

THE BISHOP AND THE ROSE.

I carried the old bishop a bunch of roses this morning. And when I handed them to him he said: "Oh, daughter, there are thorns upon them!"

SAVED BY A HISS.

In front of the entrance a "spieler" stood on a starch box and beat upon a piece of tin with a stick, and we weakly succumbed to his frenzied appeals and went inside.

It is possible that you may remember Toppan as the man who married Victoria Boyden, and, in so doing, thrust his greatness from him and became a bank clerk instead of an explorer.

"I used to think I was going to set the world on fire at one time," he said once. "I suppose every young fellow has some such ideas. I only made an ass of myself, and I'm glad I'm well out of it. Victoria saved me from that."

But this was long afterward. He died hard, and sometimes he would have moments of strength in his weakness, just as before he had given up his career during the moment of weakness in his strength.

A chance paragraph in a newspaper, a slight of the Arizona deserts of sage and cactus, a momentary panic on a ferry boat, sometimes even fine music or a great poem would wake the better part of him in the desire of doing great things.

The most trifling thing would recall all this to him, just as a couple of notes have recalled to you whole arias and overtures. But with Toppan it was as though one had recalled the arias and overtures and then was not allowed to sing them.

We went into the arena and sat down. The ring in the middle was fenced in by a great, circular iron cage. The tiers of seats rose around this, a band was playing in a box over the entrance, and the whole interior was lighted by an electric globe slung over the middle of the cage.

Inside the cage a brown bear—to me less suggestive of a wild animal than of lab robes and furlers' signs—was dancing sleepily and allowing himself to be prodded by a person whose celluloid stick showed white at the neck about the green of his Tyrolean costume. The bear was many and his steel muzzle had chafed him, and Toppan said he was corrupted of moth and rust alike, and the audience applauded but feebly when he and his keeper withdrew.

After this we had a clown elephant, dressed in a bib and tucker, and vast, baggy breeches—like those of a particularly big French Turco—who had lunch with his keeper and rang the bell and drank his wine, and wiped his mouth with a handkerchief and bedquilt, and pulled the chair from underneath his companion, seeming to be amused at it all with a strange sort of suppressed elephantine mirth.

And then, after they had both made their bow and gone out, in bounded and tumbled the dogs, barking and grinning all over, jumping up on their stools and benches, wriggling and pushing one another about, giggling and excited like so many kindergarten children on a show day. I am sure they enjoyed their performance as much as the audience did, for they never had to be told what to do, and seemed only too eager for their turn to come. The best of it all was that they were quite unconscious of the audience and appeared to do their tricks for the sake of the tricks themselves, and not for the applause which followed them.

And then, after the usual programme of wicker cylinders, hoops and balls was over, they all rushed off amid a curious scratching of paws and flapping of tails and heels.

While this had been going on we had been hearing from time to time a great sound, half whine, half rumbling guttural cough, that came from somewhere behind the exit from the cage. It was repeated at rapidly decreasing intervals and grew louder in pitch until it ended in a short bass grunt. It sounded cruel and menacing, and when at its full volume the wood of the benches under us thrilled and vibrated.

There was a little pause in the programme while the arena was cleared and new and much larger and heavier paraphernalia were set about, and a gentleman with well groomed hair and a very shiny hat entered and announced "the world's greatest lion tamer."

ly, like the dogs or the elephant, or even the bear, but with low-hanging heads, surly, watchful, their eyes gleaming with the rage and hate that burned in their hearts and that they dared not vent. Their loose, yellow hide rolled and rippled over the great muscles as they moved, and the breath coming from their hot, half-open mouth turned to steam as it struck the air.

A huge, blue painted see-saw was dragged out to the centre, and the tamer made a sharp sound of command. Slowly, and with switching tails, two of them obeyed, and clambering upon the balancing board, swung up and down, while the music played a see-saw waltz.

And all the while their great eyes flamed with the detestation of the thing and their black upper lips curled away from their long fangs in protest of this hourly renewed humiliation and degradation.

And one of the others, while waiting its turn to be whipped and bullied, sat up on his haunches and faced us and looked far away beyond us over the heads of the audience—over the continent and ocean, as it were—as though he saw something in that quarter that made him forget his present surroundings.

"You grand old brute!" muttered Toppan, and then he said: "Do you know what you would see if you were to look into his eyes now? You would see Africa, and unnamed mountains, and great stony stretches of desert, with hot blue shadows and plains of salt, and lairs in the jungle grass, and lurking places near the paths the steinbok make when they go down to water. But now he is hampered and caged—is there anything worse than a caged lion?—and kept from the life he loves and was made for—just here the trainer spoke sharply to him, and his eyes and crest dropped—"and ruled over," concluded Toppan, "by some one who is not so great as he, who has spoiled what was best in him, and has turned his powers to trivial, resultless uses—some one weaker than he, yet stronger. Ah, well, old brute, it was yours, once, we will remember that."

They wheeled out a clumsy velocipede built expressly for him, and while the lash whistled and snapped about him, the conquered king heaved himself upon it and went around and around the ring, while the band played a quickstep, the audience broke into applause, and the tamer smirked and bobbed his well oiled head. I thought of Samson performing for the Philistines and Thumelda at the triumph of Germanicus. The grand beasts, grand though conquered, seemed to be the only dignified ones in the whole business. I hated the audience who saw their shame from behind iron bars; I hated myself for being one of them, and I hated the smug, sniggering tamer.

The latter had been drawing out various stools and ladders, and now arranged the lions upon them so they should form a pyramid, with himself on top. Then he swung himself up among them, with his heels upon their necks and taking hold of the jaws of one, wrenched them apart with a great show of strength, turning his head to the audience so that all should see. And just then the electric light above him crackled harshly, guttered, dropped down to a pencil of dull red, then went out, and the place was absolutely dark.

The band stopped abruptly with a discord, and there was an instant of silence. Then we heard the stools and ladders clattering as the lions leaped down; and straightway four pairs of lambent green spots burned out of the darkness and travelled swiftly about here and there, crossing and recrossing one another like the lights of steamships in a storm. Heretofore the lions had been sluggish and inert; now they were aroused and alert in an instant, and we could hear the swift padding of their heavy feet as they swung around the arena, and the sound of their great bodies rubbing against the bars of the cage as one and the other passed nearer to us.

I don't think the audience at all appreciated the situation at first, for no one moved or seemed excited, and one shrill voice suggested that the band should play "When the electric lights go out."

"Keep perfectly quiet, please," called the tamer out of the darkness, and a certain peculiar ring in his voice was the first intimation of a possible danger. But Toppan knew, and as we heard the tamer fumbling for the latch of the gate, which he somehow could not loose in the darkness, he said, with a rising voice: "He wants to get that gate open pretty quick."

But for their restless movements the lions were quiet; they uttered no sound, which was a bad sign. Blinking and dazed by the garish blue-whiteness of a few moments before, they could see perfectly now where the tamer was blind.

"Listen," said Toppan. Near to us, and on the inside of the cage, we could hear a sound as of some slender body being whisked back and forth over the surface of the floor. In an instant I guessed what it was; one of the lions was crouched there, whipping his sides with his tail.

"When he stops that he'll spring," said Toppan, excitedly. "Bring a light, Jerry—quick!" came the tamer's voice.

People were clambering to their feet by this time, talking loud, and we heard a woman cry out. "Please keep as quiet as possible, ladies and gentlemen," cried the tamer; "it won't do to excite—"

From the direction of the voice came the sound of a heavy fall and a crash that shook the iron gratings in their sockets. "He's got him!" shouted Toppan. "And then what?" asked Jerry. In that thick darkness every one sprang up, stumbling over the seats and over each other, all shouting and crying out, suddenly stricken with a panic fear of something they could not see. Inside the barred death trap every lion suddenly gave tongue at once, until the air shook and sang in our ears. We could hear the great cats hurling themselves against the bars and could see their eyes leaving glassy streaks against the darkness as they leaped. Two more sprang as the first had done toward that quarter of the cage from which came sounds of stamping and struggling, and then the tamer began to scream.

I think that so long as I live I shall not forget the sound of the tamer's screams. He did not scream as a woman would have done, from the head, but from the chest, which sounded so much worse than I was sick from it in a second with that sickness that weakens one at the pit of the stomach and along the muscles at the back of the legs. He did not pause for a second. Every breath was a scream, and every scream was alike, and one heard through it all the long snarls of satisfied hate and revenge, snarled by the man's clothes and the rip, rip of the cruel claws.

Hearing it in the dark, as we did, made it all the more dreadful. I think for a time I must have taken leave of my senses. I was ready to vomit for the sickness that was upon me, and I beat my hands raw upon the iron bars or clasped them over my ears against the sounds of the dreadful thing that was doing behind them. I remember praying aloud that it might soon be over with, so only those screams might be stopped.

It seemed as though it had gone on for hours, when some men rushed in with a lantern and long, sharp irons. A hundred voices cried: "Here he is, over here!" and they ran outside the cage and threw the light of the lantern on a place where a heap of gray gold-laced clothes writhed and twisted beneath three great bulks of fulvous hide and bristling black mane.

The irons were useless. The three furies dragged their prey out of their reach and crouched over it again and recommenced. No one dared go into the cage, and still the man lived and struggled and screamed.

I saw Toppan's finger go to his mouth and through that medley of dreadful noises there issued a sound that, sick as I was, made me shrink anew and close my eyes and teeth and shudder as though some cold slime had been poured through the hollow of my bones where the marrow should be. It was as the noise of a fine whip-lash, mingled with the whirr of a locket magnified a hundred times, and ended in an abrupt clacking noise thrice repeated.

At once I remembered where I had heard it before, because having once heard the hiss of an aroused and angry serpent, no child of Eve can ever forget it.

The sound that now came from between Toppan's teeth and that filled the arena from wall to wall was the sound that I had heard once before in the Paris Jardin des Plantes, at feeding time—the sound made by the great constrictors when their huge bodies are looped and coiled like a reata for the throw that never misses, that never relaxes and that no beast of the field is built strong enough to withstand. All the filthy wickedness and abominable malice of the centuries since the Enemy first entered into that shape that crawls was concentrated in that hoarse, whistling hiss—a hiss that that was cold and piercing, like an icicle made sound. It was not loud, but it had in it some sort of penetrating quality that cut through the waves of horrid sounds about us, as the snake carved prow of a Viking galley might cut its way through the tumbling eddies of a tide.

At the second repetition the lions paused, none better than they knew what was the meaning of that hiss. They had heard it before in their native hunting grounds in the earlier days of summer, when the first heat lay close over the jungle, like the hollow of the palm of an angry god. Or, if they themselves had not heard it, their sires before them had, and their fear of the thing bred into their bones suddenly leaped to life at the sound, and gripped them and held them close.

When for a third time the sound surged and shrilled in their ears, their heads drew between their shoulders, their great eyes grew small and glittering, the hackles rose and stiffened on their backs, their tails drooped, and they backed slowly to the further side of the cage and cowered there, whining and beaten.

Toppan wiped the sweat from the inside of his hands and went into the cage with the keepers and gathered up the pating, broken body, with its twitching fingers and white face, and carried it out. As they lifted it, the handful of pitiful medals dropped down upon the floor. In the silence that had now succeeded, it was about the only sound one heard.

As we sat that evening on the porch of Toppan's house, in a fashionable suburb of the city, he said for the third time: "I had that trick from a Mpongwe headman," and added, "It was while I was at Victoria Falls, waiting to cross the Kalahari Desert."

Then he continued, his eyes growing keener and his manner changing: "There is some interesting work to be done in that quarter by some one. You see the Kalahari runs like this"—he drew the lines on the ground with his cane—"coming down in something like this shape from the Orange river to about the twentieth parallel south. The aneroid give its average elevation about 600 feet. I didn't cross it at the time, because we had sickness and the porters out. But I made a lot of geological observations, and from these I have built up a theory that the Kalahari is no desert at all, but a big, well-watered plateau, with higher grounds on the east and west.

"The tribes, too, thereabouts, called the place Linoka Noka, and that's the Bantu for rivers upon rivers. They're nasty, though, these Bantu, and gave us a lot of trouble. They have a way of spitting little poisoned thorns into you upwaders, and your tongue swells up and turns blue and your teeth fall out and—"

His wife Victoria came out on the porch in evening dress. "Ah, Vic," said Toppan, jumping up with a very sweet smile, "we were just talking about your paper-german next Tuesday, and I think we might have some very pretty faves made out of white tissue paper—roses and butterflies, you know."—Argonaut.

A Newboy's Bicycle. Two ragged newboys, one white, the other colored, stood on an Olive street corner as an athletic young man flashed by on a handsome safety bicycle. "I wish I had lots of money," said the little coon, "so's I could buy me one of dem wheels." "Oh, dat's easy, conony," responded the other: "no trouble 'all. Take de rubber outer yer neck 'an' de wheels outer yer head 'an' put 'em together, and den you got a bicycle. See?"—St. Louis Post Dispatch.

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