

THEY THAT SIT IN DARKNESS

STORY OF THE AUSTRALIAN NEVER-NEVER

BY JOHN MACKIE

AUTHOR OF "THE DEVILS PLAYGROUND" AND "SINNERS' TWIN"

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"By the way," I said after a pause, "I forgot to ask Saville about that fellow boy and what he has done with him. What fine eyes the beggar had—a remarkably good looking chap, altogether. I've been endgling my brains as to which of my friends he bears a certain resemblance to, but can't for the life of me remember. However, I can tell you exactly a good square look at him; he seemed always getting behind Saville."

Jack took his pipe from his mouth, and stared at me with a look of broad astonishment on his face.

"Why, what do you find so wonderful in what I say, to make you stare in that fashion?" I asked, somewhat puzzled and not a little nettled.

"You dear old humbug," replied my mate, with an exasperating slowness of speech. "Can it be possible that you don't know? Why, man, that half caste was Miss Mackenzie!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BLACKS SHOW UP.

Next morning Gordon hired a Chinaman cook, no white man being found in a sufficient state of sobriety to take the bill. We crossed the river, and set up the teams with the most perishable goods, and prepared to start for the station. Gordon's intention was to leave one man in charge of the remaining stores, stacked on the bank, until we could send for them.

After dinner we were ready to start back again to the station. Gordon told me that he had half a mind to discharge Daly, but that individual gave him no excuse for summary dismissal. Mr. Mackenzie was always averse to parting with good hands, because they were scarce "out back." Although I agreed with Gordon that it would be a waste to dismiss him, I knew well enough that Daly had endeavored to make himself useful to Gordon for the sake of his sister. But I also had a vague idea that by keeping sight of Daly we might, in course of time, get some clew to the murder of Section.

And now we were all jogging along at an easy pace in the bright sunshine, but had not as yet left the track. I was strangely glad to think that we were leaving the scene of so much trouble behind us. But perhaps the fact that Nora Mackenzie had not been left behind on the MacArthur under the wing of the police magistrate's wife had something to do with that. I should at least have another fortnight, which would give me an opportunity of making myself better known to her, perhaps winning such a share of her regard as would encourage me to hope for a certain happy consummation. But she was so utterly unlike any other woman I had ever met that I hardly knew what to make of her. Was she simply a fright, excitement loving and impulsive creature, whose strange ways might be ascribed rather to a craving for change and novel experiences than to any sterling individuality? Sometimes it seemed to me that she only adopted those erratic ways in order to disguise her warm, sympathetic nature. At other times I thought they were merely the outcome of a want of heart. Then the questions would suggest themselves: Would she have done for me what she had done for my mate? Would she have masqueraded in the oute character of a half caste boy and have braved that strange rough thron for my sake?

But was I jealous of Jack, and did she not show a decided preference for him? Here her conduct baffled me. Sometimes the evil one made me wish my friend a thousand miles away, and I was not quite so civil to him as I was ought to be to another. But Jack either did not or would not see these signs. So far as his relations with the squatter's daughter were concerned I could take no exception to them. His manner toward her had changed since the trial. He no longer treated her like a spoiled child or a frivolous girl, as he had done at first, and she indeed seemed pleased when in his company. She had undergone a metamorphosis in her eyes—one that, alas, meant trouble for me.

It was significant that none of us referred to the proceedings of the day before. We observed an unnatural reticence regarding them.

As for Daly, he discreetly kept himself aloof from the rest of us, performing his duties silently and well. On our journey back to the station little of interest occurred. Of course we took longer to go back—being heavily loaded—than in coming, but on the morning of the third day Gordon saddled up the horses for Nora Mackenzie and his sister, taking me to get ready and accompany the two women to the station.

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station, which we would possibly reach in the afternoon. He said he would come on himself about night-fall. The teams would probably reach the station some time next day.

We talked of many things as we rode back, but we never once mentioned what had occurred at the MacArthur river. I caught myself looking curiously at her several times. It was a strange thing that I should have been so blind as not to recognize her in the character of that half caste boy, Freddy, who had caused such a sensation in court. Here were those great soulful eyes that had struck me when I looked upon the boy. Here were such startingly cut and mobile features that had captivated my fancy in spite of myself. She must have dyed her skin with some simple decoction peculiar to the bush, to have transformed that face as she did. I could understand why that ugly, gaudy handkerchief. In it were gathered those great, silky, brown tresses. As for the broken pigeon English which came so naturally from her lips, that was not to be wondered at. I had often heard her counterfeited the gibberish of the blacks with such startling realism that had not her lips moved I would have sworn a black gin talked. There was no doubt she was a born actress and mimic.

In the course of the afternoon we reached the station and found things much as we had left them. The squatter had not returned, and one of the stockmen, by name Mooney, had something to tell. He had been out on the run up the river, when in a little pocket in the main range he had heard the chattering of some blacks. On riding up with his black boy came right on a mob of these gentry who, having run one of Mackenzie's bullocks into this natural yard and speared it, were cutting up and dividing the meat. He had fired upon them with fatal results and then retired.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE HEART OF THE NEVER-NEVER.

Next morning the teams came up, and we were kept busy unloading. We unpacked the goods and stowed them away in the substantial storehouse just built, stacking the sugar on swinging shelves from the roof so as to balk the ants. I saw little or nothing of the squatter's daughter. She and Elsie Gordon kept well to the quarters built for them—a neat slab house with an iron roof and another of bark over that to keep it cooler. Under the wide veranda I sometimes caught a glimpse of Nora Mackenzie swinging in a hammock reading or else moving about making some alteration in the little house that happened to strike her fancy.

We saw no signs of the blacks, and Gordon began to think that they had moved to another part of the country. On the third day after our arrival he explained that it would be advisable to take a trip up the river to the south in order to explore a certain part of the surrounding country. He found it necessary to split up the herd on account of the pasturage; to take about a thousand head of cattle up the valley some 30 or 40 miles, and fencing off the entrance to some good grassy pocket in the range to the north. Keeping the cattle in hand had begun to be very troublesome on account of the advanced season of the year. Gordon therefore said that Saville, Daly, Jack and I should go with him and drive the cattle before us up the valley. Moreover, Miss Mackenzie had been asking him for the last few days to make a trip of the kind, and he thought he might as well take her and his sister also. They had lots of pack horses, and could pack a tent for them and all they might want. Besides, they would be safer with us than if left at the station. On this point I had my doubts.

Everything had been arranged and we were to start on the morrow. Daly, Mooney and a couple of blacks went out, and mustering the cattle, drove them some 15 miles up the river so that we could conveniently pick them up next day. Gordon, Jack and I got the pack saddles out and made up the rations with such things as we would require for a six days' trip. In the afternoon Nora Mackenzie came over to the store. She was evidently in high spirits. She wanted some cartridges for her small sporting rifle and some for a small Smith & Wesson revolver.

After I had served her she tripped off, and I realized how near I had been to telling her what she had become to me. But the time was not yet. "All things come round to him who will but wait," I said to myself.

Next morning after breakfast we made a start, leaving Mooney and two other hands at the station. Our party consisted of the two women, Gordon, Saville, Daly, Jack, myself and a couple of pack horses. Gordon and Daly, with the blacks, rode on ahead to drive up the cattle. I found myself with Jack leading the way, Nora Mackenzie and Elsie Gordon following close upon us.

For several miles the creek was straight as an arrow—a succession of long, deep water holes, on which the purple and white water lilies bloomed and on which hundreds of wild willow rested, while on the banks the policeman snow white this and other gaudy and long legged birds enlivened the scene.

It was significant that all along the banks of the creek there were piles of empty mussel shells, which showed that it was a stream of some wealth to the foraging black fellows. At times we came to places where the blacks had camped. It was rather startling to count the number of their fires. In some camps alone there must have been at least 500 or 600. Where were those blacks now?

Toward evening we came to a beautifully grassed, lightly timbered meadow. Here Gordon said it would be as well to leave the cattle until we explored the country farther up the river. We chose a little ironstone ridge, where we could guard against surprise from the blacks, and camped for the night.

(To be Continued.)

Unfortunate, Very.

Mouse—Oh, dear, oh, dear! I've eaten so much I can't get into my doorway.—New York Journal.

HAS HEARD ANTS TALK.

So Thinks a French Naturalist and His Reasons For His Belief.

Sir John Lubbock, as well as many other scientists, has of course studied the ant, but it has been given to a Frenchman, M. Perel, to make a discovery as regards ants that proves them to be possessed of an intelligence far greater than has been hitherto supposed.

The way M. Perel proved this was as follows: He made a glass funnel, one end small or than the other, which, with the small end downward, in the center of a square of plain glass some six inches wide, sitting closely enough to prevent the little insects from crawling out underneath.

He then took a number of ants in a bunch about the size of an ordinary horse chestnut free from any foreign substances and, lifting up the funnel, dropped the cluster of insects inside.

While the ants were still in a state of bewilderment and before any of them could reach the edge of the glass the experimenter covered it with another square similar to the one already in use, which had been surrounded a short distance from its edge by a rim of putty.

This effectually confined the little insects and prevented their being crushed. The two plates of glass were then pressed together to within, approximately, the thickness of an ant's body, but closer on one side than on the other, so as to hold some fast and incapable of moving, while others could move about in their narrow prison where they liked.

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NOTICE is hereby given that under and by virtue of a Power of Sale contained in a certain Indenture of Mortgage bearing date the eighteenth day of May, D. 1888, and made between the aforesaid Agnes L. Keith and Edward H. Keith, of the first part, and Margaret Steves, of the second part, and recorded in Book 84 of the Westmoreland County Records, pages 28, etc.; there will for the purpose of satisfying the moneys secured by the said Indenture of Mortgage default having been made in the payment thereof, be sold at Public Auction at Phoenix Square in the City of Fredericton, in the County of York, on WEDNESDAY, the thirtieth day of January, at the hour of twelve o'clock, noon, that lands and premises in the said Indenture of Mortgage contained and there-in described as:

"A lot, that tract or parcel of land situate in the Parish of Salisbury, in the County of Westmoreland, and Province of New Brunswick, and bounded as follows: Commencing at the south-east corner of lands owned by Edgar McKie, thence running easterly along main road one hundred and forty-six feet to lands owned by Early Kay, thence northerly along the line of said lands two hundred and forty-five feet to a post, thence easterly one hundred and thirty feet to the Fredericton lot, thence northerly along said road five hundred and sixty-three feet to the Church lot, thence westerly eighty-six feet to the corner of said lot, thence northerly fifty feet to a cross road, thence westerly one hundred and seventy-seven feet to lands formerly owned by Chinnor Steves, thence southerly five hundred and seventy-seven feet until it strikes the north-east corner of lands owned by the said Edgar McKie, thence easterly along line of said lands ninety-eight feet to a post, thence southerly two hundred and forty-five feet to the place of beginning, containing five acres more or less."

Together with the buildings and improvements thereon, and the appurtenances and same belonging or in anywise appertaining.

Dated this twenty-fourth day of December, A. D. 1900.

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on applying this box of ants to the ear as though it had been a watch M. Perel was astonished to hear a regular and continuous buzzing noise, somewhat similar to the sound made by water when boiling in an open vessel, though sometimes a higher note would be struck by one or another of the ants.

Further study of the box of prisoners revealed many interesting facts. The free ants were seen to advance to the sides of the ones that could not move and to endeavor with all their strength to release the prisoners. It was then that the sounds made by the ants became louder and more strident. It was evident that these sounds conveyed some meaning, for a palpable difference was to be found in the manner in which the ants which had been intelligible to the tiny captives.

Then came the problem. How was the sound made? M. Perel proceeded to at once make minute investigations and submitted free ants to the scrutiny of a very powerful microscope.

Here, again, an interesting discovery was in store for the investigator. The sides of the little insects were found to be in one particular place rough and scaly, resembling—though of course on a tiny scale—the teeth of a saw. It was by rubbing this that the ant made the sound that had rewarded the scientist's research.

M. Perel then took a couple of ants and confined them in the glass box already described, imprisoning the one and giving the other liberty to move.

The ant that had free use of his limbs became at once intensely excited. It rushed about, making what must have been—taking into consideration the comparative size of a man and an ant—a terrible noise. The modulations of the insect's mode of expression were plainly heard by the scientist.

Then, having apparently exhausted an exceedingly copious vocabulary, the ant, in despair of liberating its companion, and at last killed it. This was evidently the last word—the only course left open.

Scotch Tenacious and Thrift. In a dull Scotch village a dull morning one neighbor called upon another. He was met at the door by his friend's wife, and the conversation went thus: "Could?" "Aye." "Gae to be weety, I think." "Aye." "Is John in?" "Oh, aye, he's in." "Can I see him?" "No." "But I wanted to see him." "Aye, but you canna see him. John's dead."

"Died?" "Aye." "Sudden?" "Aye." "Very sudden?" "Very sudden." "Did he say anything about a pot of green paint before he died?"—Anecdote by Ian MacLaren.

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