

EDITOR'S NOTE

The following extract explains how the manuscript of "Marie," and with it some others, one of which is named "Child of Storm," came into the hands of the Editor.

It is from a letter, dated January 17th, 1909, and written by Mr. George Curtis, the brother of Sir Henry Curtis, Bart., who, it will be remembered, was one of the late Mr. Allan Quatermain's friends and companions in adventure when he discovered King Solomon's Mines, and who afterwards disappeared with him in Central Africa.

This extract runs as follows:--

"You may recall that our mutual and dear friend, old Allan Quatermain, left me the sole executor of his will, which he signed before he set out with my brother Henry for Zuvendis, where he was killed. The Court, however, not being satisfied that there was any legal proof of his death, invested the capital funds in trustee securities, and by my advice let his place in Yorkshire to a tenant who has remained in occupation of it during the last two decades. Now that tenant is dead, and at the earnest prayer of the Charities which benefit under Quatermain's will, and of myself--for in my uncertain state of health I have for long been most anxious to wind up this executorship--about eight months ago the Court at last consented to the distribution of this

large fund in accordance with the terms of the will.

"This, of course, involved the sale of the real property, and before it was put up to auction I went over the house in company of the solicitor appointed by the Court. On the top landing, in the room Quatermain used to occupy, we found a sealed cupboard that I opened. It proved to be full of various articles which evidently he had prized because of their associations with his earthy life. These I need not enumerate here, especially as I have reserved them as his residuary legatee and, in the event of my death, they will pass to you under my will.

"Among these relics, however, I found a stout box, made of some red foreign wood, that contained various documents and letters and a bundle of manuscripts. Under the tape which fastened these manuscripts together, as you will see, is a scrap of paper on which is written, in blue pencil, a direction signed 'Allan Quatermain,' that in the event of anything happening to him, these MSS. are to be sent to you (for whom, as you know, he had a high regard), and that at your sole discretion you are to burn or publish them as you may see fit.

"So, after all these years, as we both remain alive, I carry out our old friend's instructions and send you his bequest, which I trust may prove of interest and value. I have read the MS. called 'Marie,' and certainly am of the opinion that it ought to be published, for I think it a strange and moving tale of a great love--full, moreover, of forgotten history.

"That named 'Child of Storm' also seems very interesting as a study of savage life, and the others may be the same; but my eyes are troubling me so much that I have not been able to decipher them. I hope, however, that I may be spared long enough to see them in print.

"Poor old Allan Quatermain. It is as though he had suddenly reappeared from the dead! So at least I thought as I perused these stories of a period of his life of which I do not remember his speaking to me.

"And now my responsibility in this matter is finished and yours begins. Do what you like about the manuscripts."

"George Curtis."

As may be imagined, I, the Editor, was considerably astonished when I received this letter and the accompanying bundle of closely-written MSS. To me also it was as though my old friend had risen from the grave and once more stood before me, telling some history of his stormy and tragic past in that quiet, measured voice that I have never been able to forget.

The first manuscript I read was that entitled "Marie." It deals with Mr. Quatermain's strange experiences when as a very young man he accompanied the ill-fated Pieter Retief and the Boer Commission on an embassy to

the Zulu despot, Dingaan. This, it will be remembered, ended in their massacre, Quatermain himself and his Hottentot servant Hans being the sole survivors of the slaughter. Also it deals with another matter more personal to himself, namely, his courtship of and marriage to his first wife, Marie Marais.

Of this Marie I never heard him speak, save once. I remember that on a certain occasion--it was that of a garden fête for a local charity--I was standing by Quatermain when someone introduced to him a young girl who was staying in the neighborhood and had distinguished herself by singing very prettily at the fête. Her surname I forget, but her Christian name was Marie. He started when he heard it, and asked if she were French. The young lady answered No, but only of French extraction through her grandmother, who also was called Marie.

"Indeed?" he said. "Once I knew a maiden not unlike you who was also of French extraction and called Marie. May you prove more fortunate in life than she was, though better or nobler you can never be," and he bowed to her in his simple, courtly fashion, then turned away. Afterwards, when we were alone, I asked him who was this Marie of whom he had spoken to the young lady. He paused a little, then answered:

"She was my first wife, but I beg you not to speak of her to me or to anyone else, for I cannot bear to hear her name. Perhaps you will learn all about her one day." Then, to my grief and astonishment, he broke into something like a sob and abruptly left the room.

After reading the record of this Marie I can well understand why he was so moved. I print it practically as it left his hands.

There are other MSS. also, one of which, headed "Child of Storm," relates the moving history of a beautiful and, I fear I must add, wicked Zulu girl named Mameena who did much evil in her day and went unrepentant from the world.

Another, amongst other things, tells the secret story of the causes of the defeat of Cetewayo and his armies by the English in 1879, which happened not long before Quatermain met Sir Henry Curtis and Captain Good.

These three narratives are, indeed, more or less connected with each other. At least, a certain aged dwarf, called Zikali, a witch-doctor and an terrible man, has to do with all of them, although in the first, "Marie," he is only vaguely mentioned in connection with the massacre of Retief, whereof he was doubtless the primary instigator. As "Marie" comes first in chronological order, and was placed on the top of the pile by its author, I publish it first. With the others I hope to deal later on, as I may find time and opportunity.

But the future must take care of itself. We cannot control it, and its events are not in our hand. Meanwhile, I hope that those who in their youth have read of King Solomon's Mines and Zuvendis, and perhaps

some others who are younger, may find as much of interest in these new chapters of the autobiography of Allan Quatermain as I have done myself.