



CHATTERBOX.

ANY PORT IN A STORM.



"He peered into a dark hole far up the trunk of the tree."

WANDERERS IN THE WAR.

By A. A. METHLEY.

(Continued from page 255.)

THE boy stood up, feeling foolish and uncomfortable at thus having literally been caught napping, and Jules also scrambled to his feet. For fully a minute the three stared at each other, and then the girl, for she was hardly more than that, turned and rushed away up the stairs as quickly as her feet would carry her.

They heard a door bang, the sound of someone hurrying across a room overhead, and then the mutter of harsh, angry voices.

'Hullo, there seems to be a row on,' said Roger, but Jules, who understood the position more or less, could not explain matters. Instead, he smiled at his friend with a quaint little shrug of his shoulders, and then contrived to make it clear that they must leave the inn without further delay. It seemed rather hard to have to start without having any breakfast, but there was no help for it, and neither of the boys wanted to encounter either the grumpy old woman or the furious young one again.

Just as they were leaving the house, however, a way out of the difficulty presented itself, for on the table was still half the long loaf of bread which they had had for supper. This was commandeered, a franc being left in its place as payment.

Then Roger slipped the straps of his knapsack over shoulders, Jules whistled to Toto, and they set off once more on their journey.

It was still only six o'clock, and the early morning air seemed exquisitely fresh and cool after the stuffy warmth of the kitchen where they had spent the night. All around was the forest, green, dewy, and full of wonderful aromatic fragrance. Birds were singing, and the ripple of a stream could be heard not far away.

The boys could now see that the inn was built in a tiny clearing, just large enough to contain the house itself, its outbuildings, the littered yard, and a scrap of orchard where a couple of goats were tethered beneath the apple and pear trees. Just outside the gate of the yard ran a narrow sandy track, rutted with wheel-marks, and this ran northward, but Roger decided that he had better follow it until they met some one who could direct them, or came to a cross-road that would take them eastward in the direction of St. Denis-sur-Meuse.

Behind the inn, at a little distance, rose the steep, cone-shaped hill, and on its summit could clearly be seen the bare branches and gleaming white trunk of the dead tree.

As Roger stood looking upward at the scene of his adventure, the panic of the night before seemed utterly absurd—as terrors have a way of doing in bright sunshine—but he was conscious of a devouring curiosity and eagerness to climb the hill once more. He wanted to go near to the tree to listen to the loud humming of the wild bees, and to look for traces of the bear among the bushes, through which it had rustled in the quest for honey.

And then, suddenly, a bright idea flashed into the boy's head. Honey! well, why should not he and Jules find it as well as the bear? The search would, at least, serve as an excuse for a second ascent of the hill,

and, if discovered, the honey would be a welcome addition to their breakfast of dry bread. 'We'll go up that hill,' he said, turning to Jules, and he set off quickly through the trees. Jules followed without demur, and very soon they had reached the hill, and were climbing it by a comparatively easy path which Roger had never seen in the darkness of the previous night. It took them quickly to the summit, and there before them were the thick bushes, where the supposed bear had lurked, and the huge white tree. It looked bigger than ever by daylight, its trunk towering high above their heads and the boughs, most of them leafless, but some with lingering tufts of green foliage, stretching wide in every direction.

It probably was a hollow tree, as Roger had surmised, for there seemed to come a dull echoing sound when he struck it with a stick, but no hole was to be seen.

Roger tried to explain things to Jules, thinking that perhaps the sharp-eyed little French boy might be able to help in the search.

'Look, Jules, honey in this tree, honey and bees.' He stopped, paused, and then, as if with an inspiration, remembered the word he wanted, 'Honey—miel—yes; that's it, miel in arbre.'

Jules' pucked brow smoothed itself, and he nodded in delighted comprehension. 'Ah, oui, oui,' he said, and after gazing upward for a moment, he turned to Roger with a rapid stream of words that seemed almost to trip over each other as they fell from his lips.

He stopped, at last, with his usual little shrug of the shoulders, when he saw that he was not understood, and then running to the tree, he caught at a bough, swung himself lightly on to it, and began to climb with rapid dexterity. In a very few minutes he was high up among the branches.

Roger watched his friend in a glow of eager admiration, for the French boy seemed to be as deft and nimble as a monkey, and it was wonderful to see how he raised himself from bough to bough and found footholds in the least promising places. He stopped at last, and peered into a dark hole far up the trunk of the tree, that Roger noticed now for the first time.

Apparently the inspection was not a satisfactory one, for Jules soon began to clamber down again, and when the ground was reached he shook his head vehemently in answer to inquiries for 'Miel.'

He tried to explain, however, what he had seen in the hollow tree, but although the words were accompanied by many gesticulations, Roger found it impossible to grasp his meaning. Then Jules ran round to the other side of the tree and pushed his way in among the thick bushes.

All this time nothing had been heard of the loud buzzing noise of the evening before, and Roger, as he listened to the drowsy hum of a few stray bees above the heather, wondered if he could possibly have dreamt that part of his adventure.

In a few moments Jules, covered with leaves and bits of stick, emerged from among the bushes, and once more vainly tried to explain something to Roger.

'Is there anything in there?' asked the English boy; but before he could search for himself, the sound of voices was heard, and Jules, seizing his friend's arm, dragged him backward into the bushes.

Two people were coming up the narrow path, talking as they came, but in low voices, so that, even if he had

understood their language, the words would have been almost indistinguishable. The foremost of the two was a man, tall and square-shouldered, with a ruddy face, and a felt hat pulled low down on his forehead. He might have been good-looking, but an ugly scar seamed one cheek and twisted his mouth into a perpetual sneer. Behind him came a woman whom both Roger and Jules recognised instantly, for she was the angry, blue-eyed young person who had roused them from their slumbers less than an hour ago.

Jules, remembering the words of the old innkeeper as to the fury of her lodger, tried to drag Roger down into the undergrowth, but the other, less well-informed, saw no reason why this chance encounter should be avoided. He had been hoping to meet some one who would be able to show them the way to St. Denis-sur-Meuse, and here were two people who probably knew the district and would be able to give the necessary information. Moreover, perhaps they might speak English, for their dress and general appearance showed that they were not peasants.

The boy took off his cap politely and came forward. 'Could you tell us, please—' he began, and then stopped short, for, as he looked up and caught sight of the boys, the scarred man's face changed, and now wore an expression of savage rage that was startling and horrible.

And the strange part of it was that fear seemed to be mingled with his anger, and he glanced furtively round, as if dreading attack or searching for a way of escape.

Roger stepped back, dismayed, and then the man, recovering his courage but losing his temper more completely than ever, burst out into a storm of furious exclamations and questions. 'What are you doing here? How dare you come? It is disgraceful, abominable! Don't you know that this place is private property? I will have you punished, thrashed, imprisoned!'

The man seemed to be beside himself, and even plucky little Jules quailed before his threats and abuse, although he clung desperately to Toto's collar and prevented the dog, who was snarling and showing his teeth viciously, from taking an active part in the encounter.

All this time the blue-eyed girl glared at the two boys with a face that was almost more full of rage than her companion's, but she seemed to be anxious to restrain his violence, and every now and then dragged at his arm or spoke to him in a low whisper. At last her persuasions seemed to prevail, and after a few more shouted threats the man turned and rushed away down the path. The girl followed, and Roger and Jules were left alone.

Roger was the first to recover, and he broke into a rather nervous little laugh. 'What queer people! I wonder what he was driving at! But France does seem to be a rum country. Come on, Jules, let's go down the hill another way. We don't want to meet that horrible man again.'

He led the way to the side of the hill where he had climbed up the night before, and now, in broad daylight, the descent proved to be a simple matter. In a very little while the bottom was reached, and then they found the road, striking it some distance north of the lonely inn. Before long came a cross-road, and they trudged eastward for several miles, halting at last near a little valley where a rushing stream had widened into a shallow, silvery pool.

'What a ripping place; let's have a rest here,' Roger cried, flinging himself down on to a heather-covered bank, and then they ate their breakfast of dry bread, and afterwards had a splendid bathe in the cool, sparkling water.

(Continued on page 270.)

THE TWO SHIPS.

A Fable.

'WHEN my ship comes home,' said the first merchant, 'I shall sell the cargo at a great profit and become the richest man in the town.'

'I shall be rich also,' observed the second merchant, cheerfully. 'I shall buy a large house and garden, several new dresses for my wife, and toys for all the children.'

'That is all very well,' returned his companion; 'but last night there was a great storm at sea, and the chances are that both our ships went to the bottom. I could not sleep for the roaring of the wind.'

'Neither could I,' said the second merchant; 'but as we lay awake, my wife and I amused ourselves by thinking of what we would do with our money when—I should say if—our ship comes safely home.'

'You are very foolish,' said the first merchant, and went his way frowning and sighing because of the bad weather.

Unfortunately the barometer continued to fall instead of rising. The weather went from bad to worse, yet when next the friends met, the second merchant smiled as cheerfully as ever.

'What is there to smile about now?' demanded the first merchant, rather irritably, for he was worn with anxiety.

'Why,' answered the other, 'I was smiling to think of the relief it will be when our ships have actually come to port.'

'My opinion is that they never will,' was the answer; 'then,' he added, very impolitely, 'you will smile on the wrong side of your face.'

'You may be right,' said the second merchant, good-temperedly.

But that very night there was the worst storm of the season. Both the ships were already overdue, and a few days later came the news that the first merchant's ship had been sighted by the home pilots, but its sister-vessel had gone to the bottom of the sea. Fortunately the crew had been able to escape in the boats, but the cargo was lost for ever.

Once more the two merchants met on the quay.

'Friend,' said the second, 'I congratulate you with all my heart. But why do you sigh?'

'Because,' answered he, 'I learn from the signals that my cargo is less than I had anticipated. Why do you smile?' he demanded. 'Anybody would think you had gained a fortune instead of losing one.'

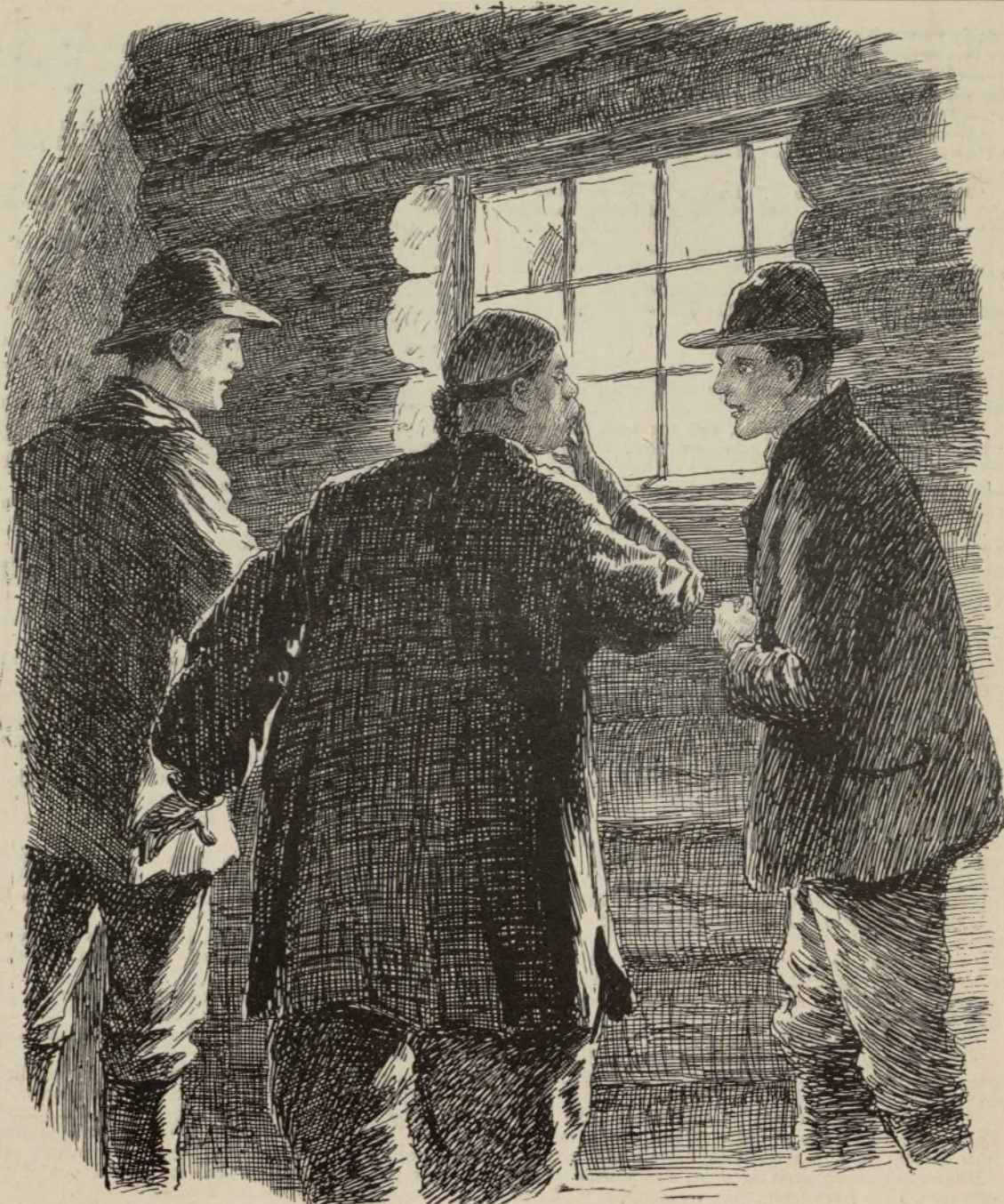
'Why,' said the second merchant, 'my wife and I make a great joke of the way we planned to buy a house and garden, and new clothes, and toys for the children, when all the time it was highly uncertain whether we should ever be a penny richer than we are at this moment. In short,' added he, with great simplicity, 'we laugh at our own foolishness.'

Which only proved, if he had but known it, that the second merchant and his wife were at the very least ten times wiser than their friend.

JOYCE COBB.



“What is there to smile about now?” demanded the first merchant.”



"He put a finger on his lips and vanished."

THE RED STEER.

(Continued from page 253.)

IT was noon when Jake reached camp without the animal, and his look was gloomy, but resolute. 'I've got to find that steer before I go home, but if we

stop now, we'll make the settlement too late for the buyer to sort out his stock. Besides, he won't want to put them on the cars when they're hot and tired.'

They set off, and reaching the little town at dusk, went to the hotel for supper. It was a rude wooden building, and when the meal was over they entered an

untidy room with cracked board walls and a floor torn by lumbermen's spiked boots. A gramophone made a discordant noise, and a group of men lounged about the big stove, for the nights were getting cold. One looked up as the boys came in.

'We have put the stock in the yard,' Jake said to him. 'They're in pretty good condition, but we haven't got the red steer.'

'That's awkward,' the man replied. 'The red steer's the best of the bunch. Don't know that I want to ship the others if that one's short.'

'You're only one short. You can knock off its value and pay for the rest.'

'No, sir; you have spoiled the bunch for a quick-selling lot; but I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll pay half your bill, and settle up again with your father when he sends the steer along.'

'Certainly not,' said Jake. 'It looks as if you wanted to call off the deal because the price of stock is going down.'

Some of the others laughed, but the man frowned. 'Think yourself a smart kid! Anyhow, I don't do business like that. You stand to your bargain and I'll stand to mine. Bring along your steer, and I'll put up the money.'

In the meantime Dawson had quietly studied the man, and did not like his look. He was big and truculent, and talked in a bullying voice, but there was something about him that hinted at cunning.

Then another of the group looked round. 'How'd you lose your steer?'

'I'm not sure we did *lose* the beast,' Jake replied.

The others hitched round their chairs, and the man said, 'Then where's it gone?'

Jake told them what had happened, and the fellow remarked in a sneering tone, 'Why didn't you shoot the panther? You look like a sport, and you had a gun.'

'We tried,' said Jake rather dryly. 'Perhaps it was lucky my partner missed!'

Dawson imagined the man glanced at the dealer who had bought the cattle. The fellow had red hair and a jarring laugh. He laughed again as he replied, 'You're a curious kid to trust with a bunch of stock. You lose the best and then come here allowing that it was stolen. Do you reckon some of the ranchers robbed you back along the trail?'

'I don't,' said Jake. 'They're an honest crowd.'

'Then you reckon the steer's in town? Why don't you look round the stockyards and see if you can find it?'

'I mean to find it,' Jake replied.

'If that's so, you'd better get busy,' the dealer interposed. 'Bring your steer along before the train pulls out to-morrow, and I'll give you the price I fixed.'

The boys went out, but as they crossed the floor Dawson heard a rattle of crockery and saw a man in blue clothes in a passage that led to the kitchen. Another, outlined against the light, was putting plates in a rack. The boys entered the veranda, and sat down near the rails. There was nobody in the street, across which the forest rose like a dark wall, but the clang of a locomotive bell and hoarse shouts came from the stockyard. The hotel windows had no curtains, and the light in the dining-room shone out. Then a shadow moved across the window, and when it vanished the lamp burned low.

'Another Chink; the town's full of them,' said Jake. 'They have two at the stockyard and a gang slashing in the bush, besides the fellows growing garden truck and at the laundry. Well, I suppose they don't make much trouble and work pretty cheap.'

Dawson imagined his comrade did not want to talk about his difficulties; but he was curious and asked, 'Do you really think the steer was stolen?'

'Sure,' said Jake quietly. 'I think the panther was a *man*. He was clever, but he hadn't got the growl quite right. The dog knew the difference.'

'Ah!' said Dawson. 'But the stock ran off all the same.'

'They did,' Jake agreed. 'It's not hard to stampede bush cows. But I allow I was foolish to hint that I knew. Wouldn't have done it if the dealer hadn't got me mad. My notion is he and the red-haired fellow played us a put-up game.' He paused, and added quickly, 'Hallo! Who's this?'

A shadowy object flitted round the corner of the building and stopped close by. The light from the window was faint, but Dawson thought he knew the Chinaman, who seemed to smile at him. It was the man they had saved from drowning not long since.

'Ah Lee,' he said. 'Cookee at hotel. You lose led cow?'

'Yes,' said Jake. 'Glad to see you look all right.'

Ah Lee glanced round, as if to make sure there was nobody about. 'Plenty China boy in town. Flend lookee; pellaps find led cow.'

Then he put a finger on his lips and vanished as a man came out of the door.

The man went down the veranda steps, and Jake remarked, 'Ah Lee's learned English pretty quick, or else he knew more than he pretended the night we pulled him out of the water. Anyhow, he may be some help. A Chink can beat a very smart white man at any kind of cunning trick, and the fellows know how to work together. If the steer's about the settlement, as I think, his friends will get upon its track.'

'Why do you think the steer is about the settlement?' Dawson asked.

'My notion is that the thief means to ship the beast off to Vancouver, and I shouldn't be surprised if he tried to put it on the cars among another bunch to-morrow.'

It was cold on the veranda, and the boys soon went to bed. As Dawson undressed, the landlord knocked at the door.

'If you're shipping your cows in the morning, you want to get up in good time; the stock train pulls out at seven o'clock,' he said. 'Breakfast will be ready when the boys have finished the job.'

Dawson thanked him, and when he put out the light stood at the window, thinking, for a few moments. It would be dark when the men began to load the cattle, and, if Jake was right, the thief would not have much trouble in smuggling the red steer on board the cars amidst the bustle. Then Dawson looked out of the window. He could see for a short distance. A dark wall of forest shut in the settlement. At the end of the street the wall was broken by the gap the stockyards occupied, and two big lights burned beside the railroad track. Nearer him, a low building stood a little back from the row of wooden houses, and he knew this was a livery stable whose owner had gone away. Then, looking straight down, he noted the dark roof of a shed

against the wall of the hotel and a pipe that ran up past the window to the roof. He knocked on the thin boards between his room and Jake's, and saying good-night, got into bed and soon went to sleep.

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CHINNA.

By MRS. HOBART-HAMPDEN,

Author of 'The Secret Valley,' etc., etc.

(Continued from page 250.)

THE sick man was so astonished at this, and at the same time so delighted, that at once he ceased to groan. And he sat up, and cried joyfully that, already, he felt health returning to him. To the children it seemed a miracle almost; but, as a matter of fact, there was nothing miraculous about it. Chinna had seen so much of this particular type of illness that he had been able to tell from the examination he had made that the man was over the worst of the attack, and would soon recover. However, he did not give his secret away, but smiled in a lofty fashion at the gratitude that was poured out on him.

'You have saved my life. You have saved my life,' the man repeated. 'First the child gave me water, and slaked the thirst that would have consumed me, and now ye have chased the demon of sickness away. In what manner shall I help you in return, O great wonder-worker? And ye, little wonder-workers all?'

It was Nancy who answered, for it was not Chinna alone who had been thinking very hard. And Nancy guessed they had found in this man's friendliness what Chinna had failed to find—a way of escape from them all. No one had listened before when she and Brian had claimed that they were white, but perhaps this man would listen now, and believe, and help.

'We are not wonder-workers at all, we children, I mean,' she began very earnestly. 'But we are really white, and we belong to white people, and we were carried down the river, ever so far, by a flood, and we have been living in the forest with Chinna. If you will help us to get home again, you shall have a great reward. Heaps and heaps of money,' Nancy promised recklessly.

The man did not answer immediately, and very anxiously the children waited. And, as they waited, it seemed to them more and more probable that he knew as little of white people as did Chinna, and would prove equally reluctant to leave his home. But, at last, to their great relief he said slowly, looking them over as he did so: 'So ye belong to the white people. I have a brother who has taken service with them. On the making of a road for the fire-carriage does he labour.'

And, at that Brian cried—for he knew the natives of India sometimes call a railway engine a fire-carriage—'It must be the very road our father's making. It's the only one there could be near here. If you'll take us to where your brother's working, that's exactly where we want to go.'

And, meanwhile, Chinna stood by, listening a little sadly. It seemed that these white children of whom he had grown so fond, and who, he was still inclined to believe, had been specially sent to him, were now about to leave him to face all the difficulties of his future unaided. But not for long was he sorrowful, for soon they were all hanging round him, begging that he and

Mrs. Chinna would come with them, trying to soothe his misgivings, promising that nothing but good should come of it. And Chinna, a smile slowly breaking over his face, gave consent at last. At least the white people could not prove more cruel and treacherous than the villagers he would leave behind—than the spirits who had so causelessly betrayed him, and who had no further use for him, it seemed, and had even laid their ban on his little forest home.

It was as he came to this conclusion that they all remembered Mrs. Chinna. In the general excitement it had been forgotten that that patient little person was still waiting at the edge of the forest, and that her anxiety was still unrelieved. Yet how could this be accomplished before morning, considering the danger involved.

CHAPTER XXVII.

'We must wait until the dawn,' Chinna decided, as much for Mrs. Chinna's sake as for any other reason. 'Until she, the mate of the great one, goes to her own place.'

'Perhaps she's gone already,' Nancy suggested.

But Chinna answered, 'She still waits; listen.' And, for a moment, there was the deepest silence in the hut, while from outside there drifted in a long and sighing breath. It was plain that Chinna was right, and that to go in search of Mrs. Chinna before the morning was impossible.

But, just as this conclusion was reached, there was a patter of footsteps from the village street, and into the circle of light thrown by the fire came the little woman. She was looking anxiously from side to side for any signs of Chinna or the children. She had been unable to bear the suspense any longer, and had crept nearer and nearer, until she had finally ventured into the village itself. And warm indeed was the welcome she received; and she laughed and cried by turns, and called down blessings on everything and every one indiscriminately. Such queer little blessings they were, too. She hoped that the children might all have many sons when they grew up, and that their shadows might never be less, and that Rajahs and Maharajahs might bow down before them. And that the sick man's crops might prosper, and his flocks and herds increase until they covered the whole country-side, though what they would find to eat in that case Mrs. Chinna did not stop to consider. It was long before she was calm enough to be told she was to journey to a new country, and she was very frightened at the prospect at first. But she, too, felt as Chinna did, that the angry villagers and the angry spirits between them had robbed the life in the clearing of the peace and security it once possessed; and affection for the children tugged also at her heart. And, presently, she was listening, round-eyed and happy, while Nancy, and Brian, and Frederick told her of all the wonderful things they would show her once their home was reached.

The remainder of the night passed quickly, though through it all was woven the thought of that waiting thing outside; and, when the talk died down for a moment, those deep-drawn breaths came sighing through the window. As a dog waits on a mat for its master, so the tigress waited beneath the window for him whom she sought. And it was not until the dawn wind ran whispering through the grass, that she slunk away stealthily to her forest haunts.

(Continued on page 266.)



"Chinna, a smile slowly breaking over his face, gave consent at last."