

BLACK SHEEP'S GOLD

by Beatrice Grimshaw

Illustrations by Irwin Myers

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WNU Service

CHAPTER X —17—

It was nearing ten o'clock, which is late in the morning for people who rise at five, and Ogo, my head carrier, and I were at the end of a long job. We had left the other carriers busy wooding and watering above, had gone down onto the flat, bringing with us pick, shovel, pegs, prospecting dish, and long steel measuring tape, worked about a bit among the "riffles" made by half sunken rocks, and taken sand and gravel from promising spots. I had washed out a few dishes, and found them go something like three ounces of fine gold to a dish, with nuggets to spare, over and above; on an average, about fifteen pounds worth to every dish we washed. It was a veritable jewelers' shop; you could kick the sand up with your toes and see it glitter.

I had a right, as discoverer (for Grace and his partner had never actually found gold) to peg out for myself one area of a hundred feet by fifty, and a prospecting claim due to me as discoverer of a field forty miles from any other—of thirty further claims. This left little for any one else who might come along.

"My troubles!" I said. "Let them wait. They meant to let me." Some of the ground, judged by what we washed, was a little richer than the rest. I picked that, measured, pegged, nailed up my notice, and was done. The warden of the field, when appointed, would have to check and confirm the work; but for all practical purposes, I had my ground secure.

The sun was high now, and down in the airless bottom of the pit, it had grown hot; so hot that the sweat ran in streams down my arms, and dripped salty from my forehead into my mouth.

"Smoke-oh," I said to Ogo, contemplating with pleasure the neat white pegs that marked off my fortune. "We can get pigs in plenty, for food," I told him, puffing at a welcome cigarette. "We'll shoot all you like. Going to stop here a week." For I was minded to load a carrier or two with gold; they were traveling light now, having eaten up a great part of their loads.

Ogo drew at his bamboo pipe; he was happy, at ease, resting from tedious and unnecessary work. I watched him, as I sat perched on a rock, my face towards the long hard way by which we had climbed down, the day before. Ogo was looking up the east side of the basin, toward the ranges.

A change came over his face. It came very quickly; it seemed, in an instant, to set his features stiff, like water frozen by an icy wind.

"What do you see, Ogo?" I asked him, not turning my head.

"Taubada," he answered, sitting up on the sand. "Me see two white men, plenty New Guinea man he come."

I looked behind me now. Up the long slopes that ran to eastward, I could see nothing at first. Then I could see—some way down the sides of the basin, dark dots moving, white dots following them. They were going fast, making the best of their way toward the bottom, like sugar ants raiding a bowl, and very anxious to get to the sugar as quickly as possible. It was, beyond all doubt, Spicer, Caxon, and their carriers.

For when I thought of Spicer and his patron; of all that the brute must have known, and of the silence—pale silence doubtless—that he had kept; of how he had balked me once, and had just fallen short of ruling me now—well, it was not astonishing that my fingers, half consciously, crept toward my left hip and the stock of the revolver without which no wise man travels through unknown Papua.

I have said that my mind, like my body, had come to maturity on the red heels of the War. There are thousands, near my age, who will understand just what that means. The War is dead, forgotten, as are its millions of dead and forgotten fighters; but the personalities shaped by it remain. It has never been possible for me to regard killing, inevitably, as murder. When Spicer and Caxon came fairly into sight, a little later; when they were well within rifle shot, nothing restrained me from picking off the tall, fair man with the awkward tread, and riding earth of a brute as little fit to

live as Fanshaw himself had been, save the knowledge that I should certainly hang for it, and that if I hanged, I could not marry Pia Laurier.

They did not hurry as I had done; they did not leap onto the gravelly flat that held more treasure than all the older goldfields of New Guinea put together. We met at leisure in the midst of the gleams of rocks that fringed the bottom of the Pit. Caxon, a silent fellow always, nodded sideways to me, and sat down on a rock, hands in pockets, surveying the flat with a sharp professional eye, which assuredly did not miss my pegs or my notice. Spicer came up grinning, held out his hand, and quoted fatuously, "Doctor Livingstone, I presume?"

I think that in the moment, an ill-defined presentiment of misfortune seized me. I suppose I must have felt, vaguely that this defeated Spicer had no reasonable right to look cheerful; certainly none to crack jokes. But if I did feel anything of the sort, it was submerged by my personal dislike of Spicer himself. I wanted to abuse him, strike him. What I did say was only—"Haven't left many of the plums for you, I'm afraid."

"Are there plums?" he said foolishly, as if he had come up into the heart of wild New Guinea for a walk. His eyes were roving while he spoke; I saw them rest on my pegs, and for a moment they opened wide, and showed as many ugly things as the windows of a convict jail. It was Caxon who spoke, however.

"What does it go to the dish?" he asked. He was sitting as he always did sit, characteristically, with legs flung wide apart, and arms akimbo, soft hat pulled right into his eyes, and insolent lip stuck out. Of the few old-time miners remaining in New Guinea, I had always liked Caxon the least.

Nevertheless, I answered him. There was no use denying patent facts.

"About four ounces to the dish," I said.

Spicer let out a whinnying cackle of delight, but Caxon made no sign.

"I suppose," he said presently, "we had better have dinner." It was three o'clock; they had—as I afterward heard—camped part way down the crater on the previous night, and traveled, since dawn. It was by a very short head that I had won.

I hadn't dined either, so we joined our messes—it would have been contrary to New Guinea bush custom to do anything else. And while we ate and drank, and watched each other slyly from under our eyelids, there was just one thought in the minds of every one—"Gold!" But not very far from it, I think, was the thought of the other thing that maddens, too, when seen; that cries out, too, when flung upon the ground—blood.

"Better be careful of 'accidents' in the bush," I thought, even as I pressed the two to share my food. "It's a big strain on any man's self-restraint. Nothing open, of course—I'd respect that—but so many little sneaky ways of killing are possible."

"What kept you back on the road?" I asked the two. I wanted to know; besides, this silence was irritating me. They looked so well pleased with themselves; had so little right to be pleased.

"Foolery," answered Caxon, his mouth choked by biscuit. "Spicer here won't realize that I'm leader, and—"

"Quite incorrect," bleated Spicer, in what I fancy he took to be an "Oxford accent." "At the death of Sir Richard, the leadership devolved on me. I decided that the interests of the Emplah would best be served by opening up what we had been led to understand was a probable goldfield of the very—"

"You were out for cash to go on the spree, same as myself," commented Caxon. "And if you'd fired just about two more shots into that crowd of natives we met, neither of us would ever have seen this place. You started the whole crowd on us, and then I had to shoot, and we wiped them out considerably. Of course we had to go round after that."

"The result of your alleged leadership," patronized Spicer, "being, in sum, that we have arrived after all the valuable ground is pegged."

"Yes," said Caxon simply, and buried his face in his pilot-size pannikin.

I knew the Papuan miner too well to question him. But there was something about the whole deal that I did not understand.

"It doesn't matter," I thought. "If they fancy they can out me somehow or other in the bush, they've got 'another think coming.' I've got the place in spite of them all, and I'll keep it."

We had finished our meal now, and the two newcomers, without further parley, went down to the flat and began walking about. It was fairly late in the afternoon by now; nevertheless, the pair started off on what was evidently a brief prospecting trip. I heard the clink of Caxon's pick new and then, and the sharp tap of a hammer. I did not trouble much about them; I was too busy making use of the opportunity to wash out a few more dishes of gravel. There could be no question, now, of loading carriers with gold for the homeward trip, but I wanted, at least, a good sample.

I do not think I shall ever forget that hour—ecstasy of washing out dish after dish, lifted almost anywhere on the flat, and finding, sure as day, at the bottom of every one, a rich sediment of yellow dust and flakes. Nature, amazingly, had done its work. My claim might be the better for sluicing later on; but at the moment, one could collect enough to make any man crazy drunk with gold-lust, out of the simple washing of a dozen dishes.

I washed them; collected the gold (it was about thirty-five ounces) and put it away in one of my swags, for Caxon and Spicer were now returning from what I took to be a fruitless quest, and I did not want them to see my marvelous gains.

They came straight up to me, evidently according to a preconceived plan. They looked tired and dirty, discouraged, too. Spicer's mouth dragged open, and there was a nasty look about his pretty blue eyes that I had seen more than once before.

"Well, Baa-Baa," he began inappropriately. "It seems that the only thing we can do—"

"Say that again," I interrupted, "and say it right."

"Mister Amory," he corrected, with scornful emphasis. "The only thing we can do is to peg out what's left, and go back."

"You understand the mining laws of the country, I suppose," was my answer.

"I do, if he doesn't," put in Caxon. "We're not going to visit the mines department this trip. The best thing you can do is to come back with us. You've got the loan of us over the whole business, and we'll all be safer together. That fancy shooting of Spicer's has made the bush a bit lively, I reckon."

I reflected. Caxon was undoubtedly in the right. Joining forces and carriers would be best for every one. We could travel faster together, because there would be plenty of hands to cut a road when wanted; more safely, because the natives would be slow to attack a big body of people. There was nothing that I need stay for, now that I had pegged my claim; I had only to go down to Port Moresby and get it granted.

Yet, and yet, when the next day came; when the tents had been struck, and the carriers' loads portioned out, and the long, hard, upward tramp was beginning, I could not do away with a sense of ill-defined anxiety. On the surface everything was right. I had won the race, taken the treasure. Caxon with his callous greed, disregarding everything in life but gain; Spicer, greedy, too, were both defeated. That was well. What, then, troubled me?

As far as I could define the matter, it was this; they did not really mind. Inexplicable, that. Unsatisfactory, that. The thought (it was not a fear, nothing so definite) stayed with me through the greater part of the trip down to the Romilly river. Nothing occurred to deepen it; nothing, on the other hand, happened to make it less. I could not help observing that my two white companions were almost nervously anxious lest I should leave their sight. There is a streak of vanity in every man; my streak led me to conclude that the two of them valued my company—in view of the dangerous country we were traversing—more than I had supposed. Yet the puzzlement, the anxiety, were still alive, somewhere submerged in my mind. I did not altogether understand.

Caxon, who was endlessly troubled by Spicer's futile attempts to be regarded as "leader," had given orders that no one, white or black, should leave the main party without his knowledge. It cost me nothing to obey him; I knew that, in the Papuan bush, divided authority spells disaster, and whatever opinion I might have held of Caxon in his private capacity, I knew him to be the best of bushmen.

On one afternoon, we had been climbing for some hours, having taken a route slightly different from that of the outward trip, and intending to cut across a ridge. This way brought us into a bit of new country; and so it was that, emerging suddenly on the top of the ridge, we came without any warning right upon one of the villages of the Tatatan tribe.

The people had heard us long before; their women, pigs, babies, and collections of skulls, were no doubt already carried off into the bush. We found the men awaiting us, plucky chaps that they were—thirty or forty naked creatures decked in feathers and shells and dogs' teeth, armed with the formidable bow of the rangers that can shoot you through at a hundred yards, and the stone club that smashes a skull as easily as a spoon smashes an egg. Not much to stand against our rifles—but they didn't know rifles; there was the trouble; and Caxon and myself were equally disinclined to stake a massacre, by way of teaching them.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

All victories are alike; defeat alone displays an individual profile.—Humeker.

Improved Uniform International Sunday School Lesson

(By REV. F. B. FITZWATER, D.D., Member of Faculty, Moody Bible Institute of Chicago.) (© 1930, Western Newspaper Union.)

Lesson for May 11

JESUS ACCLAIMED AS KING

LESSON TEXT—Matthew 21:1-46. GOLDEN TEXT—Hosanna to the son of David; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. PRIMARY TOPIC—The Children's Praise Song. JUNIOR TOPIC—Hailing Jesus as King. INTERMEDIATE AND SENIOR TOPIC—Making Christ Our King. YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULT TOPIC—Making Christ Our King.

I. The Preparation (vv. 1-6).

1. The sending of the disciples for the ass (vv. 1-3). Christ told them just where to go to find it and how to answer the inquiry of the one who owned it. This shows how perfectly Jesus knows our ways. The providing of the animal was not man's plan, but according to Christ's foreknowledge.

2. The fulfillment of prophecy (vv. 4, 5). Some five hundred years before this, Zechariah had made this prediction (Zech. 9:9). Christ's coming in this way was in exact fulfillment of Zechariah's prediction. This is highly instructive to those who would understand as yet unfulfilled prophecy. If the predictions of His first coming were thus literally fulfilled, there is no alternative but to believe that those of His second coming will likewise be literally fulfilled.

3. The obedience of the disciples (v. 6). The request may have seemed strange and unreasonable, but they obeyed.

II. The Entrance of the King (vv. 7-11).

1. The disciples put their garments upon the ass and set the Lord thereon (v. 7). This act showed that they recognized Him as their King (II Kings 9:13).

2. The multitude (vv. 8, 9). Some spread their garments in the way; others who had no garments to spare, cut down branches and did the same with them.

3. The city awakened (vv. 10, 11). It was a stirring time, but a more stirring time is to come. This will be when the Lord comes in power and glory.

III. The King Rejected (vv. 12-16).

The immediate occasion of this rejection was the cleansing of the temple. To sell oxen and sheep and doves was legitimate, as well as to exchange money in doing it, but doing it for gain was wrong. As soon as the spirit of avarice enters, the house of prayer becomes a den of thieves.

IV. The Nation Rejected by the King (vv. 17-46).

Having shown their unwillingness to receive Christ as King when officially presented to them, Christ now turns from them and makes known their awful condition in the following parables:

1. The barren fig tree cursed (vv. 17-22). It was on the morrow after his official presentation as He was returning from Jerusalem that Jesus observed the unfruitful fig tree. The barren fig tree is a type of Israel. With its leaves, it gave a show of life, but being destitute of fruit, it had no right to cumber the ground.

2. The parable of the two sons (vv. 23-32). Both sons were told by the father to work in the vineyard. The one refused outright to obey, but afterwards repented and went. The other pretended a willingness to obey, but in reality did not. The first one represents the publicans and harlots. The second the proud and self-righteous Pharisees—priests and elders.

3. The parable of the householder (vv. 33-46).

(1) This was God Himself. (2) The vineyard. This means Israel (Isa. 5:1-7, Jer. 2:21, Ps. 80:3). The Lord went to particular pains to gather out this nation and make it separate, bestowing peculiar favors upon it. This vineyard so well kept and provided for, did not bear fruit. (3) The husbandmen. These were the spiritual guides—the rulers and teachers of Israel. (4) The servants were sent for the fruit of the vineyard. These were the various prophets whom God sent to the nation. They were beaten and killed. (5) The Lord Jesus Christ, God's only and beloved Son, came into their midst. They knew Him to be the Son, but did not show Him reverence. They not only rejected the kingdom, but the King who was the Son.

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Goldsmith Memorials Oliver Goldsmith's bi-centenary recently attracted many pilgrims to the modest stone on the north side of Temple church, which marks, as nearly as can be conjectured, the last resting place of the creator of Doctor Primrose and Tony Lumpkin. There is, however, another London memorial of "rich-hearted Goldsmith," which is not nearly so well known as it deserves to be—a very handsome window in Southwark cathedral. The window, erected only a few years ago, fittingly commemorates the poet's association with the south side borough, where, for a time, he practiced as "poor physician of the poor."

Region of Blizzards The most destructive blizzards occur in the plains region from North Dakota to Kansas and eastward to Ohio.

Inventor of Decimal? The decimal point and its use are said to have been invented in 1612 by Bartholomaeus.

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