



Smithsonian Institution

National Museum of African American History and Culture

Abbott's Monthly Vol. II No. 5

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Forgetfulness By William Huffman

Breeze, waft the erring soul
Toward the dark moor;
Let thy cool vapor roll,
Doomed spirit o'er:
Night, with thy healing kiss,
Soothe thou the shade remiss;
Bound for the realm of Dis,
Past Lethe's shore.

Lethean water calm,
Heal thou and cure:
Shade, quaff the nectared balm,
Sparkling and pure:
Age-old thou art and know,
As through thy purging flow,
Shadows in anguish go;
What they endure.

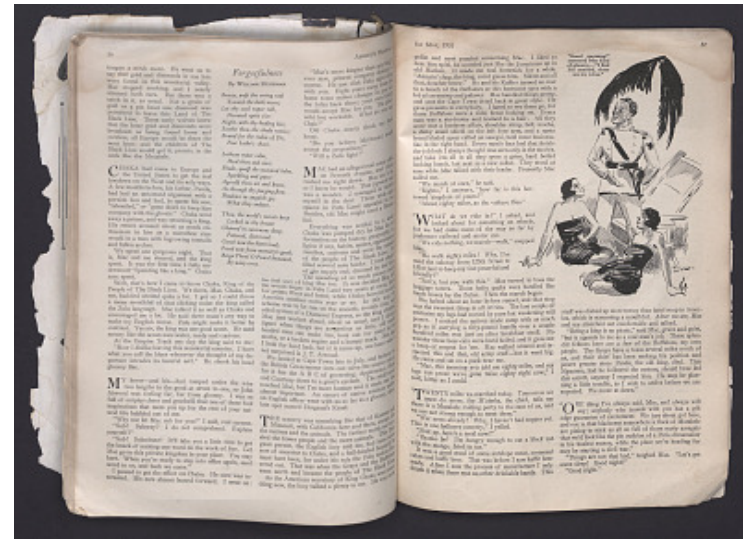
Thou, the world's secrets keep
Locked in thy breast:
Chained in cavernous deep,
Fettered, distressed.
Gone! now the bitter load;
Freed now from memory's goad;
Reign Thou! O Peace! bestowed,
By wavy crest.

tongue a notch more. He went on to say that gold and diamonds in ton lots were found in this wonderful valley. Mac stopped smoking, and I nearly strained both ears. But there was a catch in it, as usual. Not a grain of gold or a pin head size diamond was permitted to leave this Land of the Black Lion. These curly wolves knew that the hour gold and diamonds were broadcast as being found loose and careless, all Europe would be there the next hour, and the children of The Black Lion would get it, pronto, in the neck like the Matabele.

Chaka had come to Europe and the United States to get the real lowdown on the West and its wily ways. A few months before, his father, Panda, had had an untoward argument with peevish lion and had, to quote his son, "tshoniled," or "gone down to keep him company with the ghosts." Chaka went away a prince, and was returning a king. His return aroused about as much enthusiasm in him as a marathon race would in a man with ingrown toenails and fallen arches.

We spent one gorgeous night. That is, Mac and me steered, and the king spent. It was the first time I fully understood "Spending like a king." Chaka sure spent.

Well, that's how I came to know Chaka, King of the People of the Black Lion. We three, Mac, Chaka, and me, buddied around quite a lot. I got so I could throw a mean mouthful of that clicking noise the king called the Zulu language. Mac talked it as well as Chaka and encouraged me a



lot. He said there wasn't any way to make my English worse. Zulu might make it better by contrast. Yes sir, the king was one good scout. He used the money like the ocean uses water, ready and copious.

At the Empire Track one day the king said to me:

"How I dislike leaving this wonderful country. I have what you call the blues whenever the thought of my departure intrudes its hateful self." He shook his head gloomy like.

My horse — and his — had romped under the wire two lengths to the good at seven to one, so John Atwood was feeling far, far from gloomy. I was so full of surplus cheer and goodwill that one of those fool inspirations that mess you up for the rest of your natural life bubbled out of me.

"Why not let Mac sub for you?" I said, real earnest.

"Sub? Subway? I do not comprehend. Explain yourself!"

"Sub! Substitute! It'll take you a little time to get the knack of making one word do the work of five. Let Mac go to this private kingdom in your place. You stay here. When you're ready to step into office again, send word to us, and back we come."

I paused to get the effect on Chaka. He sure was interested. His ears almost leaned forward. I went on:

"Mac's more kingier than any king I ever saw, present company dittoed, of course. He can click Zulu right along with you. Eight years away from the home town makes changes in you and the folks back there; your own family would accept Mac for you. The plans wild but workable. What do you say, Chak?"

Old Chaka nearly shook my hand loose.

"Do you believe McDonald would accept the proposition?"

"Will a Zulu fight?"

Mac had an alleged real estate office on Seventh Avenue, and Chaka rushed me right down. Mac ate it up, as I knew he would. That jigwark man was a wonder. I managed to include myself in the deal. Those wide open spaces in Zulu Land appealed to me. Besides, old Mac might need a Mussolini.

Everything was settled in a week. Chaka was pumped dry by Mac for information on the history, geography, religion if any, habits, names, appearances, families, customs and even the scandal of the people of The Black Lion. He filled several notebooks. I took charge of the supply end, directed by the king. The spending of so much money made me feel sort of king like too. It was decided Mac and me would linger in Zulu Land two years at most, leave for points West and home, while Chaka hovered around America another extra year or so. In this way the scheme was to be run on the smooth, trouble-free, well oiled system of

a Diamond Express, so the king claimed. Mac just worked ahead, silent as usual, and I always figure when things are as perfect as little, old swell-headed men can make 'em, look out for sand in the works, or a broken engine and a bumpy track. Not that I look for hard luck, but if it turns up, one bozo who is not surprised is J.T. Atwood.

We landed at Cape Town late in July, and believe me the British Government can sure salve the native rules, for it has the A B C of governing, Applesauce, Bunk and Courtesy down to a gnat's eyelash. The stuff never touched Mac, but I'm more human and it made me feel almost important. An escort of native soldiers under an English officer went with us as far as a gloomy, desolate spot named Dingaan's Kraal.

The scenery was something like that of Kansas and Missouri, with California here and there, except for the natives and the animals. The farther north we traveled the fewer people and the more animals. This Dingaan person, the English looy told me, had been some sort of ancestor to Chaka, and a bull-headed buzzard he must have been, for under his rule the Zulu nation flivvered out. That was when the Grays and the Buffaloes went north and became the people of the Black Lion.

As the American secretary of King Chaka was something new, the looy talked a plenty to me. He was most

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polite and most puzzled concerning Mac. I liked to hear him spiel, he sounded just like the Jamaicans up in old Harlem. It made me real homesick for a while. "Amazing' chap, the king, can't guess him. Silent and all that, doncher know." He and his Kaffirs turned us over to a bunch of the Buffaloes at this lonesome spot with a lot of ceremony and palaver. Mac handled things pretty, and sent the Cape Town detail back in great style. He gave presents to everybody. I hated to see them go, for those Buffaloes were a wild, fierce looking set. Every man was a six-footer and trained to a hair. All they wore was a business affair, shoulder strap, belt, mocha, a dinky small shield on the left fore arm, and a nasty broad bladed spear called an assegai, held most business-like in the right hand. Every man's face had that finish-the-job look I always thought was seen only in the movies, and take 'em all in all they were a grim, hard boiled looking bunch, but neat as a new collar. They stood at ease while Mac talked with their leader. Presently Mac called me.

"We march at once," he said.

"Righto," I answers, "how far is this borrowed kingdom of yours?"

"About eighty miles, as the vulture flies."

"What do we ride in?" I asked, and looked about for something on wheels, for we had come most of the way so far by junkmore railroad and motor car.

"We ride nothing, we march—walk," snapped Mac.

"Me walk eighty miles! Why, I've used the subway from 125th Street to 131st just to keep my feet peaceful and friendly!"

"Sorry, but you walk this." Mac turned to boss the baggage toters. Those hefty packs were handled like lunch boxes by the Zulus. Then the march began.

We halted about an hour before sunset, and that stop was the sweetest thing in all Africa. The last couple of centuries my legs had moved by pure but weakening will power. I noticed the natives made camp with as much pep as if carrying a fifty-pound bundle over a couple hundred miles was just an after breakfast stroll. No wonder these bear-cats were hard boiled, and it gave me a heap of respect for 'em. Mac walked around and inspected this and that, old army stuff—but it went big. He came and sat on a pack near me.

"Mac, this morning you told me eighty miles, and my legs can prove we've gone twice eighty miles right now," I said, bitter as I could.

"Twenty miles we marched today. Tomorrow we must do more, for M'zimba, the chief, tells me there is a Matabele raiding party to the east of us, and we are not strong enough to meet them."

"War news already! Why, I haven't had supper yet. This is one helluver country." I yelled.

"Shut up, here's a meal now!"

"Thanks be! I'm hungry enough to eat a black cat with the mange, fried in tar."

It was a good meal of some antelope meat, cornmeal cakes and kaffir beer. That was before I saw kaffir beer made. After I saw the process of manufacture I only drank it when there was no other drinkable handy. This stuff was dished up more messy than hotel soup in America, which is screaming a mouthful. After we ate, Mac and me stretched out comfortable and talked.

[[image]]
[[caption]] "Good morning!" answered Mac kind of gloomy,—"I find I'm married, these are my wives." [[caption]]

"Being a king is no picnic," said Mac, grave and quiet, "but it appeals to me as a real man's job. These splendid fellows here are a few of the Buffaloes, my own people. The Grays have a town several miles north of us, and their chief has been making his position and power greater since Panda, the old king, died. This Ngacoma, had he followed the custom, should have led this escort, anyway I expected him. He may be planning a little trouble, so I wish to arrive before we are expected. We move at dawn."

"One thing I've always said, Mac, and always will say; anybody who travels with you has a gilt edge guarantee of excitement. We just about got here, and out in that blackness somewhere a flock of Matabele are pining to stick us all so full of those nasty assegais that we'd look like the pin cushion of a Paris dressmaker in his busiest season, while the place we're heading for may be starting a civil war."

"Things are not that bad," laughed Mac. "Let's get some sleep! Good night!"

"Good night."

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