

CHAPTER XXV. THE WAR WITH THE HALAKAZI PEOPLE

Now, my father, I must tell of how Umslopogaas the Slaughterer and Galazi the Wolf fared in their war against the People of the Halakazi. When I had gone from the shadow of the Ghost Mountain, Umslopogaas summoned a gathering of all his headmen, and told them it was his desire that the People of the Axe should no longer be a little people; that they should grow great and number their cattle by tens of thousands.

The headmen asked how this might be brought about--would he then make war on Dingaan the King? Umslopogaas answered no, he would win the favour of the king thus: and he told them of the Lily maid and of the Halakazi tribe in Swaziland, and of how he would go up against that tribe. Now some of the headmen said yea to this and some said nay, and the talk ran high and lasted till the evening. But when the evening was come Umslopogaas rose and said that he was chief under the Axe, and none other, and it was his will that they should go up against the Halakazi. If there was any man there who would gainsay his will, let him stand forward and do battle with him, and he who conquered should order all things. To this there was no answer, for there were few who cared to face the beak of Groan-Maker, and so it came about that it was agreed that the People of the Axe should make war upon the Halakazi, and Umslopogaas sent out messengers to summon every fighting-man to his side.

But when Zinita, his head wife, came to hear of the matter she was

angry, and upbraided Umslopogaas, and heaped curses on me, Mopo, whom she knew only as the mouth of DINGAAN, because, as she said truly, I had put this scheme into the mind of the Slaughterer. "What!" she went on, "do you not live here in peace and plenty, and must you go to make war on those who have not harmed you; there, perhaps, to perish or to come to other ill? You say you do this to win a girl for DINGAAN and to find favour in his sight. Has not DINGAAN girls more than he can count? It is more likely that, wearying of us, your wives, you go to get girls for yourself, Bulalio; and as for finding favour, rest quiet, so shall you find most favour. If the king sends his impis against you, then it will be time to fight, O fool with little wit!"

Thus ZINITA spoke to him, very roughly--for she always blurted out what was in her mind, and Umslopogaas could not challenge her to battle. So he must bear her talk as best he might, for it is often thus, my father, that the greatest of men grow small enough in their own huts. Moreover, he knew that it was because ZINITA loved him that she spoke so bitterly.

Now on the third day all the fighting-men were gathered, and there might have been two thousand of them, good men and brave. Then Umslopogaas went out and spoke to them, telling them of this adventure, and GALAZI the Wolf was with him. They listened silently, and it was plain to see that, as in the case of the headmen, some of them thought one thing and some another. Then GALAZI spoke to them briefly, telling them that he knew the roads and the caves and the number of the Halakazi cattle; but still they doubted. Thereon Umslopogaas added these words:--

"To-morrow, at the dawn, I, Bulalio, Holder of the Axe, Chief of the People of the Axe, go up against the Halakazi, with Galazi the Wolf, my brother. If but ten men follow us, yet we will go. Now, choose, you soldiers! Let those come who will, and let those who will stop at home with the women and the little children."

Now a great shout rose from every throat.

"We will go with you, Bulalio, to victory or death!"

So on the morrow they marched, and there was wailing among the women of the People of the Axe. Only Zinita did not wail, but stood by in wrath, foreboding evil; nor would she bid her lord farewell, yet when he was gone she wept also.

Now Umslopogaas and his impi travelled fast and far, hungering and thirsting, till at length they came to the land of the Umswazi, and after a while entered the territory of the Halakazi by a high and narrow pass. The fear of Galazi the Wolf was that they should find this pass held, for though they had harmed none in the kraals as they went, and taken only enough cattle to feed themselves, yet he knew well that messengers had sped by day and night to warn the people of the Halakazi. But they found no man in the pass, and on the other side of it they rested, for the night was far spent. At dawn Umslopogaas looked out over the wide plains beyond, and Galazi showed him a long low hill, two

hours' march away.

"There, my brother," he said, "lies the head kraal of the Halakazi, where I was born, and in that hill is the great cave."

Then they went on, and before the sun was high they came to the crest of a rise, and heard the sound of horns on its farther side. They stood upon the rise, and looked, and lo! yet far off, but running towards them, was the whole impi of the Halakazi, and it was a great impi.

"They have gathered their strength indeed," said Galazi. "For every man of ours there are three of these Swazis!"

The soldiers saw also, and the courage of some of them sank low. Then Umslopogaas spoke to them:--

"Yonder are the Swazi dogs, my children; they are many and we are few. Yet, shall it be told at home that we, men of the Zulu blood, were hunted by a pack of Swazi dogs? Shall our women and children sing THAT song in our ears, O Soldiers of the Axe?"

Now some cried "Never!" but some were silent; so Umslopogaas spoke again:--

"Turn back all who will: there is yet time. Turn back all who will, but ye who are men come forward with me. Or if ye will, go back all of

you, and leave Axe Groan-Maker and Club Watcher to see this matter out alone."

Now there arose a mighty shout of "We will die together who have lived together!"

"Do you swear it?" cried Umslopogaas, holding Groan-Maker on high.

"We swear it by the Axe," they answered.

Then Umslopogaas and Galazi made ready for the battle. They posted all the young men in the broken ground above the bottom of the slope, for these could best be spared to the spear, and Galazi the Wolf took command of them; but the veterans stayed upon the hillside, and with them Umslopogaas.

Now the Halakazi came on, and there were four full regiments of them. The plain was black with them, the air was rent with their shoutings, and their spears flashed like lightnings. On the farther side of the slope they halted and sent a herald forward to demand what the People of the Axe would have from them. The Slaughterer answered that they would have three things: First, the head of their chief, whose place Galazi should fill henceforth; secondly, that fair maid whom men named the Lily; thirdly, a thousand head of cattle. If these demands were granted, then he would spare them, the Halakazi; if not, he would stamp them out and take all.

So the herald returned, and when he reached the ranks of the Halakazi he called aloud his answer. Then a great roar of laughter went up from the Halakazi regiments, a roar that shook the earth. The brow of Umslopogaas the Slaughterer burned red beneath the black when he heard it, and he shook Groan-Maker towards their host.

"Ye shall sing another song before this sun is set," he cried, and strode along the ranks speaking to this man and that by name, and lifting up their hearts with great words.

Now the Halakazi raised a shout, and charged to come at the young men led by Galazi the Wolf; but beyond the foot of the slope was peaty ground, and they came through it heavily, and as they came Galazi and the young men fell upon them and slew them; still, they could not hold them back for long, because of their great numbers, and presently the battle ranged all along the slope. But so well did Galazi handle the young men, and so fiercely did they fight beneath his eye, that before they could be killed or driven back all the force of the Halakazi was doing battle with them. Ay, and twice Galazi charged with such as he could gather, and twice he checked the Halakazi rush, throwing them into confusion, till at length company was mixed with company and regiment with regiment. But it might not endure, for now more than half the young men were down, and the rest were being pushed back up the hill, fighting madly.

But all this while Umslopogaas and the veterans sat in their ranks upon the brow of the slope and watched. "Those Swazi dogs have a fool for their general," quoth Umslopogaas. "He has no men left to fall back on, and Galazi has broken his array and mixed his regiments as milk and cream are mixed in a bowl. They are no longer an impi, they are a mob."

Now the veterans moved restlessly on their haunches, pushing their legs out and drawing them in again. They glanced at the fray, they looked into each other's eyes and spoke a word here, a word there, "Well smitten, Galazi! Wow! that one is down! A brave lad! Ho! a good club is the Watcher! The fight draws near, my brother!" And ever as they spoke their faces grew fiercer and their fingers played with their spears.

At length a captain called aloud to Umslopogaas:--

"Say, Slaughterer, is it not time to be up and doing? The grass is wet to sit on, and our limbs grow cramped."

"Wait awhile," answered Umslopogaas. "Let them weary of their play. Let them weary, I tell you."

As he spoke the Halakazi huddled themselves together, and with a rush drove back Galazi and those who were left of the young men. Yes, at last they were forced to flee, and after them came the Swazis, and in the forefront of the pursuit was their chief, ringed round with a circle of his bravest.

Umslopogaas saw it and bounded to his feet, roaring like a bull. "At them now, wolves!" he shouted.

Then the lines of warriors sprang up as a wave springs, and their crests were like foam upon the wave. As a wave that swells to break they rose suddenly, like a breaking wave they poured down the slope. In front of them was the Slaughterer, holding Groan-Maker aloft, and oh! his feet were swift. So swift were his feet that, strive as they would, he outran them by the quarter of a spear's throw. Galazi heard the thunder of their rush; he looked round, and as he looked, lo! the Slaughterer swept past him, running like a buck. Then Galazi, too, bounded forward, and the Wolf-Brethren sped down the hill, the length of four spears between them.

The Halakazi also saw and heard, and strove to gather themselves together to meet the rush. In front of Umslopogaas was their chief, a tall man hedged about with assegais. Straight at the shield-hedge drove Umslopogaas, and a score of spears were lifted to greet him, a score of shields heaved into the air--this was a fence that none might pass alive. Yet would the Slaughterer pass it--not alone! See! he steadies his pace, he gathers himself together, and now he leaps! High into the air he leaps; his feet knock the heads of the warriors and rattle against the crowns of their shields. They smite upwards with the spear, but he has swept over them like a swooping bird. He has cleared them--he has lit--and now the shield-hedge guards two chiefs. But not for long.

Ou! Groan-Maker is aloft, he falls--and neither shield nor axe may stay his stroke, both are cleft through, and the Halakazi lack a leader.

The shield-ring wheels in upon itself. Fools! Galazi is upon you! What was that? Look, now! see how many bones are left unbroken in him whom the Watcher falls on full! What!--another down! Close up, shield-men--close up! Ai! are you fled?

Ah! the wave has fallen on the beach. Listen to its roaring--listen to the roaring of the shields! Stand, you men of the Halakazi--stand! Surely they are but a few. So! it is done! By the head of Chaka! they break--they are pushed back--now the wave of slaughter seethes along the sands--now the foe is swept like floating weed, and from all the line there comes a hissing like the hissing of thin waters. "S'gee!" says the hiss. "S'gee! S'gee!"

There, my father, I am old. What have I do with the battle any more, with the battle and its joy? Yet it is better to die in such a fight as that than to live any other way. I have seen such--I have seen many such. Oh! we could fight when I was a man, my father, but none that I knew could ever fight like Umslopogaas the Slaughterer, son of Chaka, and his blood-brother Galazi the Wolf! So, so! they swept them away, those Halakazi; they swept them as a maid sweeps the dust of a hut, as the wind sweeps the withered leaves. It was soon done when once it was begun. Some were fled and some were dead, and this was the end of that fight. No, no, not of all the war. The Halakazi were worsted in the

field, but many lived to win the great cave, and there the work must be finished. Thither, then, went the Slaughterer presently, with such of his impi as was left to him. Alas! many were killed; but how could they have died better than in that fight? Also those who were left were as good as all, for now they knew that they should not be overcome easily while Axe and Club still led the way.

Now they stood before a hill, measuring, perhaps, three thousand paces round its base. It was of no great height, and yet unclimbable, for, after a man had gone up a little way, the sides of it were sheer, offering no foothold except to the rock-rabbits and the lizards. No one was to be seen without this hill, nor in the great kraal of the Halakazi that lay to the east of it, and yet the ground about was trampled with the hoofs of oxen and the feet of men, and from within the mountain came a sound of lowing cattle.

"Here is the nest of Halakazi," quoth Galazi the Wolf.

"Here is the nest indeed," said Umslopogaas; "but how shall we come at the eggs to suck them? There are no branches on this tree."

"But there is a hole in the trunk," answered the Wolf.

Now he led them a little way till they came to a place where the soil was trampled as it is at the entrance to a cattle kraal, and they saw that there was a low cave which led into the cliff, like an archway such

as you white men build. But this archway was filled up with great blocks of stone placed upon each other in such a fashion that it could not be forced from without. After the cattle were driven in it had been filled up.

"We cannot enter here," said Galazi. "Follow me."

So they followed him, and came to the north side of the mountain, and there, two spear-casts away, a soldier was standing. But when he saw them he vanished suddenly.

"There is the place," said Galazi, "and the fox has gone to earth in it."

Now they ran to the spot and saw a little hole in the rock, scarcely bigger than an ant-bear's burrow, and through the hole came sounds and some light.

"Now where is the hyena who will try a new burrow?" cried Umslopogaas.

"A hundred head of cattle to the man who wins through and clears the way!"

Then two young men sprang forward who were flushed with victory and desired nothing more than to make a great name and win cattle, crying:--

"Here are hyenas, Bulalio."

"To earth, then!" said Umslopogaas, "and let him who wins through hold the path awhile till others follow."

The two young men sprang at the hole, and he who reached it first went down upon his hands and knees and crawled in, lying on his shield and holding his spear before him. For a little while the light in the burrow vanished, and they heard the sound of his crawling. Then came the noise of blows, and once more light crept through the hole. The man was dead.

"This one had a bad snake," said the second soldier; "his snake deserted him. Let me see if mine is better."

So down he went on his hands and knees, and crawled as the first had done, only he put his shield over his head. For awhile they heard him crawling, then once more came the sound of blows echoing on the ox-hide shield, and after the blows groans. He was dead also, yet it seemed that they had left his body in the hole, for now no light came through. This was the cause, my father: when they struck the man he had wriggled back a little way and died there, and none had entered from the farther side to drag him out.

Now the soldiers stared at the mouth of the passage and none seemed to love the look of it, for this was but a poor way to die. Umslopogaas and Galazi also looked at it, thinking.

"Now I am named Wolf," said Galazi, "and a wolf should not fear the dark; also, these are my people, and I must be the first to visit them," and he went down on his hands and knees without more ado. But Umslopogaas, having peered once more down the burrow, said: "Hold, Galazi; I will go first! I have a plan. Do you follow me. And you, my children, shout loudly, so that none may hear us move; and, if we win through, follow swiftly, for we cannot hold the mouth of that place for long. Hearken, also! this is my counsel to you: if I fall choose another chief--Galazi the Wolf, if he is still living."

"Nay, Slaughterer, do not name me," said the Wolf, "for together we live or die."

"So let it be, Galazi. Then choose you some other man and try this road no more, for if we cannot pass it none can, but seek food and sit down here till those jackals bolt; then be ready. Farewell, my children!"

"Farewell, father," they answered, "go warily, lest we be left like cattle without a herdsman, wandering and desolate."

Then Umslopogaas crept into the hole, taking no shield, but holding Groan-Maker before him, and at his heels crept Galazi. When he had covered the length of six spears he stretched out his hand, and, as he trusted to do, he found the feet of that man who had gone before and died in the place. Then Umslopogaas the wary did this: he put his head beneath the dead man's legs and thrust himself onward till all the body

was on his back, and there he held it with one hand, gripping its two wrists in his hand. Then he crawled forward a little space and saw that he was coming to the inner mouth of the burrow, but that the shadow was deep there because of a great mass of rock which lay before the burrow shutting out the light. "This is well for me," thought Umslopogaas, "for now they will not know the dead from the living. I may yet look upon the sun again." Now he heard the Halakazi soldiers talking without.

"The Zulu rats do not love this run," said one, "they fear the rat-catcher's stick. This is good sport," and a man laughed.

Then Umslopogaas pushed himself forward as swiftly as he could, holding the dead man on his back, and suddenly came out of the hole into the open place in the dark shadow of the great rock.

"By the Lily," cried a soldier, "here's a third! Take this, Zulu rat!" And he struck the dead man heavily with a kerrie. "And that!" cried another, driving his spear through him so that it pricked Umslopogaas beneath. "And that! and this! and that!" said others, as they smote and stabbed.

Now Umslopogaas groaned heavily in the deep shadow and lay still. "No need to waste more blows," said the man who had struck first. "This one will never go back to Zululand, and I think that few will care to follow him. Let us make an end: run, some of you, and find stones to stop the burrow, for now the sport is done."

He turned as he spoke and so did the others, and this was what the Slaughterer sought. With a swift movement, he freed himself from the dead man and sprang to his feet. They heard the sound and turned again, but as they turned Groan-Maker pecked softly, and that man who had sworn by the Lily was no more a man. Then Umslopogaas leaped forwards, and, bounding on to the great rock, stood there like a buck against the sky.

"A Zulu rat is not so easily slain, O ye weasels!" he cried, as they came at him from all sides at once with a roar. He smote to the right and the left, and so swiftly that men could scarcely see the blows fall, for he struck with Groan-Maker's beak. But though men scarcely saw the blows, yet, my father, men fell beneath them. Now foes were all around, leaping up at the Slaughterer as rushing water leaps to hide a rock--everywhere shone spears, thrusting at him from this side and from that. Those in front and to the side Groan-Maker served to stay, but one wounded Umslopogaas in the neck, and another was lifted to pierce his back when the strength of its holder was bowed to the dust--to the dust, to become of the dust.

For now the Wolf was through the hole also, and the Watcher grew very busy; he was so busy that soon the back of the Slaughterer had nothing to fear--yet those had much to fear who stood behind his back. The pair fought bravely, making a great slaughter, and presently, one by one, plumed heads of the People of the Axe showed through the burrow and strong arms mingled in the fray. Swiftly they came, leaping into battle

as otters leap to the water--now there were ten of them, now there were twenty--and now the Halakazi broke and fled, since they did not bargain for this. Then the rest of the Men of the Axe came through in peace, and the evening grew towards the dark before all had passed the hole.