

It seems but a little matter, yet it is more than all the worlds to him!

To the astonishment of his colleagues in antiquarian research, Smith has never returned to Egypt. He explains to them that his health is quite restored, and that he no longer needs this annual change to a more temperate climate.

Now, which of the two royal rings did the Director-General return to Smith on the mummied hand of her late Majesty Ma-Mee?

MAGEPA THE BUCK

In a preface to a story of the early life of the late Allan Quatermain, known in Africa as Macumazahn, which has been published under the name of "Marie," Mr. Curtis, the brother of Sir Henry Curtis, tells of how he found a number of manuscripts that were left by Mr. Quatermain in his

house in Yorkshire. Of these "Marie" was one, but in addition to it and sundry other completed records I, the Editor to whom it was directed that these manuscripts should be handed for publication, have found a quantity of unclassified notes and papers. Some of these deal with matters that have to do with sport and game, or with historical events, and some are memoranda of incidents connected with the career of the writer, or with remarkable occurrences that he had witnessed of which he does not speak elsewhere.

One of these notes--it is contained in a book much soiled and worn that evidently its owner had carried about with him for years--reminds me of a conversation that I had with Mr. Quatermain long ago when I was his guest in Yorkshire. The note itself is short; I think that he must have jotted it down within an hour or two of the event to which it refers. It runs thus:--

"I wonder whether in the 'Land Beyond' any recognition is granted for acts of great courage and unselfish devotion--a kind of spiritual Victoria Cross. If so I think it ought to be accorded to that poor old savage, Magepa, as it would be if I had any voice in the matter. Upon my word he has made me feel proud of humanity. And yet he was nothing but a 'nigger,' as so many call the Kaffirs."

For a while I, the Editor, wondered to what this entry could allude.

Then of a sudden it all came back to me. I saw myself, as a young man, seated in the hall of Quatermain's house one evening after dinner. With me were Sir Henry Curtis and Captain Good. We were smoking, and the conversation had turned upon deeds of heroism. Each of us detailed such acts as he could remember which had made the most impression on him. When we had finished, old Allan said:--

"With your leave I'll tell you a story of what I think was one of the bravest things I ever saw. It happened at the beginning of the Zulu War, when the troops were marching into Zululand. Now at that time, as you know, I was turning an honest penny transport-riding for the Government, or rather for the military authorities. I hired them three wagons with the necessary voorloopers and drivers, sixteen good salted oxen to each wagon, and myself in charge of the lot. They paid me, well, never mind how much--I am rather ashamed to mention the amount. The truth is that the Imperial officers bought in a dear market during that Zulu War; moreover, things were not always straight. I could tell you stories of folk, not all of them Colonials, who got rich quicker than they ought, commissions and that kind of thing. But perhaps these are better forgotten. As for me, I asked a good price for my wagons, or rather for the hire of them, of a very well-satisfied young gentleman in uniform who had been exactly three weeks in the country, and to my surprise, got it. But when I went to those in command and warned them what would happen if they persisted in their way of advance, then in their pride

they would not listen to the old hunter and transport-rider, but politely bowed me out. If they had, there would have been no Isandhlwana disaster."

He brooded awhile, for, as I knew, this was a sore subject with him, one on which he would rarely talk. Although he escaped himself, Quatermain had lost friends on that fatal field. He went on:--

"To return to old Magepa. I had known him for many years. The first time we met was in the battle of the Tugela. I was fighting for the king's son, Umbelazi the Handsome, in the ranks of the Tulwana regiment--I mean to write all that story, for it should not be lost. Well, as I have told you before, the Tulwana were wiped out; of the three thousand or so of them I think only about fifty remained alive after they had annihilated the three of Cetewayo's regiments that set upon them. But as it chanced Magepa was one who survived.

"I met him afterwards at old King Panda's kraal and recognised him as having fought by my side. Whilst I was talking to him the Prince Cetewayo came by; to me he was civil enough, for he knew how I chanced to be in the battle, but he glared at Magepa, and said:

"Why, Macumazahn, is not this man one of the dogs with which you tried to bite me by the Tugela not long ago? He must be a cunning dog also, one who can run fast, for how comes it that he lives to snarl when so many will never bark again? Ow! if I had my way I would find a strip

of hide to fit his neck.'

"Not so,' I answered, 'he has the King's peace and he is a brave man --braver than I am, anyway, Prince, seeing that I ran from the ranks of the Tulwana, while he stood where he was.'

"You mean that your horse ran, Macumazahn. Well, since you like this dog, I will not hurt him,' and with a shrug he went his way.

"Yet soon or late he will hurt me,' said Magepa, when the Prince had gone. 'U'Cetewayo has a memory long as the shadow thrown by a tree at sunset. Moreover, as he knows well, it is true that I ran, Macumazahn, though not till all was finished and I could do no more by standing still. You remember how, after we had eaten up the first of Cetewayo's regiments, the second charged us and we ate that up also. Well, in that fight I got a tap on the head from a kerry. It struck me on my man's ring which I had just put on, for I think I was the youngest soldier in that regiment of veterans. The ring saved me; still, for a while I lost my mind and lay like one dead. When I found it again the fight was over and Cetewayo's people were searching for our wounded that they might kill them. Presently they found me and saw that there was no hurt on me.

""Here is one who shams dead like a stink-cat," said a big fellow, lifting his spear.

"Then it was that I sprang up and ran, who was but just married and

desired to live. He struck at me, but I jumped over the spear, and the others that they threw missed me. Then they began to hunt me, but, Macumazahn, I who am named "The Buck," because I am swifter of foot than any man in Zululand, outpaced them all and got away safe.'

"Well done, Magepa,' I said. 'Still, remember the saying of your people, "At last the strong swimmer goes with the stream and the swift runner is run down.'"

"I know it, Macumazahn,' he answered, with a nod, 'and perhaps in a day to come I shall know it better.'

"I took little heed of his words at the time, but more than thirty years afterwards I remembered them.

"Such was my first acquaintance with Magepa. Now, friends, I will tell you how it was renewed at the time of the Zulu War.

"As you know, I was attached to the centre column that advanced into Zululand by Rorke's Drift on the Buffalo River. Before war was declared, or at any rate before the advance began, while it might have been and many thought it would be averted, I was employed transport-riding goods to the little Rorke's Drift Station, that which became so famous afterwards, and incidentally in collecting what information I could of Cetewayo's intentions. Hearing that there was a kraal a mile or so the other side of the river, of which the people were said to be very

friendly to the English, I determined to visit it. You may think this was rash, but I was so well known in Zululand, where for many years, by special leave of the king, I was allowed to go whither I would quite unmolested and, indeed, under the royal protection, that I felt no fear for myself so long as I went alone.

"Accordingly one evening I crossed the drift and headed for a kloof in which I was told the kraal stood. Ten minutes' ride brought me in sight of it. It was not a large kraal; there may have been six or eight huts and a cattle enclosure surrounded by the usual fence. The situation, however, was very pretty, a knoll of rising ground backed by the wooded slopes of the kloof. As I approached, I saw women and children running to the kraal to hide, and when I reached the gateway for some time no one would come out to meet me. At length a small boy appeared who informed me that the kraal was 'empty as a gourd.'

"'Quite so,' I answered; 'still, go and tell the headman that Macumazahn wishes to speak with him.'

"The boy departed, and presently I saw a face that seemed familiar to me peeping round the edge of the gateway. After a careful inspection its owner emerged.

"He was a tall, thin man of indefinite age, perhaps between sixty and seventy, with a finely-cut face, a little grey beard, kind eyes and very well-shaped hands and feet, the fingers, which twitched incessantly,

being remarkably long.

"Greeting, Macumazahn,' he said, 'I see you do not remember me. Well, think of the battle of the Tugela, and of the last stand of the Tulwana, and of a certain talk at the kraal of our Father-who-is-dead' (that is King Panda), 'and of how he who sits in his place' (he meant Cetewayo), 'told you that if he had his way he would find a hide rope to fit the neck of a certain one.'

"Ah!' I said, 'I know you now, you are Magepa the Buck. So the Runner has not yet been run down.'

"No, Macumazahn, not yet, but there is still time. I think that many swift feet will be at work ere long.'

"How have you prospered?' I asked him.

"Well enough, Macumazahn, in all ways except one. I have three wives, but my children have been few and are dead, except one daughter, who is married and lives with me, for her husband, too, is dead. He was killed by a buffalo, and she has not yet married again. But enter and see.'

"So I went in and saw Magepa's wives, old women all of them. Also, at his bidding, his daughter, whose name was Gita, brought me some maas, or curdled milk, to drink. She was a well-formed woman, very like her father, but sad-faced, perhaps with a prescience of evil to come.

Clinging to her finger was a beautiful boy of something under two years of age, who, when he saw Magepa, ran to him and threw his little arms about his legs. The old man lifted the child and kissed him tenderly, saying:

"It is well that this toddler and I should love one another, Macumazahn, seeing that he is the last of my race. All the other children here are those of the people who have come to live in my shadow.'

"Where are their fathers?' I asked, patting the little boy who, his mother told me, was named Sinala upon the cheek, an attention that he resented.

"They have been called away on duty,' answered Magepa shortly; and I changed the subject.

"Then we began to talk about old times, and I asked him if he had any oxen to sell, saying that this was my reason for visiting the kraal.

"Nay, Macumazahn,' he answered in a meaning voice. 'This year all the cattle are the king's.'

"I nodded and replied that, as it was so, I had better be going, whereon, as I half expected, Magepa announced that he would see me safe to the drift. So I bade farewell to the wives and the widowed daughter,

and we started.

"As soon as we were clear of the kraal Magepa began to open his heart to me.

"Macumazahn,' he said, looking up at me earnestly, for I was mounted, and he walked beside my horse, 'there is to be war. Cetewayo will not consent to the demands of the great White Chief from the Cape,'--he meant Sir Bartle Frere--'he will fight with the English; only he will let them begin the fighting. He will draw them on into Zululand and then overwhelm them with his impis and stamp them flat, and eat them up; and I, who love the English, am very sorry. Yes, it makes my heart bleed. If it were the Boers now, I should be glad, for we Zulus hate the Boers; but the English we do not hate; even Cetewayo likes them; still, he will eat them up if they attack him.'

"Indeed,' I answered; and then as in duty bound I proceeded to get what I could out of him, and that was not a little. Of course, however, I did not swallow it all, since that I suspected that Magepa was feeding me with news that he had been ordered to disseminate.

"Presently we came to the mouth of the kloof in which the kraal stood, and here, for greater convenience of conversation, we halted, for I thought it as well that we should not be seen in close talk on the open plain beyond. The path here, I should add, ran past a clump of green bushes; I remember they bore a white flower that smelt sweet, and were

backed by some tall grass, elephant-grass I think it was, among which grew mimosa trees.

"Magepa,' I said, 'if in truth there is to be fighting, why don't you move over the river one night with your people and cattle, and get into Natal?'

"I would if I could, Macumazahn, who have no stomach for this war against the English. But there I should not be safe, since presently the king will come into Natal too, or send thirty thousand assegais as his messengers. Then what will happen to those who have left him?'

"Oh! if you think that,' I answered, laughing, 'you had better stay where you are.'

"Also, Macumazahn, the husbands of those women at my kraal have been called up to their regiments and if their wives fled to the English they would be killed. Again, the king has sent for nearly all our cattle "to keep them safe." He fears lest we Border Zulus might join our people in Natal, and that is why he is keeping our cattle "safe."

"Life is more than cattle, Magepa. At least you might come.'

"What! And leave my people to be killed? Macumazahn, you did not use to talk so. Still, hearken. Macumazahn, will you do me a service? I will pay you well for it. I would get my daughter Gita and my little grandson

Sinala into safety. If I and my wives are wiped out it does not matter, for we are old. But her I would save, and the boy I would save, so that one may live who will remember my name. Now if I were to send them across the drift, say at the dawn, not to-morrow and not the next day, but the day after, would you receive them into your wagon and deliver them safe to some place in Natal? I have money hidden, fifty pieces of gold, and you may take half of these and also half of the cattle if ever I live to get them back out of the keeping of the king.'

"Never mind about the money, and we will speak of the cattle afterwards,' I said. 'I understand that you wish to send your daughter and your little grandson out of danger; and I think you wise, very wise. When once the advance begins, if there is an advance, who knows what may happen? War is a rough game, Magepa. It is not the custom of you black people to spare women and children; and there will be Zulus fighting on our side as well as on yours; do you understand?'

"Ow! I understand, Macumazahn. I have known the face of war and seen many a little one like my grandson Sinala assegaied upon his mother's back.'

"Very good. But if I do this for you, you must do something for me. Say, Magepa, does Cetewayo really mean to fight, and if so, how? Oh yes, I know all you have been telling me, but I want not words but truth from the heart?'

"'You ask secrets,' said the old fellow, peering about him into the gathering gloom. 'Still, "a spear for a spear and a shield for a shield," as our saying runs. I have spoken no lie. The king does mean to fight, not because he wants to, but because the regiments swear that they will wash their assegais; they who have never seen blood since that battle of the Tugela in which we two played a part, and if he will not suffer it, well, there are more of his race! Also he means to fight thus,' and he gave me some very useful information, that is, information which would have been useful if those in authority had deigned to pay any attention to it when I passed it on.

"Just as he had finished speaking I thought that I heard a sound in the dense green bush behind us. It reminded me of the noise a man makes when he tries to stifle a cough, and frightened me. For if we had been overheard by a spy, Magepa was as good as dead, and the sooner I was across the river the better.

"'What's that?' I asked.

"'A bush buck, Macumazahn. There are lots of them about here.'

"Not being satisfied, though it is true that buck do cough like this, I turned my horse to the bush, seeking an opening. Thereon something crashed away and vanished into the long grass. In those shadows, of course, I could not see what it was, but such light as remained glinted on what might have been the polished tip of the horn of an antelope

or--an assegai.

"I told you it was a buck, Macumazahn,' said Magepa. 'Still, if you smell danger, let us come away from the bush, though the orders are that no white man is to be touched as yet.'

"Then, while we walked on towards the ford, he set out with great detail, as Kaffirs do, the exact arrangements that he proposed to make for the handing over of his daughter and her child into my care. I remember that I asked him why he would not send her on the following morning, instead of two mornings later. He answered because he expected an outpost of scouts from one of the regiments at his kraal that night, who would probably remain there over the morrow and perhaps longer. While they were in the place it would be difficult, if not impossible, for him to send away Gita and her son without exciting suspicion.

"Near the drift we parted, and I returned to our provisional camp and wrote a beautiful report of all that I had learned, of which report, I may add, no one took the slightest notice.

"I think it was the morning before that whereon I had arranged to meet Gita and the little boy at the drift that just about dawn I went down to the river for a wash. Having taken my dip, I climbed on to a flat rock to dress myself, and looked at the billows of beautiful, pearly mist which hid the face of the water, and considered--I almost said listened to--the great silence, for as yet no live thing was stirring.

"Ah! if I had known of the hideous sights and sounds that were destined to be heard ere long in this same haunt of perfect peace! Indeed, at that moment there came a kind of hint or premonition of them, since suddenly through the utter quiet broke the blood-curdling wail of a woman. It was followed by other wails and shouts, distant and yet distinct. Then the silence fell again.

"Now, I thought to myself, that noise might very well have come from old Magepa's kraal; luckily, however, sounds are deceptive in mist.

"Well, the end of it was that I waited there till the sun rose. The first thing on which its bright beams struck was a mighty column of smoke rising to heaven from where Magepa's kraal had stood!

"I went back to my wagons very sad--so sad that I could scarcely eat my breakfast. While I walked I wondered hard whether the light had glinted upon the tip of a buck's horn in that patch of green bush with the sweet-smelling white flowers a night or two ago. Or had it perchance fallen upon the point of the assegai of some spy who was watching my movements! In that event yonder column of smoke and the horrible cries that preceded it were easy to explain. For had not Magepa and I talked secrets together, and in Zulu?

"On the following morning at dawn I attended at the drift in the faint hope that Gita and her boy might arrive there as arranged. But nobody

came, which was not wonderful, seeing that Gita lay dead, stabbed through and through, as I saw afterwards, (she made a good fight for the child), and that her spirit had gone to wherever go the souls of the brave-hearted, be they white or black. Only on the farther bank of the river I saw some Zulu scouts who seemed to know my errand, for they called to me, asking mockingly where was the pretty woman I had come to meet?

"After that I tried to put the matter out of my head, which indeed was full enough of other things, since now definite orders had arrived as to the advance, and with these many troops and officers.

"It was just then that the Zulus began to fire across the river at such of our people as they saw upon the bank. At these they took aim, and, as a result, hit nobody. A raw Kaffir with a rifle, in my experience, is only dangerous when he aims at nothing, for then the bullet looks after itself and may catch you. To put a stop to this nuisance a regiment of the friendly natives--there may have been several hundred of them--was directed to cross the river and clear the kloofs and rocks of the Zulu skirmishers who were hidden among them. I watched them go off in fine style, and in the course of the afternoon heard a good deal of shouting and banging of guns on the farther side of the river.

"Towards evening someone told me that our impi, as he called it grandiloquently, was returning victorious. Having at the moment nothing else to do, I walked down to the river at a point where the water was

deep and the banks were high. Here I climbed to the top of a pile of boulders, whence with my field-glasses I could sweep a great extent of plain which stretched away on the Zululand side till at length it merged into hills and bush.

"Presently I saw some of our natives marching homewards in a scattered and disorganised fashion, but evidently very proud of themselves, for they were waving their assegais and singing scraps of war-songs. A few minutes later, a mile or more away, I caught sight of a man running.

"Watching him through the glasses I noted three things: First, that he was tall; secondly, that he ran with extraordinary swiftness; and, thirdly, that he had something tied upon his back. It was evident, further, that he had good reason to run, since he was being hunted by a number of our Kaffirs, of whom more and more continually joined the chase. From every side they poured down upon him, trying to cut him off and kill him, for as they got nearer I could see the assegais which they threw at him flash in the sunlight.

"Very soon I understood that the man was running with a definite object and to a definite point; he was trying to reach the river. I thought the sight very pitiful, this one poor creature being hunted to death by so many. Also I wondered why he did not free himself from the bundle on his back, and came to the conclusion that he must be a witch-doctor, and that the bundle contained his precious charms or medicines.

"This was while he was yet a long way off, but when he came nearer, within three or four hundred yards, of a sudden I caught the outline of his face against a good background, and knew it for that of Magepa.

"My God! I said to myself, 'it is old Magepa the Buck, and the bundle in the mat will be his grandson, Sinala!'

"Yes, even then I felt certain that he was carrying the child upon his back.

"What was I to do? It was impossible for me to cross the river at that place, and long before I could get round by the ford all would be finished. I stood up on my rock and shouted to those brutes of Kaffirs to let the man alone. They were so excited that they did not hear my words; at least, they swore afterwards that they thought I was encouraging them to hunt him down.

"But Magepa heard me. At the moment he seemed to be failing, but the sight of me appeared to give him fresh strength. He gathered himself together and leapt forward at a really surprising speed. Now the river was not more than three hundred yards away from him, and for the first two hundred of these he quite outdistanced his pursuers, although they were most of them young men and comparatively fresh. Then once more his strength began to fail.

"Watching through the glasses, I could see that his mouth was wide open,

and that there was red foam upon his lips. The burden on his back was dragging him down. Once he lifted his hands as though to loose it; then with a wild gesture let them fall again.

"Two of the pursuers who had outpaced the others crept up to him--lank, lean men of not more than thirty years of age. They had stabbing spears in their hands, such as are used at close quarters, and these of course they did not throw. One of them gained a little on the other.

"Now Magepa was not more than fifty yards from the bank, with the first hunter about ten paces behind him and coming up rapidly. Magepa glanced over his shoulder and saw, then put out his last strength. For forty yards he went like an arrow, running straight away from his pursuers, until he was within a few feet of the bank, when he stumbled and fell.

"'He's done,' I said, and, upon my word, if I had had a rifle in my hand I think I would have stopped one or both of those bloodhounds and taken the consequences.

"But no! Just as the first man lifted his broad spear to stab him through the back on which the bundle lay, Magepa leapt up and wheeled round to take the thrust in the chest. Evidently he did not wish to be speared in the back--for a certain reason. He took it sure enough, for the assegai was wrenched out of the hand of the striker. Still, as he was reeling backwards, it did not go through Magepa, or perhaps it hit a bone. He drew out the spear and threw it at the man, wounding him. Then

he staggered on, back and back, to the edge of the little cliff.

"It was reached at last. With a cry of 'Help me, Macumazahn!' Magepa turned, and before the other man could spear him, leapt straight into the deep water. He rose. Yes, the brave old fellow rose and struck out for the other bank, leaving a little line of red behind him.

"I rushed, or rather sprang and rolled down to the edge of the stream to where a point of shingle ran out into the water. Along this I clambered, and beyond it up to my middle. Now Magepa was being swept past me. I caught his outstretched hand and pulled him ashore.

"'The boy!' he gasped; 'the boy! Is he dead?'

"I severed the lashings of the mat that had cut right into the old fellow's shoulders. Inside of it was little Sinala, spluttering out water, but very evidently alive and unhurt, for presently he set up a yell.

"'No,' I said, 'he lives, and will live.'

"'Then all is well, Macumazahn.' (A pause.) 'It was a spy in the bush, not a buck. He overheard our talk. The King's slayers came. Gita held the door of the hut while I took the child, cut a hole through the straw with my assegai, and crept out at the back. She was full of spears before she died, but I got away with the boy. Till your Kaffirs found

me I lay hid in the bush, hoping to escape to Natal. Then I ran for the river, and saw you on the farther bank. I might have got away, but that child is heavy.' (A pause.) 'Give him food, Macumazahn, he must be hungry.' (A pause.) 'Farewell. That was a good saying of yours--the swift runner is outrun at last. Ah! yet I did not run in vain.'

(Another pause, the last.) Then he lifted himself upon one arm and with the other saluted, first the boy Sinala and next me, muttering, 'Remember your promise, Macumazahn.'

"That is how Magepa the Buck died. I never saw anyone carrying weight who could run quite so well as he," and Quatermain turned his head away as though the memory of this incident affected him somewhat.

"What became of the child Sinala?" I asked presently.

"Oh! I sent him to an institution in Natal, and afterwards was able to get some of his property back for him. I believe that he is being trained as an interpreter."

THE BLUE CURTAINS