

## A Lucky Escape.

It had been a stiff morning's fight. The dum-dums had worked deadly way with the Baggara horsemen, but yet a good many English went to the last account too. Estcourt recalled being struck down, and then the curtain fell. The next thing he realized was curious in the extreme. He was being lifted up; he heard some one say:

'He is alive.'

Then he was put on a horse in front of a rider, and a long march began.

The hot day, the scene, the desert—all that seemed to go by like a mist; his head swam. It was not till the cool of the evening, when there was a halt, and he and his companion in misfortune, Sergt. Brooke, were placed in a hut, that complete consciousness returned. He saw too, that though his own case might be bad, that of the Sergeant was immeasurably worse; the non-commissioned officer lay there looking up at the roof.

'He will die,' he thought.

When a man in authority looked in and asked in guttural French if he was well, Estcourt entered a protest on behalf of his fellow-prisoner.

'Do something for him,' he said.

The man shrugged his shoulders.

'Mais il va mourir.'

'Qu'il meure donc,' was the brutal reply and he swaggered out of the hut.

The Sergeant was in a delirium a few hours later, imagining himself fighting. Estcourt watched over him. When morning came he appeared appreciably better.

'He was afraid that they would separate them, but though several guards came into the hut at about mid-day they went again without doing more than glance at the fetters which had been fastened on the prisoners' wrists and ankles.

In the afternoon Estcourt heard his name called. The Sergeant was lucid, but was nearing the end.

'I am lost,' he said feebly; 'I am lost. Estcourt give me your hand. You have much to wish me ill for.'

'But I don't wish you ill. All that is forgotten. Bygones are bygones for ever.'

'Thanks. What fools we were. How we miss our chances here! Good-bye.'

The Sergeant's head fell back. He was dead. Estcourt laid a cloth over the face and called the sentry who was outside.

'What is it?' he said.

'You see my friend; he is dead.'

The man made a gesture and went out, and a few hours afterward the body was taken away and buried. Later in the day the man who spoke French appeared again.

'Will you join us?' he said.

Estcourt indignantly refused.

'You had better reconsider that,' said the man. 'You would have a post of confidence. You would be at the door of the master.'

'I have considered,' he replied.

'You will not join us?'

'I will not join you.'

'You will at least give your parole?'

'I will not.'

'Triple fool! You cannot escape, and such conduct, such obstinacy, will make your treatment more severe.'

'All the same I am determined. I shall not change.'

'Then you have but yourself to blame for what may occur.'

He gave an impatient shrug of the shoulders and walked out abruptly into the blinding white sunlight which looked so dazzling, so curiously brilliant, viewed from the shadow of the dark hut. Hours went by; he forgot that the Sergeant was dead, that now he might try to escape, that nothing with-held him.

'And yet,' he thought, 'need I have considered him? He made the poor chaps' lives wretched.'

Then he fell to thinking about why he, an Oxford man, had enlisted—a quarrel at home, a fit of pique. Perhaps all that would be forgiven now.

It was all very strange. A feeling of indifference came upon him. It did not much signify, after all, and the past, the old life, the boating party, the piano at night, the remembered words of a song:

'Poor Jim!

How I envied him!

All the old dreams of a vanished summer, with a scene in a lilac scented garden and an early morning departure before the break of day, with the life in later days, the canteen, the excitement of a military fete at the Victoria Barracks, Windsor—all that came back in a quaint misty way. What would they be doing in London just then?

And as he lay there, thinking of the old

days and listening to the sounds of the night, the purring flight of a moth, the drowsy chunter of a camel, the confused medley of soft voices and movements, it seemed as if he was being introduced in a dream to a consecutive conversation. It was conducted in that curious chop-stick French he had heard before.

The man who had spoken to him in the afternoon was outside speaking once more. Who was he? Not a Frenchman, although he spoke a little French—Frenchmen did not act like that. Not a Spaniard, despite a soft exclamation in the language of Cervantes, a 'Dios!' in velvety tones.

No, he must be a human compound, a polyglot party, one of the men who have a little of the worst of every southern nation, the born adventurers on the great routes of the world.

—And he went on talking; but unfortunately it was mostly in the native tongue—only a few words of which Estcourt could understand.

So far as his chains would allow him, he got up and listened. He made out such words as 'Surprise'—'will end it all'—'tomorrow'—and he gathered from it that an attack was to be made.

But then that meant that the English were close by. The voices ceased and all was silent again.

Then the English were near—near to El Fayz—and they were ignorant of the presence of the enemy. They may be defeated, annihilated absolutely. They ought to be warned. But how?

He rose to his feet. Alas! How could

be warn his countrymen? He was fastened by the ankles to a ring bolt in the floor, and his hands were manacled; he sat down again and felt the ring and then rubbed it with the chain which fastened his hands.

Then he stopped suddenly, for the noise he had made frightened him. A shadow seemed to fit across the open doorway of the hut. And out there in the mysteries of the night everything was happening, but there across the vast desert, in other lands on the great sea!

Yet rubbing the bolt would be no good. 'It would take a good twelve months at least,' he thought.

That must be another way—something short of taking the hut with him.

'That poor Sergeant!' he thought. 'I imagined that we should get away together, but we shall not now.'

He rubbed the iron staple for another minute, but he made no impression. Then he took hold of the ring. Why should it not come up? He tried to work it backwards and forwards, but his efforts were at first futile, for the earth of the hut floor had been beaten hard; but at length he found that the ring slightly moved; he jerked it, and it moved more. Then he endeavored to perform one of the movements recommended to those who employ the athletic exerciser; he took hold of the chain which fastened his ankles to the ring and threw himself backwards. The ring came up with a run, and he was thrown heavily on the ground on his back, where he lay for a few minutes with a jar running painfully through his spine and partially stunning him.

Somehow, though, the consciousness of what he had to do forced him back to action. He got up, and lifting the chain and staple, walked to the door and looked out. All was silent. He caught sight of the white robe of an Arab sentinel vanishing round the end of the buildings in that encampment, and that he moved quickly across the broad silvery patch of moon-

light into the shade of the other huts. Here he paused again.

It needed no long consideration to realize that he could not advance far, fettered as he was by the chains. He remained in the shadow of the huts, thinking. Then a movement behind caused him to start forward again. He continued in the shadow as far as possible, but that friendly gloom would have to be left directly, he knew. It was away out there across the desert in the brilliant, unrelieved light that he would find the English. A palm tree ahead to the north looked miles away. He reached the end of the encampment and paused again.

Out of the darkness came an odd assortment of little sounds, native women were talking in whispers. One of the little paposes whimpered, and a camel seemed to be entering a protest.

What if he was seen? It would not mean anything very peaceful for him.

'It is very necessary not to be caught,' he thought.

The duty before him was to escape, and give the alarm, for otherwise the Mahdist hordes might effect a surprise and win, at any rate, a temporary success under its half breed leaders.

He soon came to the end of the shadow. In case of detection there would be nothing else for it but running.

The white desert stretched ahead like a vast silver sheet with no end to it. He was sure he was going right he had to take the direction of the north, and there was the Nile away to the right, far distant.

It was difficult to make progress in the soft, yielding sand, and then there was not only the sand. There were the fetters, which rendered walking a feat of skill.

He had been trudging on for some time, when an object caught his attention. The desert is like the sea—there is an absolute unbroken expanse, and then suddenly there appears something quite close, and there

is no ready explanation to the observer as to how it came there.

It had seemed that he was absolutely alone, and then right in his path there lay something dark, a huddled heap. Was it a scout? A sound behind him made him stop. A patrol was coming. He crouched down, and then lay flat, wriggling into the sand until he was almost buried. The patrol did not observe him, but went by. He started up, and hastened forward as fast as his chains would allow, and very soon he was able to make out what the object was; the white clinging garments of a southern Soudanese warrior, the free lance of the Baggara forces were to be seen. The swarthy son of the wilderness was sleeping there under the stars, his head pillowed by his camel.

Estcourt's heart leaped with excitement. Here was his chance. He must have that camel at any cost. But need it be at the cost of blood.

Then he remembered that his own life was in jeopardy. If the man woke up he would to a certainty attack. Unarmed and in his present condition, what could he do? He remained there a few seconds looking down at his enemy.

Unfortunately he could not steal the camel the man had the bridle wound round his arm.

But there was a knife in the man's girdle. Estcourt softly leaned down and drew it. The sleeper did not move.

With the greatest care Estcourt took hold of the bridle near the camel's head and cut it, and then pulled at the cut off end, ordering the camel to rise.

The animal chattered and complained. Estcourt rubbed his nose and appealed to it as an intelligent quadruped to do as he wished, as he had heard the native drivers do.

The camel abandoned its attitude of absolute unreasoning protest, and began to weigh matters; it ceased to chunter. It

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SISTERLY AFFECTION.