

The Quest of Betty Lancey

By MAGDA F. WEST

Copyright, 1909, by W. G. Chapman. Copyright in Great Britain

CHAPTER XIV.—(Continued.)

There Johnny had chills and fever, and Harry fell into the dumps, while Benoni tended Johnny like a woman, with such skill and technique that Larry was moved to ask if the black had ever studied medicine.

"Yes, I took my degree at Heidelberg," Benoni replied, somewhat gruffly. "They don't balk at an African prince in Germany."

"Why do you hate America, for you do, you know?" said Harry.

"Because it was an American, the father of the woman you know as Corissa Wayne, who brought untold misery upon my father and his ancient African house," blurted Benoni, forcing Johnny to drink a tea he had steeped for him. The cave was coarsely furnished with skins, some crude pottery and cooking utensils. To Larry it looked like a secluded hunting lodge or the some-time retreat of a spasmodic hermit.

"Then you know about this mystery, just as I've thought," said Larry. "And into what mess you're taking Johnny and me, I'd like to know!"

"I'm trying to take you to Miss Lancey," responded Benoni. "I don't know, of course, but I'm pretty certain she's alive. That pigeon confirmed my belief of that. But as to telling you—Morris, the tale will unfold itself, and if it doesn't," he shrugged his shoulders and put down the cup.

After that, even in the long watches of the night, when Johnny lay still and quiet, fighting a long, slow battle with his malady, Benoni forbore to discuss any aspect of the Wayne murder mystery. This tantalized Larry all the more. Benoni would speak, though, of his travels, and Larry listened to the narrations as spellbound as if to the master of all story-tellers. For the black had a marvelous power of language.

One morning the rain ceased to fall. Johnny was up now and walking around the cave, trying to laugh at the illness that had laid him so low. Larry had lost his watch when the punt overturned, also his notes of his African travels that he had conscientiously been making. Whether it was noon, night or dinner time, Larry never knew any more, and it might have been Christmas or Decoration Day for aught he might tell to the contrary. He tried Robinson Crusoe's notch-on-a-cross experiment in time keeping on a rock by the cave door, but had given up this calendar attempt as altogether too crude and too much of a near-Waterbury.

"We're going to move on to-day, boys," said Benoni, "as soon as breakfast's over."

"Now see here," objected Larry. "If I'm going to die I'd just as soon die right here as die of curiosity on the road, and that's what I'm going to do if you don't drop this swathing of mystery, Benoni, and tell us where we are going, and all about it. What's the matter with you, anyway? Why don't you take us into your confidence a bit? Supposing you'd die? Where would be then?"

"Better off if you knew nothing of what I know," Benoni responded. "Besides, I'm not going to die. Then, too, lack of knowledge means want of worry. You will need all your strength. I don't want it depleted by anxiety. Better trust in me quietly. I've not failed you yet. And I'm trying to pay you a debt of gratitude. In taking you where we are journeying I'm risking the lives of others I hold dear. Remember that!"

"Well, where are we going?" insisted Johnny. "I don't want to take any more of your launch rides if you're going to serve them up with jungle sauce, as you did before. I don't like the taste of the drinks!"

"We won't have any more of that ready?"

Rebelliously, mutinously, Johnny and Larry followed the giant African. The country all around was a waste of water, where the prodigal river had burst her bands. Afar to the south rose a dull granite mountain. Toward this Benoni bent his steps. They climbed the top of the hillock above the cave and by dextrous jumps and shrewd calculation reached an elevated plateau with but a nominal wetting. Thick grass carpeted this plateau, beat down to the earth, and interwoven by the pounding of the rains it made a slippery matting for them to walk upon. Far to the north rose the mountain, and to the west lumbered the nauseous river that skirted the cave. For hours they walked until they entered a thicket, through whose mazes Benoni found a labyrinthine path, which they threaded in silence. "Wonder what the time is?" volunteered Johnny.

"About noon, I think," answered Benoni. "We'd stop to eat, but I want to reach the castle before the rain begins again."

"The castle?" queried Johnny. "Whose? Whew-ee!"

They had stopped abruptly. The path had come out upon a wonderful garden, exquisitely laid out, though battered from the onslaughts of the rain. Ahead of them was a granite castle, and close to its uncouth entrance a girl was dancing. As they looked they saw that she was tall and fair, and that though there was a huge lion beside her, though her hair fell in braids down her back, and though her garb was that of a woman of ancient Greece, that she was unmistakably the long sought Betty!

CHAPTER XV.

City Editor Burton and Betty were walking in the garden. The garden was wet as a sponge, and Betty, shoes and stockings off, was joying in the rush of the water and the feel of the tepid ooze beneath her feet. It was the first time in days that the rain had not been falling. A haze still overspread the desert and the air seemed full enough of rain to have dripped if you had squeezed it. But Betty didn't care. Her long brown hair, still dull and satiny as a pecan-shell, despite the havoc of fever, sea wind and southern sun, dangled below her waist in two thick braids, and was parted with never a sign of a ripple over her broad white forehead. Betty's hair under no provocation had ever been known to curl. It was nice, straightforward hair. Her gown was a prolongation of Meta's tunic, and skirt of fine white linen, low of neck, devoid of sleeve and clasped at the shoulder with two flashing diamond buckles that Meta picked up somewhere around the castle. It was fastened at the belt by a wide girdle of cut and uncut diamonds curiously and indiscriminately mixed. Betty had long since ceased to take any interest in diamonds, for she had had more of flashing pins and geo-gaws thrust on her by the admiring Meta during her stop in the castle than she had ever dreamed of owning. Betty's skirt, though much longer than Meta's, was very well above her ankles and with City Editor Burton as an appreciative audience Betty was practicing a barefoot dance as she had seen an ultra-fashionable exponent of barefoot dancing prance upon a very esthetic stage.

"Just watch, City Editor Burton," she laughed. "Just watch! Here is where I am expressing joy! Note the glow of the drapery, Burton, my boy, and the marvelous way in which the dancer sticks her toes into the ooze—Oh, there's a thorn. Now, City Editor Burton, I'm about to be captured and cast away on a desert isle—watch me—see this gesture in grief—City Editor mine—I send a message—see—I welcome a pigeon—see, there, City Editor Burton, it brings me a message from—oh, Meta, Meta—Meta—Larry—Johnny—"

Burton bayed a prodigious roar, Meta tumbled from the house with a small rifle in her hand as Betty, barefooted, dishevelled, sprang into the arms of Larry Morris, and let him hold her very tightly and kiss her forehead again and again, while red-headed Johnny Johnson grabbed her hands alternately and danced around so recklessly that City Editor Burton howled louder than a simoon. Betty and Larry were too rapt for words. Not so the incorrigible Johnny.

"Get on to the Isadora Duncan rig," he chortled, "and this animal here—your lap-dog, Betty? What do you call him?"

"City Editor Burton," mumbled Betty, extricating herself from Larry's arms, and both the men roared.

"Wouldn't I like to see old Burt's face if we could only ship him the brute," said Johnny. "It would be worth getting hung for!"

Meta, when she had recognized Larry as the original of the portrait in Betty's locket, lowered the little revolver, which till this moment Betty had not known she possessed. As Meta turned to go into the house Betty called her back, and putting her arm around the black girl's waist, she said: "Larry, dear, she has been good to me; this is Meta." Larry put out his hand and the black girl, half abashed, took it silently.

"Meta," echoed Johnny. "Where's Benoni? Is she his?"

Johnny whistled, and a man came through the brake—he came like a whirlwind, and when he saw the black girl by Betty's side a savage yell of triumph, mingled with the grief that is born of joy, rang out from both their throats.

"His wife," said Larry, quietly. "He brought us here. He and the pigeons. Betty, dear, it was so like you to think of the pigeons!"

"Oh, then my messages did some good; those blessed birds, those blessed birds!" exclaimed Betty. "I never knew what became of them. How did you find the way?"

"We followed Benoni; he knew the way best," answered Larry.

"His wife," said Betty, aghast. "And she never told!"

Johnson and Larry both laughed. "If that isn't the woman of it. You'll hold that up against her all her life, I suppose."

"Well, I don't care," said Betty. "Anyway, I'll bet I know one thing you boys don't. I know who killed Corissa Wayne."

"Who?" asked both boys, in a breath. "Well, then, it was the man who loved her best," replied Betty.

"Oh, what's his name?" asked Johnny.

"I don't know," said Betty, "but it must have been her husband, of course."

"Fell down on your assignment," sneered Larry. "No story's any good without names!"

The lion stretched his shrunken gums over his rickety teeth and yawned slightly.

"Mademoiselle," said Meta, approaching, "you had better come in out of the wet—it is going to rain again! Look at the sky."

"Meta, do you speak English?" reproached Betty, with a mental resume of the weary days that she had spent without intercourse of coherent speech since Tyoga's absence.

"Oh, forgive me," cried Meta, falling at her feet. "Yes, I went to a convent in London, Miladi, but they made me promise I would not let you know I knew your tongue. They were afraid I would tell—too much. But it has hurt me so much, Miladi; I felt at times that I would choke if I did not speak with you."

"Now I know why you couldn't learn English," laughed Betty. "But I know these boys are hungry. Let's get them some dinner and then we can talk."

"We must depart in all haste from here," warned Benoni. "To stop long is very dangerous."

"Benoni speaks truly," added his wife.

"But in all this rain that's to come?" expostulated Betty, "and we can't leave City Editor Burton?"

"We're not going to," said Johnny. "That's too good a joke."

CHAPTER XVI.

In vain did the police and the reporters dig and pry into the house at 94 Briarsweet place in hope of finding some trace of Hamley Hackley.

Mr. Hackley was not about. His London bankers could give no definite information about him. For thirty years he had been accustomed to go and come when he pleased. He had for a long while maintained a comfortable home at Khartoum and another at Cairo, but he visited these only at intervals, and sometimes was not seen in them for a year at a time. He was known to possess great estates located in Central Africa, but none knew positively where. He kept a retinue of servants at each establishment and a suave major-domo in each was accustomed to being the nominal head of the household. Neither of these men, however, could give any of the wished for explicit information about their master. Each home contained the usual accumulation of furniture, bric-a-brac, and the olla podrida of civilization that aggregates in every wealthy home, but nothing at all mysterious or in any way smacking of the criminal. They were the homes of a gentleman of wealth and culture. Any connection between the African laws and penalties of Mr. Hackley and the Indian home of the Harcourt was impossible to discover. The Harcourt menage was located in the hill country, in a most beautiful spot. Harcourt had come there about seven years previously, at the time of his marriage to Narcisse De L'Enclos, the widow, a Madame Marie De L'Enclos, whose husband, Captain Raoul De L'Enclos, an honorably discharged officer in the French army, had brought his bride there immediately after his marriage. The captain had died a year after the birth of his daughter, and Madame De L'Enclos and the little girl Narcisse had lived in secluded magnificence, till one season on a trip to Calcutta, they had met Harold Harcourt, the younger son of an English nobleman, who was then visiting a cousin in the Indian city. After a brief acquaintance the young girl, then only 18, and Harcourt were married. The young pair went back to the hill country palace and the mother left for a continental voyage from which she never returned, though it was given out that she had died while abroad. Then the Harcourt baby came—a boy—and when he was two years old he met a tragic death. There had never been anything to give rise to suspicion about the Harcourt home, any more than at the Hackley estates, nor was any seeming connection between the two families instituted except that both were accredited with possessing large diamond interests in Africa, and the peculiar likeness between the two women, and the similarity in handwriting and in the euphony of the names of the two men. Portraits of Harcourt on the walls of his Indian home were photographed and sent to America and were an exact tally for the man held in jail in Chicago.

(To be continued.)

The Sun.

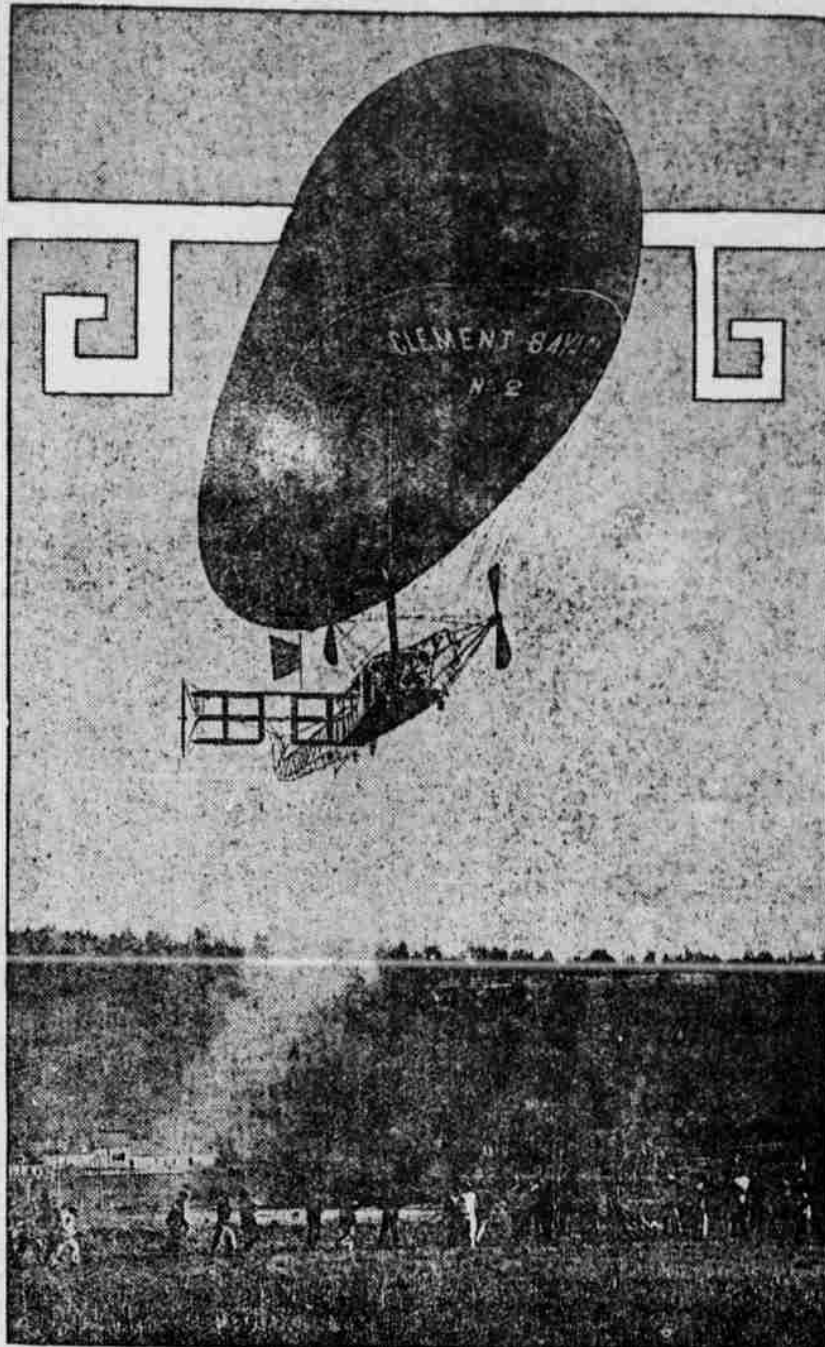
Sir Robert Ball asserted that every 100 years the sun loses five miles of its diameter. To allay anxiety, however, he mentioned that the diameter of the sun is 860,000 miles and that 40,000 years hence the diameter would still be 850,000 miles.

Veracity.

"Figures can't lie," said the mathematician.

"Did you ever try to follow the argument put up by the figures on a tax-cab register?"—Washington Star

BRITAIN WANTS \$150,000 WARSHIP OF THE AIR.



The British government is negotiating for the purchase of the great dirigible balloon named the Clement-Bayard II, constructed in France. The price is between \$125,000 and \$150,000. Preliminary to the possible closing of negotiations the balloon will be tested in an attempt to cross the British channel and land at Wormwood Scrubs, in England. The British Parliamentary aerial defense committee has an option on the giant craft designed for war purposes. France, it is said, will buy a similar ship named the Clement-Bayard III.—Illustrated London News.

POPULAR SCIENCE

After six years' contest Peter Cooper Hewitt has been awarded patents for his mercury vapor electric lamp. The patents have been in dispute almost since the date when they were first applied for, in 1901.

Construction work will shortly begin on another of those stupendous buildings which are called a city of towers. The new structure, which is to be built at the northwest corner of Wall and Nassau streets, will extend 539 feet above the street level, making it the third tallest office building in the world.

The Society of Illuminating Engineers in England has lately discussed the question of the best means of avoiding glare from artificial lights. It is beginning to be recognized that the recent introduction of intensely dazzling points of light raises problems in the solution of which the oculist must take a hand. Two Berlin professors urged in a communication to the society the advisability of imitating daylight. The quality of daylight is its diffusion, whereby the eye is saved from injury. It has been estimated that the diffused daylight from a clear sky is about 60 per cent of the direct sunlight. It is pointed out that the injurious eye effects of artificial lights are not confined to the light centers, but arise also from the glare reflected from the surface of shining paper and other bright objects.

A device which manufactures breathable air, when required, for miners caught in mine accidents, has recently been invented by Clarence Hall, government expert at Pittsburgh. A double tank contains, in one compartment, sodium peroxide, and in the other water. A cock that can be opened at will connects the two. The combination of the chemical and water creates a flow of oxygen, and enough of the raw material is carried in the apparatus to supply one man's demand for about thirty minutes. A nose and mouth piece are furnished to cover the face. The purpose of the device is to provide men with a portable supply of oxygen that will enable them to live long enough to make efforts in their own behalf after an accident. A man can travel far in thirty minutes, if he can breathe freely and knows his ground. It is expected that the invention will be the means of many otherwise impossible escapes.

W. H. S. Jones contends that malaria played a considerable part in

bringing about the decline of the ancient Greeks, and also exercised a powerful influence upon Roman history and life. He thinks it doubtful if Greece was malarious in early times. In the fifth century B. C. malaria fell like a blight upon Attica, and, he believes, upon many other fertile districts of Greece. He ascribes the decadence of the Greeks before the triumph of Rome, in part, at least, to the ravages of malaria. As to Rome, Mr. Jones points out that some districts in Etruria and Latium were at one time populous and prosperous, although now they are hardly habitable on account of malaria. Although Rome was marshy in the early period, it was well drained, and there is no reason to suppose that malaria was present. But in the first century B. C. Cicero and others speak of a shrine and altar on the Palatine Hill dedicated to the goddess Fever. While not regarding malaria as one of the causes of the downfall of the Roman empire, Mr. Jones holds that it greatly influenced the course of events.

THE AMERICAN ACCENT.

An English Writer Frees His Mind on the Subject.

"The American accent," writes a contemporary correspondent, "is far less irritating than the cockney dialect, and it would be well for us if the former, which is at least musical, could be substituted for the cacophonous patois of our east end."

As a matter of fact, we think that the cockney accent has a certain number of real admirers, but what we wish to call to our readers' minds particularly is that America has its cockney, so to speak, precisely as we have. People in Kentucky have a rather burrish way of speaking, and they loathe and detest the fruity twang which overwhelms New England. The westerner, again, is responsible for the dialect which was supplied on the English boards by stage Yankees.

Whether you acquire the American accent or not depends on the length of time you remain in America. Englishmen who stay in New York for protracted periods preserve their native cadences intact. It is the man who pays a flying visit to the United States who comes back and always says "nop" for "no" and "yep" for "yes."

Once we met a man who had returned from a week's stay in Boston. He said he had heard it was easy to acquire the twang and finally exclaimed, "Waal, stranger, I guess it may be dead easy for some, but not for Blank Z. Asterisk," meaning himself. "Now, what's your opinion? Am I right?"—London Globe.

There's no hope for a young man who is too lazy to fall in love