jolly hot. 'Ope may die!' cried July graciously, for he prided himself on his polite English, picked up from drivers and gold prospectors. 'You new baas?'

'Yes, you durned little ugly imp, I'm your new baas, and the first thing you've got to do is to take your bloomin' hookey out of this, d'ye mind? I've heard all about you. Last thing the superintendent says to me, he says, says he, 'You kick that lazy nigger out of that, first thing, Mr. Roser,' he says, 'cause he's no good,' says he. I says, 'Supe,' says I, 'no 't-tentot or Kaffir ain't no good.' I says, 'an' ye can depend on me to do the necessary kickin' in a methodical an' artistic manner not to be beat,' says I, 'cause I believe most teenashfully that the only way to make the natives of this blasted land know their place is to kick 'em hard an' frequent. In persooance of which—take that!'

Thereupon the ugly brute, having dismounted, twisted July round by the neck and kicked so viciously that the boy went sprawling through the doorway into the barn. The cordial smile of welcome which had broadened his innocent black face had died away as the white man talked, giving place to a look of extreme fear, for even his life had been so lonely but that the roughness of outcast civilization had scratched it. Now, with one long howl of grief and dismay, he picked himself up, sore in mind and body, and fled from the house until, from the shelter of a distant antheap, he felt it safe to watch the fierce newcomer.

Mr. Roser, having carelessly flung a few Whitechapel terms of affection after July, appeared to dismiss him from his mind, led his horse into the stable, stayed there a while, probably examining the stock, and coming out again, sat down in July's former seat in the sun and smoked a pipe with patience and apparent content.

Suddenly there came a distant call, the Australian 'coo-ee!' from the veldt, and Roser jumped to his feet and sang out 'coo-ee!' in return. Swiftly loping over the plain came another horseman with another rifle, and the two met in quick and eager consultation. Says Roser:

'It's all right. We'd best be off. Wheeler can't be here before morning, but we'll set a good start. I've frightened the young nigger away, and he won't stop running, I bet, tonight. There's only twelve horses, though, fit to take, and if we get them into Bechuanaland by tomorrow night we'll be all right. There's no hurry, but there's no telling who may pass along the trek; so as soon as dark, an' that's now, we'll drive 'em off. Are you on?'

'Sure, I'm on,' says the other rogue, 'an' it's easy as mud, if you ask me.'

It darkened rapidly, and at last was fairly night a moonless night. As the

twilight died away July crept nearer the stable, from one ant hill's covering to another. He had as yet no doubt that the newcomer was his father's legitimate successor, but he crawled near for a chance to recover his worldly possessions without being kicked. His am zement was vast, therefore, when, from across the trail, he beheld the two men leading out the horses, mount their own and drive the herd quietly off across the veldt, with a cool leisureliness, too, which was dumbfounding, for the villains knew well that no coach would pass for two days, and the new station master would not now arrive until next day.

July's mouth was wide open with surprise as it dawned upon him that the company's horses were in the possession of a pair of audacious horse thieves, who would drive them across the Transvaal border, to dispose of them to Bechuanaland settlers at their leisure.

The boy awoke at once to a fair realization of his own part in the matter. No more faithful servant than his father had the stage company ever had, and July had been trained to look upon a horse thief as the vilest of mankind. He was oppressed with his own unwaryness in being so tricked and he was terror-stricken at what the company, a thing of unlimited power for punishments and rewards, would do to him for his lack of faith in not detesting the stock. July ran into the stables and found four horses left, those in poorest condition, but one of them, though along in years and gaunt, was not so contemptible as the hasty thieves had apparently thought it.

July jumped bareback on the old horse and proceeded to follow the thieves with great cunning, never coming within sound or sight of them, but continually dismounting, and by listening close to the ground and by the help of an instinct which only a veldt-born native could have, tracking them surely. Mile after mile through the night, over boulder-strewn strips, and through parks of scrubby trees, now down a ravine, now across a ridge of hillocks, through grass up to the horses' bellies, and over rocky streams, and by the faint light of the stars, went the herd and the thieves, and, all unsuspected, little July.

Suddenly the Hottentot came to a halt and listed, for a minute puzzled. After a while he proceeded very cautiously, leading his horse very, very slowly and cautiously, so that he took more than an hour to go a little way. Then he came out round a low kopje, having fastened his horse and himself crawling like a snake on the ground. By the ghostly light he looked into a little hollow and saw that the thieves, quite unconscious of being followed, were stretched on the ground, fast asleep—after the superciliously confident manner of too clever people—while a picket rope was stretched between two iron pins driven in the ground and to this the horses six a side, were fastened by their halters.

Slowly, slowly the black boy crept among them, and they knew his familiar smell and touch—had he not used to sleep in each one's stall in turn? He untied them and they fell placidly to grazing without a whinny, and the two rogues snored and slept through it all. July hesitated over the two horses the property of the robbers, if a robber may be said to have any property at all. But he could not take them. He wanted only his own. While he hesitated, however, one horse playfully bit another, and the bitten one kicked and neighed. Up sprang Roser and up the second thief, awake at once. They ran to their horses but July was quick. He smote the nearest of the herd with his hands and yelled, and the herd stampeded. July rushed to his hidden horse, mounted him in a twinkling, and went after the horses, skillfully rounding them up, even in the darkness, and heading them for the track. But the yell and the noise of the horses' scamper were sufficient guide for the thieves.

'It's that durned little black imp that I ought to have knifed. He's been a follerin' us, the vile heathen,' shouted Roser, and in a second they threw themselves on the saddled horses and gave chase. It was a desperate, headlong, reckless ride, where every step and every second might send horses and rider smashing to the ground but July was worked up to desperation and his pursuers to fury.

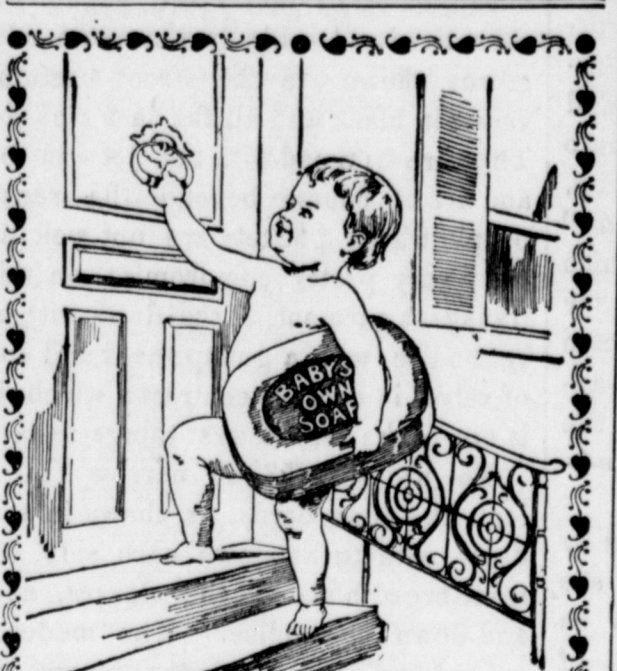
July had a good start, but his horse was no match for the younger beasts of the thieves. So after five minutes of the chase when the black boy found himself losing, he almost gave up. The herd were keeping together, and unburdened by riders, were gaining, but July dropped rapidly behind. He heard the crack of a pistol, and a bullet whistled past, and it may be that new danger quickened his wits, for he suddenly conceived a scheme of vengeance. He let the herd go and kept edging off to the right, and as he galloped he began to scream out, as if guiding the stampeding horses. In the darkness the thieves followed the voice, firing once or twice in that direction.

Away over July veered, until he was leading the men in a different direction altogether, and he kept shouting all the time. Suddenly he was silent, but pressed his horse forward eagerly. His eyes, the eyes of a savage, could see better than a white man's in the night and he knew the country well. At last he

gave voice to a loud shout and then the men were close upon him, and doubtless they thought the boy was still with the herd. They poured forth a storm of curses and emptied their revolvers at the sound. July shouted again only fifty yards ahead of them, and then was grimly silent as he pulled his wearied horse hard away and sheered suddenly off at right angles.

On came the thieves, to find to draw rein all ignorant of a trap. Raging and swearing and triumphing in the thought that they had caught up with the stolen herd, they galloped past. Ten, twenty, forty yards. There was a horrible scream, followed by another, a crash, a torrent of cries of agony and howls for help, and all was still July had led them to a line of deserted shafts dug by gold prospectors in the days of a rush, the land was dotted with such holes—and there was an end of them, and the little Hottentot boy was revenged.

The stolen horses, not so fresh as usual, were all back in their stable when the genuine station master arrived. He was a decent man and reported July's tact to the company, as, of course, did the enthusiastic drivers, so that the little heathen boy was thanked and well taken care of by his employers. But the bleaching bones of the robbers and their horses lie to this day where they fell to July's trap.



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## SURCHARGED STAMPS.

Irregular Profits of Public Officers in Dealing with Collectors.

Three years ago the Times drew attention to the subject of surcharged stamps to a lengthy article, says Chambers' Journal. Lord Ripon had caused a circular to be sent from the colonial officer in order to put down the abuses connected with the sale of 'surcharged stamps,' which had proved a temptation to postmasters and treasurers and other public officers by making irregular profits in dealing with stamp collectors and others. The remedy for this state of matters is to keep a sufficient supply of stamps on hand, and then there would be no necessity to practice 'surcharging.'

It appears that when in certain cases it became known that a stamp was getting scarce agents of the stamp dealer would at once buy up the stock and ask for more. The colonial postoffice, in order to get over the delay involved in procuring fresh supplies, would print on dearer stamps that those which were exhausted the price of those which were asked for. For instance, a three penny stamp became a half penny one and a four penny stamp a two penny one. A stamp thus altered in value is said to be 'surcharged,' and a rush is made for this by the dealer. These find their way into collections at 50 or 100 per cent. over their value. A Paris dealer is said to have kept a sum of £1,000 'placed' at different postoffices with instructions to local postmasters to send on specimens to that value whenever a new stamp or a fresh surcharge was made. A London dealer one day received a remittance for 12s. 6d. in half-penny postage stamps from some one in Fiji who was in debt to him for that amount. The stamps, being all surcharged, were sold for about £15.

It will be remembered that the republic of Liberia, on the west coast of Africa, not having ready cash to pay the expenses of its delegate to the Chicago exhibition, gave him a supply of postage stamps to sell to the best advantage. It appears that this negro republic depends largely upon the sale of stamps for paying its way, and the stamps, beautifully engraved in London, are largely sold to stamp collectors. When the North Borneo Company issued a finely engraved stamp in 1894, in six weeks the wholesale dealers turned over £2,000 worth of them. One dealer went in for £880 worth, another £400 and two for £1,200 between them.

## CIVILIZED CANNIBALS.

Some Interesting Facts About the Battaks of the Island of Sumatra.

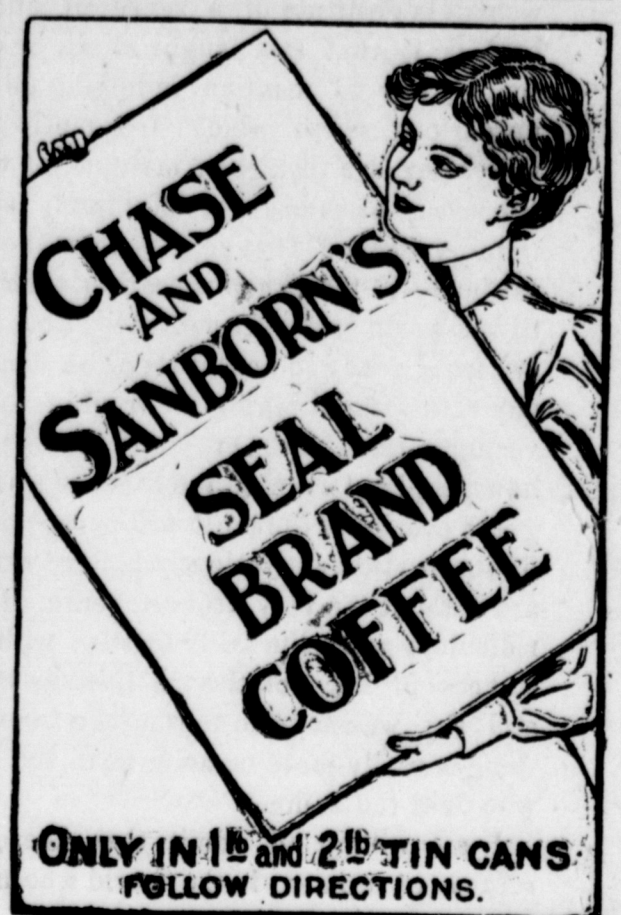
Sumatra is one of the largest islands in the world, and has a population of 8,000,000. Respecting some of the tribes of the interior hardly anything is known, inasmuch as the island had been crossed by white men only two or three times. The immediate neighbors of the Acheenese are the Battaks, a most interesting race of cannibals, who are quite civilized in their way, having a written language of their own. They know how to make firearms, even boring their gun barrels. Also they carve gun stocks in correct style, and are acquainted with the art of making powder. They find their own sulphur and saltpetre, using pieces of bamboo for cartridge cases and bits of coral for bullets. They are excellent agriculturists, and raise cattle. In addition they are clever gold and silver smiths, making filigree work and weaving gold thread.

The Battaks only eat prisoners of war or bad criminals. Formerly the habit of cannibalism among them was universal, and human flesh used to be sold in the country in open market, some chiefs eating it daily as a matter of liking. It is considered the greatest possible insult to a foe or punishment to a person guilty of a grievous crime to eat him. Besides the question of economy is considered. At a feast it was cheaper to slaughter six slaves at 100 guilders than to kill six buffaloes at 150 guilders. When a distinguished person died two individuals customarily went through a lot of buffooneries at the graveside, after which they were killed and laid in the excavation, the coffin being placed on top of them. Cannibalism is more or less mixed up with the religion of these people, who have their wizards and witch doctors to practice incantations.

The Battaks build houses of planks and strong beams, placing them on piles for the advantage thus given in defending them. Many of their villages are on almost inaccessible pinnacles in the hills, favorite spots being little plateaus formed by the broadening of a mountain range. Commonly they are surrounded by palisades, with watch towers. Much art and industry is put in the carving and painting of the woodwork of the houses. An outbuilding serves as a sleeping place and council house, rice being stored in the upper part. No light is kept at night for fear of attracting ghosts, but in emergency candles of resin are used. Communal houses serve as sleeping places for the unmarried men, sometimes 100 of them together. Here are hung up the heads of slain enemies and other trophies.

Nearly all of the highest peaks in Sumatra are volcanoes, and most of these are active. In the immediate neighbor-

hood of these mighty chimneys, which hurl out masses of ashes and stone are the fertile lowlands, with a dense population. The destruction of 40,000 human lives by the eruption of Sumbawa in 1815, and the washing away of 16,000 people by 'tidal waves,' following the eruption of Krakato in 1883 are not solitary instances.—New York Sun.



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