ALLAN QUATERMAIN

By H. Rider Haggard

I inscribe this book of adventure to my son
ARTHUR JOHN RIDER HAGGARD

in the hope that in days to come he, and many other boys whom I shall never know, may, in the acts and thoughts of Allan Quatermain and his companions, as herein recorded, find something to help him and them to reach to what, with Sir Henry Curtis, I hold to be the highest rank whereto we can attain—the state and dignity of English gentlemen.

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INTRODUCTION

December 23

‘I have just buried my boy, my poor handsome boy of whom I was so proud, and my heart is broken. It is very hard having only one son to lose him thus, but God’s will be done. Who am I that I should complain? The great wheel of Fate rolls on like a Juggernaut, and crushes us all in turn, some soon, some late—it does not matter when, in the end, it crushes us all. We do not prostrate ourselves before it like the poor Indians; we fly hither and thither—we cry for mercy; but it is of no use, the black Fate thunders on and in its season reduces us to powder.

‘Poor Harry to go so soon! just when his life was opening to him. He was doing so well at the hospital, he had passed his last examination with honours, and I was proud of them, much prouder than he was, I think. And then he must needs go to that smallpox hospital. He wrote to me that he was not afraid of smallpox and wanted to gain the experience; and now the disease has killed him, and I, old and grey and withered, am left to mourn over him, without a chick or child to comfort me. I might have saved him, too—I have money enough for both of us, and much more than enough—King Solomon’s Mines provided me with that; but I said, “No, let the boy earn his living, let him labour that he may enjoy rest.” But the rest has come to him before the labour. Oh, my boy, my boy!

‘I am like the man in the Bible who laid up much goods and builded barns—goods for my boy and barns for him to store them in; and now his soul has been required of him, and I am left desolate. I would that it had been my soul and not my boy’s!

‘We buried him this afternoon under the shadow of the grey and ancient tower of the church of this village where my house is. It was a dreary December afternoon, and the sky was heavy with snow, but not much was falling. The coffin was put down by the grave, and a few big flakes lit upon it. They looked very white upon the black cloth! There was a little hitch about getting the coffin down into the grave—the necessary ropes had

been forgotten: so we drew back from it, and waited in silence watching the big flakes fall gently one by one like heavenly benedictions, and melt in tears on Harry's pall. But that was not all. A robin redbreast came as bold as could be and lit upon the coffin and began to sing. And then I am afraid that I broke down, and so did Sir Henry Curtis, strong man though he is; and as for Captain Good, I saw him turn away too; even in my own distress I could not help noticing it.'

The above, signed 'Allan Quatermain', is an extract from my diary written two years and more ago. I copy it down here because it seems to me that it is the fittest beginning to the history that I am about to write, if it please God to spare me to finish it. If not, well it does not matter. That extract was penned seven thousand miles or so from the spot where I now lie painfully and slowly writing this, with a pretty girl standing by my side fanning the flies from my august countenance. Harry is there and I am here, and yet somehow I cannot help feeling that I am not far off Harry.

When I was in England I used to live in a very fine house—at least I call it a fine house, speaking comparatively, and judging from the standard of the houses I have been accustomed to all my life in Africa—not five hundred yards from the old church where Harry is asleep, and thither I went after the funeral and ate some food; for it is no good starving even if one has just buried all one's earthly hopes. But I could not eat much, and soon I took to walking, or rather limping—being permanently lame from the bite of a lion—up and down, up and down the oak-panelled vestibule; for there is a vestibule in my house in England. On all the four walls of this vestibule were placed pairs of horns—about a hundred pairs altogether, all of which I had shot myself. They are beautiful specimens, as I never keep any horns which are not in every way perfect, unless it may be now and again on account of the associations connected with them. In the centre of the room, however, over the wide fireplace, there was a clear space left on which I had fixed up all my rifles. Some of them I have had for forty years, old muzzle-loaders that nobody would look at nowadays. One was an elephant gun with strips of rimpi, or green hide, lashed round the stock and locks, such as used to be owned by the Dutchmen—a 'roer' they call it. That gun, the Boer I bought it from many years ago told me, had been used by his father at the battle of the Blood River, just after Dingaan swept

into Natal and slaughtered six hundred men, women, and children, so that the Boers named the place where they died ‘Weenen’, or the ‘Place of Weeping’; and so it is called to this day, and always will be called. And many an elephant have I shot with that old gun. She always took a handful of black powder and a three-ounce ball, and kicked like the very deuce.

Well, up and down I walked, staring at the guns and the horns which the guns had brought low; and as I did so there rose up in me a great craving:—I would go away from this place where I lived idly and at ease, back again to the wild land where I had spent my life, where I met my dear wife and poor Harry was born, and so many things, good, bad, and indifferent, had happened to me. The thirst for the wilderness was on me; I could tolerate this place no more; I would go and die as I had lived, among the wild game and the savages. Yes, as I walked, I began to long to see the moonlight gleaming silvery white over the wide veldt and mysterious sea of bush, and watch the lines of game travelling down the ridges to the water. The ruling passion is strong in death, they say, and my heart was dead that night. But, independently of my trouble, no man who has for forty years lived the life I have, can with impunity go coop himself in this prim English country, with its trim hedgerows and cultivated fields, its stiff formal manners, and its well-dressed crowds. He begins to long—ah, how he longs!—for the keen breath of the desert air; he dreams of the sight of Zulu impis breaking on their foes like surf upon the rocks, and his heart rises up in rebellion against the strict limits of the civilized life.

Ah! this civilization, what does it all come to? For forty years and more I lived among savages, and studied them and their ways; and now for several years I have lived here in England, and have in my own stupid manner done my best to learn the ways of the children of light; and what have I found? A great gulf fixed? No, only a very little one, that a plain man’s thought may spring across. I say that as the savage is, so is the white man, only the latter is more inventive, and possesses the faculty of combination; save and except also that the savage, as I have known him, is to a large extent free from the greed of money, which eats like a cancer into the heart of the white man. It is a depressing conclusion, but in all essentials the savage and the child of civilization are identical. I dare say that the highly civilized lady reading this will smile at an old fool of a

hunter's simplicity when she thinks of her black bead-bedecked sister; and so will the superfine cultured idler scientifically eating a dinner at his club, the cost of which would keep a starving family for a week. And yet, my dear young lady, what are those pretty things round your own neck?—they have a strong family resemblance, especially when you wear that *very* low dress, to the savage woman's beads. Your habit of turning round and round to the sound of horns and tom-toms, your fondness for pigments and powders, the way in which you love to subjugate yourself to the rich warrior who has captured you in marriage, and the quickness with which your taste in feathered head-dresses varies—all these things suggest touches of kinship; and you remember that in the fundamental principles of your nature you are quite identical. As for you, sir, who also laugh, let some man come and strike you in the face whilst you are enjoying that marvellous-looking dish, and we shall soon see how much of the savage there is in *you*.

There, I might go on for ever, but what is the good? Civilization is only savagery silver-gilt. A vainglory is it, and like a northern light, comes but to fade and leave the sky more dark. Out of the soil of barbarism it has grown like a tree, and, as I believe, into the soil like a tree it will once more, sooner or later, fall again, as the Egyptian civilization fell, as the Hellenic civilization fell, and as the Roman civilization and many others of which the world has now lost count, fell also. Do not let me, however, be understood as decrying our modern institutions, representing as they do the gathered experience of humanity applied for the good of all. Of course they have great advantages—hospitals for instance; but then, remember, we breed the sickly people who fill them. In a savage land they do not exist. Besides, the question will arise: How many of these blessings are due to Christianity as distinct from civilization? And so the balance sways and the story runs—here a gain, there a loss, and Nature's great average struck across the two, whereof the sum total forms one of the factors in that mighty equation in which the result will equal the unknown quantity of her purpose.

I make no apology for this digression, especially as this is an introduction which all young people and those who never like to think (and it is a bad habit) will naturally skip. It seems to me very desirable that we should

sometimes try to understand the limitations of our nature, so that we may not be carried away by the pride of knowledge. Man's cleverness is almost indefinite, and stretches like an elastic band, but human nature is like an iron ring. You can go round and round it, you can polish it highly, you can even flatten it a little on one side, whereby you will make it bulge out the other, but you will *never*, while the world endures and man is man, increase its total circumference. It is the one fixed unchangeable thing—fixed as the stars, more enduring than the mountains, as unalterable as the way of the Eternal. Human nature is God's kaleidoscope, and the little bits of coloured glass which represent our passions, hopes, fears, joys, aspirations towards good and evil and what not, are turned in His mighty hand as surely and as certainly as it turns the stars, and continually fall into new patterns and combinations. But the composing elements remain the same, nor will there be one more bit of coloured glass nor one less for ever and ever.

This being so, supposing for the sake of argument we divide ourselves into twenty parts, nineteen savage and one civilized, we must look to the nineteen savage portions of our nature, if we would really understand ourselves, and not to the twentieth, which, though so insignificant in reality, is spread all over the other nineteen, making them appear quite different from what they really are, as the blacking does a boot, or the veneer a table. It is on the nineteen rough serviceable savage portions that we fall back on emergencies, not on the polished but unsubstantial twentieth. Civilization should wipe away our tears, and yet we weep and cannot be comforted. Warfare is abhorrent to her, and yet we strike out for hearth and home, for honour and fair fame, and can glory in the blow. And so on, through everything.

So, when the heart is stricken, and the head is humbled in the dust, civilization fails us utterly. Back, back, we creep, and lay us like little children on the great breast of Nature, she that perchance may soothe us and make us forget, or at least rid remembrance of its sting. Who has not in his great grief felt a longing to look upon the outward features of the universal Mother; to lie on the mountains and watch the clouds drive across the sky and hear the rollers break in thunder on the shore, to let his poor struggling life mingle for a while in her life; to feel the slow beat of her

eternal heart, and to forget his woes, and let his identity be swallowed in the vast imperceptibly moving energy of her of whom we are, from whom we came, and with whom we shall again be mingled, who gave us birth, and will in a day to come give us our burial also.

And so in my trouble, as I walked up and down the oak-panelled vestibule of my house there in Yorkshire, I longed once more to throw myself into the arms of Nature. Not the Nature which you know, the Nature that waves in well-kept woods and smiles out in corn-fields, but Nature as she was in the age when creation was complete, undefiled as yet by any human sinks of sweltering humanity. I would go again where the wild game was, back to the land whereof none know the history, back to the savages, whom I love, although some of them are almost as merciless as Political Economy. There, perhaps, I should be able to learn to think of poor Harry lying in the churchyard, without feeling as though my heart would break in two.

And now there is an end of this egotistical talk, and there shall be no more of it. But if you whose eyes may perchance one day fall upon my written thoughts have got so far as this, I ask you to persevere, since what I have to tell you is not without its interest, and it has never been told before, nor will again.

CHAPTER I THE CONSUL'S YARN

A week had passed since the funeral of my poor boy Harry, and one evening I was in my room walking up and down and thinking, when there was a ring at the outer door. Going down the steps I opened it myself, and in came my old friends Sir Henry Curtis and Captain John Good, RN. They entered the vestibule and sat themselves down before the wide hearth, where, I remember, a particularly good fire of logs was burning.

'It is very kind of you to come round,' I said by way of making a remark; 'it must have been heavy walking in the snow.'

They said nothing, but Sir Henry slowly filled his pipe and lit it with a burning ember. As he leant forward to do so the fire got hold of a gassy bit of pine and flared up brightly, throwing the whole scene into strong relief, and I thought, What a splendid-looking man he is! Calm, powerful face, clear-cut features, large grey eyes, yellow beard and hair—altogether a magnificent specimen of the higher type of humanity. Nor did his form belie his face. I have never seen wider shoulders or a deeper chest. Indeed, Sir Henry's girth is so great that, though he is six feet two high, he does not strike one as a tall man. As I looked at him I could not help thinking what a curious contrast my little dried-up self presented to his grand face and form. Imagine to yourself a small, withered, yellow-faced man of sixty-three, with thin hands, large brown eyes, a head of grizzled hair cut short and standing up like a half-worn scrubbing-brush—total weight in my clothes, nine stone six—and you will get a very fair idea of Allan Quatermain, commonly called Hunter Quatermain, or by the natives 'Macumazahn'—Anglicè, he who keeps a bright look-out at night, or, in vulgar English, a sharp fellow who is not to be taken in.

Then there was Good, who is not like either of us, being short, dark, stout—*very* stout—with twinkling black eyes, in one of which an eyeglass is everlastingly fixed. I say stout, but it is a mild term; I regret to state that of late years Good has been running to fat in a most disgraceful way. Sir Henry tells him that it comes from idleness and over-feeding, and Good does not like it at all, though he cannot deny it.

We sat for a while, and then I got a match and lit the lamp that stood ready on the table, for the half-light began to grow dreary, as it is apt to do when one has a short week ago buried the hope of one's life. Next, I opened a cupboard in the wainscoting and got a bottle of whisky and some tumblers and water. I always like to do these things for myself: it is irritating to me to have somebody continually at my elbow, as though I were an eighteen-month-old baby. All this while Curtis and Good had been silent, feeling, I suppose, that they had nothing to say that could do me any good, and content to give me the comfort of their presence and unspoken sympathy; for it was only their second visit since the funeral. And it is, by the way, from the *presence* of others that we really derive support in our dark hours of grief, and not from their talk, which often only serves to irritate us. Before a bad storm the game always herd together, but they cease their calling.

They sat and smoked and drank whisky and water, and I stood by the fire also smoking and looking at them.

At last I spoke. 'Old friends,' I said, 'how long is it since we got back from Kukuanaland?'

'Three years,' said Good. 'Why do you ask?'

'I ask because I think that I have had a long enough spell of civilization. I am going back to the veldt.'

Sir Henry laid his head back in his arm-chair and laughed one of his deep laughs. 'How very odd,' he said, 'eh, Good?'

Good beamed at me mysteriously through his eyeglass and murmured, 'Yes, odd—very odd.'

'I don't quite understand,' said I, looking from one to the other, for I dislike mysteries.

'Don't you, old fellow?' said Sir Henry; 'then I will explain. As Good and I were walking up here we had a talk.'

'If Good was there you probably did,' I put in sarcastically, for Good is a great hand at talking. 'And what may it have been about?'

‘What do you think?’ asked Sir Henry.

I shook my head. It was not likely that I should know what Good might be talking about. He talks about so many things.

‘Well, it was about a little plan that I have formed—namely, that if you were willing we should pack up our traps and go off to Africa on another expedition.’

I fairly jumped at his words. ‘You don’t say so!’ I said.

‘Yes I do, though, and so does Good; don’t you, Good?’

‘Rather,’ said that gentleman.

‘Listen, old fellow,’ went on Sir Henry, with considerable animation of manner. ‘I’m tired of it too, dead-tired of doing nothing more except play the squire in a country that is sick of squires. For a year or more I have been getting as restless as an old elephant who scents danger. I am always dreaming of Kukuanaland and Gagool and King Solomon’s Mines. I can assure you I have become the victim of an almost unaccountable craving. I am sick of shooting pheasants and partridges, and want to have a go at some large game again. There, you know the feeling—when one has once tasted brandy and water, milk becomes insipid to the palate. That year we spent together up in Kukuanaland seems to me worth all the other years of my life put together. I dare say that I am a fool for my pains, but I can’t help it; I long to go, and, what is more, I mean to go.’ He paused, and then went on again. ‘And, after all, why should I not go? I have no wife or parent, no chick or child to keep me. If anything happens to me the baronetcy will go to my brother George and his boy, as it would ultimately do in any case. I am of no importance to any one.’

‘Ah!’ I said, ‘I thought you would come to that sooner or later. And now, Good, what is your reason for wanting to trek; have you got one?’

‘I have,’ said Good, solemnly. ‘I never do anything without a reason; and it isn’t a lady—at least, if it is, it’s several.’

I looked at him again. Good is so overpoweringly frivolous. ‘What is it?’ I said.

‘Well, if you really want to know, though I’d rather not speak of a delicate and strictly personal matter, I’ll tell you: I’m getting too fat.’

‘Shut up, Good!’ said Sir Henry. ‘And now, Quatermain, tell us, where do you propose going to?’

I lit my pipe, which had gone out, before answering.

‘Have you people ever heard of Mt Kenia?’ I asked.

‘Don’t know the place,’ said Good.

‘Did you ever hear of the Island of Lamu?’ I asked again.

‘No. Stop, though—isn’t it a place about 300 miles north of Zanzibar?’

‘Yes. Now listen. What I have to propose is this. That we go to Lamu and thence make our way about 250 miles inland to Mt Kenia; from Mt Kenia on inland to Mt Lekakisera, another 200 miles, or thereabouts, beyond which no white man has to the best of my belief ever been; and then, if we get so far, right on into the unknown interior. What do you say to that, my hearties?’

‘It’s a big order,’ said Sir Henry, reflectively.

‘You are right,’ I answered, ‘it is; but I take it that we are all three of us in search of a big order. We want a change of scene, and we are likely to get one—a thorough change. All my life I have longed to visit those parts, and I mean to do it before I die. My poor boy’s death has broken the last link between me and civilization, and I’m off to my native wilds. And now I’ll tell you another thing, and that is, that for years and years I have heard rumours of a great white race which is supposed to have its home somewhere up in this direction, and I have a mind to see if there is any truth in them. If you fellows like to come, well and good; if not, I’ll go alone.’

‘I’m your man, though I don’t believe in your white race,’ said Sir Henry Curtis, rising and placing his arm upon my shoulder.

‘Ditto,’ remarked Good. ‘I’ll go into training at once. By all means let’s go to Mt Kenia and the other place with an unpronounceable name, and look for a white race that does not exist. It’s all one to me.’

‘When do you propose to start?’ asked Sir Henry.

‘This day month,’ I answered, ‘by the British India steamboat; and don’t you be so certain that things have no existence because you do not happen to have heard of them. Remember King Solomon’s mines!’

Some fourteen weeks or so had passed since the date of this conversation, and this history goes on its way in very different surroundings.

After much deliberation and inquiry we came to the conclusion that our best starting-point for Mt Kenia would be from the neighbourhood of the mouth of the Tana River, and not from Mombassa, a place over 100 miles nearer Zanzibar. This conclusion we arrived at from information given to us by a German trader whom we met upon the steamer at Aden. I think that he was the dirtiest German I ever knew; but he was a good fellow, and gave us a great deal of valuable information. ‘Lamu,’ said he, ‘you goes to Lamu—oh ze beautiful place!’ and he turned up his fat face and beamed with mild rapture. ‘One year and a half I live there and never change my shirt—never at all.’

And so it came to pass that on arriving at the island we disembarked with all our goods and chattels, and, not knowing where to go, marched boldly up to the house of Her Majesty’s Consul, where we were most hospitably received.

Lamu is a very curious place, but the things which stand out most clearly in my memory in connection with it are its exceeding dirtiness and its smells. These last are simply awful. Just below the Consulate is the beach, or rather a mud bank that is called a beach. It is left quite bare at low tide, and serves as a repository for all the filth, offal, and refuse of the town. Here it is, too, that the women come to bury coconuts in the mud, leaving them there till the outer husk is quite rotten, when they dig them up again and use the fibres to make mats with, and for various other purposes. As this process has been going on for generations, the

condition of the shore can be better imagined than described. I have smelt many evil odours in the course of my life, but the concentrated essence of stench which arose from that beach at Lamu as we sat in the moonlit night—not under, but *on* our friend the Consul's hospitable roof—and sniffed it, makes the remembrance of them very poor and faint. No wonder people get fever at Lamu. And yet the place was not without a certain quaintness and charm of its own, though possibly—indeed probably—it was one which would quickly pall.

'Well, where are you gentlemen steering for?' asked our friend the hospitable Consul, as we smoked our pipes after dinner.

'We propose to go to Mt Kenia and then on to Mt Lekakisera,' answered Sir Henry. 'Quatermain has got hold of some yarn about there being a white race up in the unknown territories beyond.'

The Consul looked interested, and answered that he had heard something of that, too.

'What have you heard?' I asked.

'Oh, not much. All I know about it is that a year or so ago I got a letter from Mackenzie, the Scotch missionary, whose station, "The Highlands", is placed at the highest navigable point of the Tana River, in which he said something about it.'

'Have you the letter?' I asked.

'No, I destroyed it; but I remember that he said that a man had arrived at his station who declared that two months' journey beyond Mt Lekakisera, which no white man has yet visited—at least, so far as I know—he found a lake called Laga, and that then he went off to the north-east, a month's journey, over desert and thorn veldt and great mountains, till he came to a country where the people are white and live in stone houses. Here he was hospitably entertained for a while, till at last the priests of the country set it about that he was a devil, and the people drove him away, and he journeyed for eight months and reached Mackenzie's place, as I heard, dying. That's all I know; and if you ask me, I believe that it is a lie; but if

you want to find out more about it, you had better go up the Tana to Mackenzie's place and ask him for information.'

Sir Henry and I looked at each other. Here was something tangible.

'I think that we will go to Mr Mackenzie's,' I said.

'Well,' answered the Consul, 'that is your best way, but I warn you that you are likely to have a rough journey, for I hear that the Masai are about, and, as you know, they are not pleasant customers. Your best plan will be to choose a few picked men for personal servants and hunters, and to hire bearers from village to village. It will give you an infinity of trouble, but perhaps on the whole it will prove a cheaper and more advantageous course than engaging a caravan, and you will be less liable to desertion.'

Fortunately there were at Lamu at this time a party of Wakwafi Askari (soldiers). The Wakwafi, who are a cross between the Masai and the Wataveta, are a fine manly race, possessing many of the good qualities of the Zulu, and a great capacity for civilization. They are also great hunters. As it happened, these particular men had recently been on a long trip with an Englishman named Jutson, who had started from Mombasa, a port about 150 miles below Lamu, and journeyed right round Kilimanjaro, one of the highest known mountains in Africa. Poor fellow, he had died of fever when on his return journey, and within a day's march of Mombasa. It does seem hard that he should have gone off thus when within a few hours of safety, and after having survived so many perils, but so it was. His hunters buried him, and then came on to Lamu in a dhow. Our friend the Consul suggested to us that we had better try and hire these men, and accordingly on the following morning we started to interview the party, accompanied by an interpreter.

In due course we found them in a mud hut on the outskirts of the town. Three of the men were sitting outside the hut, and fine frank-looking fellows they were, having a more or less civilized appearance. To them we cautiously opened the object of our visit, at first with very scant success. They declared that they could not entertain any such idea, that they were worn and weary with long travelling, and that their hearts were sore at the loss of their master. They meant to go back to their homes and rest