

A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder

James De Mille

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A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder

By James De Mille

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CHAPTER I

THE FINDING OF THE COPPER CYLINDER

It occurred as far back as February 15, 1850. It happened on that day that the yacht Falcon lay becalmed upon the ocean between the Canaries and the Madeira Islands. This yacht Falcon was the property of Lord Featherstone, who, being weary of life in England, had taken a few congenial friends for a winter's cruise in these southern latitudes. They had visited the Azores, the Canaries, and the Madeira Islands, and were now on their way to the Mediterranean.

The wind had failed, a deep calm had succeeded, and everywhere, as far

as the eye could reach, the water was smooth and glassy. The yacht rose and fell at the impulse of the long ocean undulations, and the creaking of the spars sounded out a lazy accompaniment to the motion of the vessel. All around was a watery horizon, except in the one place only, toward the south, where far in the distance the Peak of Teneriffe rose into the air.

The profound calm, the warm atmosphere, the slow pitching of the yacht, and the dull creaking of the spars all combined to lull into a state of indolent repose the people on board. Forward were the crew; some asleep, others smoking, others playing cards. At the stern were Oxenden, the intimate friend of Featherstone, and Dr. Congreve, who had come in the double capacity of friend and medical attendant. These two, like the crew, were in a state of dull and languid repose. Suspended between the two masts, in an Indian hammock, lay Featherstone, with a cigar in his mouth and a novel in his hand, which he was pretending to read. The fourth member of the party, Melick, was seated near the mainmast, folding some papers in a peculiar way. His occupation at length attracted the roving eyes of Featherstone, who poked forth his head from his hammock, and said in a sleepy voice:

"I say, Melick, you're the most energetic fellah I ever saw. By Jove! you're the only one aboard that's busy. What are you doing?"

"Paper boats," said Melick, in a business-like tone.

"Paper boats! By Jove!" said Featherstone. "What for?"

"I'm going to have a regatta," said Melick. "Anything to kill time, you know."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Featherstone again, raising himself higher in his hammock, "that's not a bad idea. A wegatta! By Jove! glowious! glowious! I say, Oxenden, did you hear that?"

"What do you mean by a regatta?" asked Oxenden, lazily.

"Oh, I mean a race with these paper boats. We can bet on them, you know."

At this Featherstone sat upright, with his legs dangling out of the hammock.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed again. "Betting! So we can. Do you know, Melick, old chap, I think that's a wegular piece of inspiration. A wegatta! and we can bet on the best boat."

"But there isn't any wind," said Oxenden.

"Well, you know, that's the fun of it," said Melick, who went solemnly on as he spoke, folding his paper boats; "that's the fun of it. For you see if there was a wind we should be going on ourselves, and the regatta couldn't come off; but, as it is, the water is just right. You pick out your boat, and lay your bet on her to race to some given point."

"A given point? But how can we find any?"

"Oh, easily enough; something or anything--a bubble'll do, or we can

pitch out a bit of wood."

Upon this Featherstone descended from his perch, and came near to examine the proceedings, while the other two, eager to take advantage of the new excitement, soon joined him. By this time Melick had finished his paper boats. There were four of them, and they were made of different colors, namely, red, green, yellow, and white.

"I'll put these in the water," said Melick, "and then we can lay our bets on them as we choose. But first let us see if there is anything that can be taken as a point of arrival. If there isn't anything, I can pitch out a bit of wood, in any direction which may seem best."

Saying this, he went to the side, followed by the others, and all looked out carefully over the water.

"There's a black speck out there," said Oxenden.

"So there is," said Featherstone. "That'll do. I wonder what it is?"

"Oh, a bit of timber," said Melick. "Probably the spar of some ship."

"It don't look like a spar," said the doctor; "it's only a round spot, like the float of some net."

"Oh, it's a spar," said Melick. "It's one end of it, the rest is under water."

The spot thus chosen was a dark, circular object, about a hundred yards away, and certainly did look very much like the extremity of some spar, the rest of which was under water. Whatever it was, however, it served well enough for their present purpose, and no one took any further interest in it, except as the point toward which the paper boats should run in their eventful race.

Melick now let himself down over the side, and placed the paper boats on the water as carefully as possible. After this the four stood watching the little fleet in silence. The water was perfectly still, and there was no perceptible wind, but there were draughts of air caused by the rise and fall of the yacht, and these affected the tiny boats. Gradually they drew apart, the green one drifting astern, the yellow one remaining under the vessel, while the red and the white were carried out in the direction where they were expected to go, with about a foot of space between them.

"Two to one on the red!" cried Featherstone, betting on the one which had gained the lead.

"Done," said Melick, promptly taking his offer.

Oxenden made the same bet, which was taken by Melick and the doctor.

Other bets were now made as to the direction which they would take, as to the distance by which the red would beat the white, as to the time which would be occupied by the race, and as to fifty other things which need not be mentioned. All took part in this; the excitement rose high and the betting went on merrily. At length it was noticed that the white was overhauling the red. The excitement grew intense; the betting changed its form, but was still kept up, until at last

the two paper boats seemed blended together in one dim spot which gradually faded out of sight.

It was now necessary to determine the state of the race, so Featherstone ordered out the boat. The four were soon embarked, and the men rowed out toward the point which had been chosen as the end of the race. On coming near they found the paper boats stuck together, saturated with water, and floating limp on the surface. An animated discussion arose about this. Some of the bets were off, but others remained an open question, and each side insisted upon a different view of the case. In the midst of this, Featherstone's attention was drawn to the dark spot already mentioned as the goal of the race.

"That's a queer-looking thing," said he, suddenly. "Pull up, lads, a little; let's see what it is. It doesn't look to me like a spar."

The others, always on the lookout for some new object of interest, were attracted by these words, and looked closely at the thing in question. The men pulled. The boat drew nearer.

"It's some sort of floating vessel," said Oxenden.

"It's not a spar," said Melick, who was at the bow.

And as he said this he reached out and grasped at it. He failed to get it, and did no more than touch it. It moved easily and sank, but soon came up again. A second time he grasped at it, and with both hands. This time he caught it, and then lifted it out of the water into the boat. These proceedings had been watched with the deepest interest; and now, as this curious floating thing made its appearance among them, they all crowded around it in eager excitement.

"It looks like a can of preserved meat," said the doctor.

"It certainly is a can," said Melick, "for it's made of metal; but as to preserved meat, I have my doubts."

The article in question was made of metal and was cylindrical in shape. It was soldered tight and evidently contained something. It was about eighteen inches long and eight wide. The nature of the metal was not easily perceptible, for it was coated with slime, and covered over about half its surface with barnacles and sea-weed. It was not heavy, and would have floated higher out of the water had it not been for these encumbrances.

"It's some kind of preserved meat," said the doctor. "Perhaps something good--game, I dare say--yes, Yorkshire game-pie. They pot all sorts of things now."

"If it's game," said Oxenden, "it'll be rather high by this time. Man alive! look at those weeds and shells. It must have been floating for ages."

"It's my belief," said Featherstone, "that it's part of the provisions laid in by Noah for his long voyage in the ark. So come, let's open it, and see what sort of diet the antediluvians had."

"It may be liquor," said Oxenden.

Melick shook his head.

"No," said he; "there's something inside, but whatever it is, it isn't liquor. It's odd, too. The thing is of foreign make, evidently. I never saw anything like it before. It may be Chinese."

"By Jove!" cried Featherstone, "this is getting exciting. Let's go back to the yacht and open it."

The men rowed back to the yacht.

"It's meat of some sort," continued the doctor. "I'm certain of that. It has come in good time. We can have it for dinner."

"You may have my share, then," said Oxenden. "I hereby give and bequeath to you all my right, title, and interest in and to anything in the shape of meat that may be inside."

"Meat cans," said Melick, "are never so large as that."

"Oh, I don't know about that," said the doctor, "they make up pretty large packages of pemmican for the arctic expeditions."

"But they never pack up pemmican in copper cylinders," said Melick, who had been using his knife to scrape off the crust from the vessel.

"Copper!" exclaimed Oxenden. "Is it copper?"

"Look for yourselves," said Melick, quietly.

They all looked, and could see, where the knife had cut into the vessel, that it was as he said. It was copper.

"It's foreign work," said Melick. "In England we make tin cans for everything. It may be something that's drifted out from Mogadore or some port in Morocco."

"In that case," said Oxenden, "it may contain the mangled remains of one of the wives of some Moorish pasha."

By this time they had reached the yacht and hurried aboard. All were eager to satisfy their curiosity. Search was made for a cold-chisel, but to no purpose. Then Featherstone produced a knife which was used to open sardine boxes, but after a faithful trial this proved useless. At length Melick, who had gone off in search of something more effective, made his appearance armed with an axe. With this he attacked the copper cylinder, and by means of a few dexterous blows succeeded in cutting it open. Then he looked in.

"What do you see?" asked Featherstone.

"Something," said Melick, "but I can't quite make it out."

"If you can't make it out, then shake it out," said Oxenden.

Upon this Melick took the cylinder, turned it upside down, shook it smartly, and then lifted it and pounded it against the deck. This served to loosen the contents, which seemed tightly packed, but came gradually down until at length they could be seen and drawn forth.

Melick drew them forth, and the contents of the mysterious copper cylinder resolved themselves into two packages.

The sight of these packages only served to intensify their curiosity. If it had been some species of food it would at once have revealed itself, but these packages suggested something more important. What could they be? Were there treasures inside--jewels, or golden ornaments from some Moorish seraglio, or strange coin from far Cathay?

One of the packages was very much larger than the other. It was enclosed in wrappers made of some coarse kind of felt, bound tight with strong cords. The other was much smaller, and, was folded in the same material without being bound. This Melick seized and began to open.

"Wait a minute," said Featherstone. "Let's make a bet on it. Five guineas that it's some sort of jewels!"

"Done," said Oxenden.

Melick opened the package, and it was seen that Featherstone had lost. There were no jewels, but one or two sheets of something that looked like paper. It was not paper, however, but some vegetable product which was used for the same purpose. The surface was smooth, but the color was dingy, and the lines of the vegetable fibres were plainly discernible. These sheets were covered with writing.

"Halloa!" cried Melick. "Why, this is English!"

At this the others crowded around to look on, and Featherstone in his excitement forgot that he had lost his bet. There were three sheets, all covered with writing--one in English, another in French, and a third in German. It was the same message, written in these three different languages. But at that moment they scarcely noticed this. All that they saw was the message itself, with its mysterious meaning.

It was as follows:

"To the finder of this:

"Sir,--I am an Englishman, and have been carried by a series of incredible events to a land from which escape is as impossible as from the grave. I have written this and committed it to the sea, in the hope that the ocean currents may bear it within the reach of civilized man. Oh, unknown friend! whoever you are. I entreat you to let this message be made known in some way to my father, Henry More, Keswick, Cumberland, England, so that he may learn the fate of his son. The MS. accompanying this contains an account of my adventures, which I should like to have forwarded to him. Do this for the sake of that mercy which you may one day wish to have shown to yourself.

"ADAM MORE."

"By Jove!" cried Featherstone, as he read the above, "this is really getting to be something tremendous."

"This other package must be the manuscript," said Oxenden, "and it'll

tell all about it."

"Such a manuscript'll be better than meat," said the doctor, sententiously.

Melick said nothing, but, opening his knife, he cut the cords and unfolded the wrapper. He saw a great collection of leaves, just like those of the letter, of some vegetable substance, smooth as paper, and covered with writing.

"It looks like Egyptian papyrus," said the doctor. "That was the common paper of antiquity."

"Never mind the Egyptian papyrus," said Featherstone, in feverish curiosity. "Let's have the contents of the manuscript. You, Melick, read; you're the most energetic of the lot, and when you're tired the rest of us will take turns."

"Read? Why, it'll take a month to read all this," said Melick.

"All the better," said Featherstone; "this calm will probably last a month, and we shall have nothing to interest us."

Melick made no further objection. He was as excited as the rest, and so he began the reading of the manuscript.

CHAPTER II

ADRIFT IN THE ANTARCTIC OCEAN

My name is Adam More. I am the son of Henry More, apothecary, Keswick, Cumberland. I was mate of the ship Trevelyan (Bennet, master), which was chartered by the British Government to convey convicts to Van Dieman's Land. This was in 1843. We made our voyage without any casualty, landed our convicts in Hobart Town, and then set forth on our return home. It was the 17th of December when we left. From the first adverse winds prevailed, and in order to make any progress we were obliged to keep well to the south. At length, on the 6th of January, we sighted Desolation Island. We found it, indeed, a desolate spot. In its vicinity we saw a multitude of smaller islands, perhaps a thousand in number, which made navigation difficult, and forced us to hurry away as fast as possible. But the aspect of this dreary spot was of itself enough to repel us. There were no trees, and the multitude of islands seemed like moss-covered rocks; while the temperature, though in the middle of the antarctic summer, was from 38 to 58 degrees Fahr.

In order to get rid of these dangerous islands we stood south and west, and at length found ourselves in south latitude 65 degrees, longitude 60 degrees east. We were fortunate enough not to find any ice, although we were within fifteen hundred miles of the South Pole, and far within that impenetrable icy barrier which, in 1773, had arrested the progress of Captain Cook. Here the wind failed us, and we lay becalmed and drifting. The sea was open all around us, except to the southeast, where there was a low line along the horizon terminating in a lofty promontory; but though it looked like land we

took it for ice. All around us whales and grampuses were gambolling and spouting in vast numbers. The weather was remarkably fine and clear.

For two or three days the calm continued, and we drifted along helplessly, until at length we found ourselves within a few miles of the promontory above mentioned. It looked like land, and seemed to be a rocky island rising from the depths of the sea. It was, however, all covered with ice and snow, and from this there extended eastward as far as the eye could reach an interminable line of ice, but toward the southwest the sea seemed open to navigation. The promontory was very singular in shape, rising up to a peak which was at least a thousand feet in height, and forming a striking object, easily discovered and readily identified by any future explorer. We named it, after our ship, Trevelyan Peak, and then felt anxious to lose sight of it forever. But the calm continued, and at length we drifted in close enough to see immense flocks of seals dotting the ice at the foot of the peak.

Upon this I proposed to Agnew, the second mate, that we should go ashore, shoot some seals, and bring them back. This was partly for the excitement of the hunt, and partly for the honor of landing in a place never before trodden by the foot of man. Captain Bennet made some objections, but he was old and cautious, and we were young and venturesome, so we laughed away his scruples and set forth. We did not take any of the crew, owing to the captain's objections. He said that if we chose to throw away our own lives he could not help it, but that he would positively refuse to allow a single man to go with us. We thought this refusal an excess of caution amounting to positive cowardice, but were unable to change his mind. The distance was not great, the adventure was attractive, and so the captain's gig was lowered, and in this Agnew and I rowed ashore. We took with us a double-barrelled rifle apiece, and also a pistol. Agnew took a glass.

We rowed for about three miles, and reached the edge of the ice, which extended far out from the promontory. Here we landed, and secured the boat by means of a small grappling-iron, which we thrust into the ice. We then walked toward the promontory for about a mile, and here we found a multitude of seals. These animals were so fearless that they made not the slightest movement as we came up, but stared at us in an indifferent way. We killed two or three, and then debated whether to go to the promontory or not. Agnew was eager to go, so as to touch the actual rock; but I was satisfied with what we had done, and was now desirous of returning. In the midst of this I felt a flake of snow on my cheek. I started and looked up. To my great surprise I saw that the sky had changed since I had last noticed it. When we left the ship it was clear and blue, but now it was overspread with dark, leaden-colored clouds, and the snow-flakes that had fallen were ominous of evil. A snow-storm here, in the vicinity of the ice, was too serious a thing to be disregarded. But one course now remained, and that was an immediate return to the ship.

Each of us seized a seal and dragged it after us to the boat. We reached it and flung them in. Just at that moment a gun sounded over the water. It was from the ship--the signal of alarm--the summons from the captain for our return. We saw now that she had been drifting since we left her, and had moved southwest several miles. The row back promised to be far harder than the pull ashore, and, what was worse, the wind was coming up, the sea was rising, and the snow was

thickening. Neither of us said a word. We saw that our situation was very serious, and that we had been very foolhardy; but the words were useless now. The only thing to be done was to pull for the ship with all our strength, and that was what we did.

So we pushed off, and rowed as we had never rowed before. Our progress was difficult. The sea grew steadily rougher; the wind increased; the snow thickened; and, worst of all, the day was drawing to a close. We had miscalculated both as to distance and time. Even if it had continued calm we should have had to row back in the dark; but now the sun was setting, and with the darkness we had to encounter the gathering storm and the blinding snow. We rowed in silence. At every stroke our situation grew more serious. The wind was from the south, and therefore favored us to some extent, and also made less of a sea than would have been produced by a wind from any other quarter; but then this south wind brought dangers of its own, which we were soon to feel--new dangers and worse ones. For this south wind drove the ship farther from us, and at the same time broke up the vast fields of ice and impelled the fractured masses northward. But this was a danger which we did not know just then. At that time we were rowing for the ship, and amid the darkness and the blinding snow and the dashing waves we heard from time to time the report of signal-guns fired from the ship to guide us back. These were our only guide, for the darkness and the snow had drawn the ship from our sight, and we had to be guided by our hearing only.

We were rowing for our lives, and we knew it; but every moment our situation grew more desperate. Each new report of the gun seemed to sound farther away. We seemed always to be rowing in the wrong direction. At each report we had to shift the boat's course somewhat, and pull toward the last point from which the gun seemed to sound. With all this the wind was increasing rapidly to a gale, the sea was rising and breaking over the boat, the snow was blinding us with its ever-thickening sleet. The darkness deepened and at length had grown so intense that nothing whatever could be seen--neither sea nor sky, not even the boat itself--yet we dared not stop; we had to row. Our lives depended on our efforts. We had to row, guided by the sound of the ship's gun, which the ever-varying wind incessantly changed, till our minds grew all confused, and we rowed blindly and mechanically.

So we labored for hours at the oars, and the storm continually increased, and the sea continually rose, while the snow fell thicker and the darkness grew intenser. The reports of the gun now grew fainter; what was worse, they were heard at longer intervals, and this showed us that Captain Bennet was losing heart; that he was giving us up; that he despaired of finding us, and was now firing only an occasional gun out of a mournful sense of duty. This thought reduced us to despair. It seemed as if all our efforts had only served to take us farther away from the ship, and deprived us of all motive for rowing any harder than was barely necessary to keep the boat steady. After a time Agnew dropped his oar and began to bail out the boat--a work which was needed; for, in spite of our care, she had shipped many seas, and was one third full of water. He worked away at this while I managed the boat, and then we took turns at bailing. In this way we passed the dreary night.

Morning came at last. The wind was not so violent, but the snow was so thick that we could only see for a little distance around us. The ship was nowhere visible, nor were there any signs of her. The last gun had

been fired during the night. All that we could see was the outline of a gaunt iceberg--an ominous spectacle. Not knowing what else to do we rowed on as before, keeping in what seemed our best course, though this was mere conjecture, and we knew all the time that we might be going wrong. There was no compass in the boat, nor could we tell the sun's position through the thick snow. We rowed with the wind, thinking that it was blowing toward the north, and would carry us in that direction. We still hoped to come within sound of the ship's gun, and kept straining our ears incessantly to hear the wished-for report. But no such sound ever came again, and we heard nothing except the plash of the waves and the crash of breaking ice. Thus all that day we rowed along, resting at intervals when exhausted, and then resuming our labors, until at length night came; and again to the snow and ice and waves was added the horror of great darkness. We passed that night in deep misery. We had eaten nothing since we left the ship, but though exhausted by long fasting and severe labor, the despair of our hearts took away all desire for food. We were worn out with hard work, yet the cold was too great to allow us to take rest, and we were compelled to row so as to keep ourselves from perishing. But fatigue and drowsiness overcame us, and we often sank into sleep even while rowing; and then after a brief slumber we would awake with benumbed limbs to wrestle again with the oars. In this way we passed that night.

Another morning came, and we found to our great joy that the snow had ceased. We looked eagerly around to see if there were any signs of the ship. Nothing could be seen of her. Far away on one side rose a peak, which looked like the place where we had landed. Judging from the wind, which we still supposed to be southerly, the peak lay toward the northeast; in which case we had been carried steadily, in spite of all our efforts, toward the south. About a mile on one side of us the ice began, and extended far away; while on the other side, at the distance of some ten miles, there was another line of ice. We seemed to have been carried in a southwesterly direction along a broad strait that ran into the vast ice-fields. This discovery showed how utterly useless our labors had been; for in spite of all, even with the wind in our favor, we had been drawn steadily in an opposite direction. It was evident that there was some current here, stronger than all our strength, which had brought us to this place.

We now determined to land on the ice, and try to cook a portion of our seals. On approaching it we noticed that there was a current which tended to draw us past the ice in what I supposed to be a southwesterly direction. This confirmed my worst fears. But now the labor of landing and building a fire on the ice served to interest us for a time and divert our thoughts. We brushed away the snow, and then broke up a box which was in the boat, and also the stern seats. This we used very sparingly, reserving the rest for another occasion. Then we cut portions from one of the seals, and laid them in thin strips on the flames. The cooking was but slight, for the meat was merely singed; but we were ravenous, and the contact of the fire was enough to give it an attractive flavor. With this food we were greatly refreshed; and as for drink, we had all around us an endless extent of ice and snow. Then, taking our precious fragments of cooked meat, we returned to the boat and put off. We could scarcely tell what to do next, and while debating on this point we fell asleep. We slept far into the night, then awoke benumbed with cold; then took to the oars till we were weary; then fell asleep again, to be again awakened by the cold and again to pull at the oars. So the night passed, and

another day came.

The snow still held off, but the sky was overcast with dark, leaden-colored clouds, and looked threatening. Ice was all around us as before; and the open water had diminished now from ten miles to five miles of width. The ice on one side was low, but on the opposite side it arose to the height of one hundred feet. We saw here, as we watched the shore, that the current which had already borne us thus far was now stronger than ever, and was carrying us along at a rate which made all efforts of ours against it utterly useless. And now a debate arose between us as to the direction of this current. Agnew suddenly declared his belief that it was running north, while I was firm in the conviction that it ran south.

"There's no use rowing any more," said Agnew. "If it runs south we can't resist it. It's too strong. But I always like to look on the bright side, and so I believe it runs north. In that case there is no use rowing, for it will carry us along fast enough."

Then I proposed that we should go ashore on the ice. To this Agnew objected, but afterward consented, at my earnest request. So we tried to get ashore, but this time found it impossible; for the ice consisted of a vast sheet of floating lumps, which looked like the ruin of bergs that had been broken up in some storm. After this I had nothing to say, nor was there anything left for us but to drift wherever the current might carry us.

So we drifted for some days, Agnew all the time maintaining that we were going north, while I was sure that we were going south. The sky remained as cloudy as ever, the wind varied incessantly, and there was nothing by which we could conjecture the points of the compass. We lived on our seal, and for drink we chewed ice and snow. One thing was certain--the climate was no colder. Agnew laid great stress on this.

"You see," said he, "we must be going north. If we were going south we should be frozen stiff by this time."

"Yes; but if we were going north," said I, "we ought to find it growing warmer."

"No," said he, "not with all this ice around us. It's the ice that keeps the temperature in this cold state."

Argument could do no good, and so we each remained true to our belief--his leading him to hope, and mine dragging me down to despair. At length we finished the last fragment of the seal that we had cooked, and, finding ourselves near some firm ice, we went ashore and cooked all that was left, using the remainder of our wood for fuel, and all that we dared to remove from the boat. Re-embarking with this, we drifted on as before.

Several more days passed. At last one night I was roused by Agnew. He pointed far away to the distant horizon, where I saw a deep red glow as of fire. We were both filled with wonder at the sight, and were utterly unable to account for it. We knew that it could not be caused by the sun or the moon, for it was midnight, and the cause lay on the earth and not in the skies. It was a deep, lurid glow, extending along the horizon, and seemed to be caused by some vast conflagration.

CHAPTER III

A WORLD OF FIRE AND DESOLATION

At the sight of that deep-red glow various feelings arose within us: in me there was new dejection; in Agnew there was stronger hope. I could not think but that it was our ship that was on fire, and was burning before our eyes. Agnew thought that it was some burning forest, and that it showed our approach to some habitable and inhabited land. For hour after hour we watched, and all the time the current drew us nearer, and the glow grew brighter and more intense. At last we were too weak to watch any longer, and we fell asleep.

On waking our first thoughts were about the fire, and we looked eagerly around. It was day, but the sky was as gloomy as ever, and the fire was there before our eyes, bright and terrible. We could now see it plainly, and discern the cause also. The fire came from two points, at some distance apart--two peaks rising above the horizon, from which there burst forth flames and smoke with incessant explosions. All was now manifest. It was no burning ship, no blazing forest, no land inhabited by man: those blazing peaks were two volcanoes in a state of active eruption, and at that sight I knew the worst.

"I know where we are now," I said, despairingly.

"Where?" asked Agnew.

"That," said I, "is the antarctic continent."

"The antarctic fiddlestick," said he, contemptuously. "It is far more likely to be some volcanic island in the South Sea. There's a tremendous volcano in the Sandwich Islands, and these are something like it."

"I believe," said I, "that these are the very volcanoes that Sir James Ross discovered last year."

"Do you happen to know where he found them?" Agnew asked.

"I do not," I answered.

"Well, I do," said he, "and they're thousands of miles away from this. They are south latitude 77 degrees, east longitude 167 degrees; while we, as I guess, are about south latitude 40 degrees, east longitude 60 degrees."

"At any rate," said I, "we're drifting straight toward them."

"So I see," said Agnew, dryly. "At any rate, the current will take us somewhere. We shall find ourselves carried past these volcanic islands, or through them, and then west to the Cape of Good Hope. Besides, even here we may find land with animals and vegetation; who knows?"

"What! amid all this ice?" I cried. "Are you mad?"

"Mad?" said he; "I should certainly go mad if I hadn't hope."

"Hope!" I repeated; "I have long since given up hope."

"Oh, well," said he, "enjoy your despair, and don't try to deprive me of my consolation. My hope sustains me, and helps me to cheer you up. It would never do, old fellow, for both of us to knock under."

I said nothing more, nor did Agnew. We drifted on, and all our thoughts were taken up with the two volcanoes, toward which we were every moment drawing nearer. As we approached they grew larger and larger, towering up to a tremendous height. I had seen Vesuvius and Stromboli and Aetna and Cotopaxi; but these appeared far larger than any of them, not excepting the last. They rose, like the Peak of Teneriffe, abruptly from the sea, with no intervening hills to dwarf or diminish their proportions. They were ten or twelve miles apart, and the channel of water in which we were drifting flowed between them.

Here the ice and snow ended. We thus came at last to land; but it was a land that seemed more terrible than even the bleak expanse of ice and snow that lay behind, for nothing could be seen except a vast and drear accumulation of lava-blocks of every imaginable shape, without a trace of vegetation--uninhabited, uninhabitable, and unpassable to man. But just where the ice ended and the rocks began there was a long, low reef, which projected for more than a quarter of a mile into the water, affording the only possible landing-place within sight. Here we decided to land, so as to rest and consider what was best to be done.

Here we landed, and walked up to where rugged lava-blocks prevented any further progress. But at this spot our attention was suddenly arrested by a sight of horror. It was a human figure lying prostrate, face downward.

At this sight there came over us a terrible sensation. Even Agnew's buoyant soul shrank back, and we stared at each other with quivering lips. It was some time before we could recover ourselves; then we went to the figure, and stooped down to examine it.

The clothes were those of a European and a sailor; the frame was emaciated and dried up, till it looked like a skeleton; the face was blackened and all withered, and the bony hands were clinched tight. It was evidently some sailor who had suffered shipwreck in these frightful solitudes, and had drifted here to starve to death in this appalling wilderness. It was a sight which seemed ominous of our own fate, and Agnew's boasted hope, which had so long upheld him, now sank down into a despair as deep as my own. What room was there now for hope, or how could we expect any other fate than this?

At length I began to search the pockets of the deceased.

"What are you doing?" asked Agnew, in a hoarse voice.

"I'm trying to find out who he is," I said. "Perhaps there may be papers."

As I said this I felt something in the breast-pocket of his jacket, and drew it forth. It was a leather pocket-book, mouldy and rotten

like the clothing. On opening it, it fell to pieces. There was nothing in it but a piece of paper, also mouldy and rotten. This I unfolded with great care, and saw writing there, which, though faded, was still legible. It was a letter, and there were still signs of long and frequent perusals, and marks, too, which looked as though made by tears--tears, perhaps of the writer, perhaps of the reader: who can tell? I have preserved this letter ever since, and I now fasten it here upon this sheet of my manuscript.

THE LETTER.

"Bristol April 20. 1820.

"my darling tom

"i writ you these few lines in hast i don like youar gon a walen an in the south sea dont go darlin tom or mebbe ill never se you agin for ave bad dremes of you darlin tom an im afraid so don go my darlin tom but come back an take anoth ship for America baby i as wel as ever but mises is pa an as got a new tooth an i think yo otnt go a walen o darlin tom * * * sea as the wages was i in New York an better go thar an id like to go ther for good for they gives good wages in America. O come back my Darlin tom and take me to America an the baby an weel all live an love an di together

"Your loving wife Polley Reed."

I began to read this, but there came a lump in my throat, and I had to stop. Agnew leaned on my shoulder, and we both read it in silence. He rubbed the back of his hand over his eyes and drew a long breath. Then he walked away for a little distance, and I put the letter carefully away in my own pocket-book. After a little while Agnew came back.

"More," said he, "do you remember any of the burial-service?"

I understood his meaning at once.

"Yes," I said, "some of it--a good deal of it, I think."

"That's good," said he. "Let's put the poor fellow under ground."

"It would be hard to do that," I said; "we'll have to bury him in the snow."

At this Agnew went off for a little distance and clambered over the rocks. He was not gone long. When he returned he said, "I've found some crumbled pumice-stone; we can scoop a grave for him there."

We then raised the body and carried it to the place which Agnew had found. So emaciated was the poor dead sailor that his remains were no heavier than a small boy. On reaching the spot, we found the crumbled pumice-stone. We placed the body in a crevice among the lava rocks, and then I said what I could remember of the burial-service. After this we carried in our hands the crumbled pumice-stone until we had covered the body, and thus gave the poor fellow a Christian burial.

We then returned to the shore.

"More, old fellow," said Agnew, "I feel the better for this; the service has done me good."

"And me too," said I. "It has reminded me of what I had forgotten. This world is only a part of life. We may lose it and yet live on. There is another world; and if we can only keep that in our minds we sha'n't be so ready to sink into despair--that is, I sha'n't. Despair is my weakness; you are more hopeful."

"Yes," said Agnew, solemnly; "but my hope thus far has referred only to the safety of my skin. After this I shall try to think of my soul, and cultivate, not the hope of escape, but the hope full of immortality. Yes, More, after all we shall live, if not in England, then, let us hope, in heaven."

There was a long silence after this--that kind of silence which one may preserve who is at the point of death.

"I wonder how he got here?" said Agnew, at last. "The letter mentions a whaler. No doubt the ship has been driven too far south; it has foundered; he has escaped in a boat, either alone or with others; he has been carried along this channel, and has landed here, afraid to go any farther."

"But his boat, what has become of that?"

"His boat! That must have gone long ago. The letter was written in 1820. At any rate, let's look around."

We did so. After some search we found fragments of a rotted rope attached to a piece of rock.

"That," said Agnew, "must have been fastened to the boat; and as for the boat herself, she has long ago been swept away from this."

"What shall we do now?" I said, after a long silence.

"There's only one thing," said Agnew. "We must go on."

"Go on?" I asked, in wonder.

"Certainly," said he, confidently. "Will you stay here? No. Will you go back? You can't. We must, therefore, go on. That is our only hope."

"Hope!" I cried. "Do you still talk of hope?"

"Hope?" said Agnew; "of course. Why not? There are no limits to hope, are there? One can hope anything anywhere. It is better to die while struggling like a man, full of hope and energy than to perish in inaction and despair. It is better to die in the storm and furious waters than to waste away in this awful place. So come along. Let's drift as before. Let's see where this channel will take us. It will certainly take us somewhere. Such a stream as this must have some outlet."

"This stream," said I, "will take us to death, and death only. The current grows swifter every hour. I've heard some old yarn of a vast opening at each of the poles, or one of them, into which the waters of

the ocean pour. They fall into one, and some say they go through and come out at the other."

Agnew laughed.

"That," said he, "is a madman's dream. In the first place, I don't believe that we are approaching the south, but the north. The warmth of the climate here shows that. Yes, we are drawing north. We shall soon emerge into warm waters and bright skies. So come along, and let us lose no more time."

I made no further objection. There was nothing else to be done, and at the very worst we could not be in greater danger while drifting on than in remaining behind. Soon, therefore, we were again in the boat, and the current swept us on as before.

The channel now was about four miles wide. On either side arose the lofty volcanoes vomiting forth flames and smoke with furious explosions; vast stones were hurled up into the air from the craters; streams of molten lava rolled down, and at intervals there fell great showers of ashes. The shores on either side were precipitous and rugged beyond all description, looking like fiery lava streams which had been arrested by the flood, and cooled into gloomy, overhanging cliffs. The lava rock was of a deep, dull slate-color, which at a distance looked black; and the blackness which thus succeeded to the whiteness of the snow behind us seemed like the funeral pall of nature. Through scenes like these we drifted on, and the volcanoes on either side of the channel towered on high with their fiery floods of lava, their incessant explosions, their fierce outbursts of flames, and overhead there rolled a dense black canopy of smoke--altogether forming a terrific approach to that unknown and awful pathway upon which we were going. So we passed this dread portal, and then there lay before us--what? Was it a land of life or a land of death? Who could say?

It was evening when we passed through. Night came on, and the darkness was illuminated by the fiery glow of the volcanic flames. Worn out with fatigue, we fell asleep. So the night passed, and the current bore us on until, at length, the morning came. We awoke, and now, for the first time in many days, we saw the face of the sun. The clouds had at last broken, the sky was clear, and behind us the sun was shining. That sight told us all. It showed us where we were going.

I pointed to the sun.

"Look there," said I. "There is the sun in the northern sky--behind us. We have been drifting steadily toward the south."

At this Agnew was silent, and sat looking back for a long time. There we could still see the glow of the volcanic fires, though they were now many miles away; while the sun, but lately risen, was lying on a course closer to the horizon than we had ever seen it before.

"We are going south," said I--"to the South Pole. This swift current can have but one ending--there may be an opening at the South Pole, or a whirlpool like the Maelstrom."

Agnew looked around with a smile.

"All these notions," said he, "are dreams, or theories, or guesses. There is no evidence to prove them. Why trouble yourself about a guess? You and I can guess, and with better reason; for we have now, it seems, come farther south than any human being who has ever lived. Do not imagine that the surface of the earth is different at the poles from what it is anywhere else. If we get to the South Pole we shall see there what we have always seen--the open view of land or water, and the boundary of the horizon. As for this current, it seems to me like the Gulf Stream, and it evidently does an important work in the movement of the ocean waters. It pours on through vast fields of ice on its way to other oceans, where it will probably become united with new currents. Theories about openings at the poles, or whirlpools, must be given up. Since the Maelstrom has been found to be a fiction, no one need believe in any other whirlpool. For my own part, I now believe that this current will bear us on, due south, over the pole, and then still onward, until at last we shall find ourselves in the South Pacific Ocean. So cheer up--don't be downhearted; there's still hope. We have left the ice and snow behind, and already the air is warmer. Cheer up; we may find our luck turn at any moment."

To this I had no reply to make. Agnew's confidence seemed to me to be assumed, and certainly did not alleviate my own deep gloom, nor was the scene around calculated to rouse me in the slightest degree out of my despair. The channel had now lessened to a width of not more than two miles; the shores on either side were precipitous cliffs, broken by occasional declivities, but all of solid rock, so dark as to be almost black, and evidently of volcanic origin. At times there arose rugged eminences, scarred and riven, indescribably dismal and appalling. There was not only an utter absence of life here in these abhorrent regions, but an actual impossibility of life which was enough to make the stoutest heart quail. The rocks looked like iron. It seemed a land of iron penetrated by this ocean stream which had made for itself a channel, and now bore us onward to a destination which was beyond all conjecture.

Through such scenes we drifted all that day. Night came, and in the skies overhead there arose a brilliant display of the aurora australis, while toward the north the volcanic fires glowed with intense lustre. That night we slept. On awakening we noticed a change in the scene. The shores, though still black and forbidding, were no longer precipitous, but sloped down gradually to the water; the climate was sensibly milder, and far away before us there arose a line of giant mountains, whose summits were covered with ice and snow that gleamed white and purple in the rays of the sun.

Suddenly Agnew gave a cry, and pointed to the opposite shore.

"Look!" he cried--"do you see? They are men!"

I looked, and there I saw plainly some moving figures that were, beyond a doubt, human beings.

CHAPTER IV

THE SIGHT OF HUMAN BEINGS

The sight of human beings, thus unexpectedly found, filled us with strange feelings--feelings which I cannot explain. The country was still iron-bound and dark and forbidding, and the stream ran on in a strong current, deep, black as ink, and resistless as fate; the sky behind was lighted up by the volcanic glare which still shone from afar; and in front the view was bounded by the icy heights of a mountain chain. Here was, indeed, a strange country for a human habitation; and strange, indeed, were the human beings whom we saw.

"Shall we land?" said Agnew.

"Oh no," said I. "Don't be hasty. The elements are sometimes kinder than men, and I feel safer here, even in this river of death, than ashore with such creatures as those."

Agnew made no reply. We watched the figures on the shore. We saw them coming down, staring and gesticulating. We drew on nearer to them till we were able to see them better. A nearer view did not improve them. They were human beings, certainly, but of such an appalling aspect that they could only be likened to animated mummies. They were small, thin, shrivelled, black, with long matted hair and hideous faces. They all had long spears, and wore about the waist short skirts that seemed to be made of the skin of some sea-fowl.

We could not imagine how these creatures lived, or where. There were no signs of vegetation of any kind--not a tree or a shrub. There were no animals; but there were great flocks of birds, some of which seemed different from anything that we had ever seen before. The long spears which the natives carried might possibly be used for catching these, or for fishing purposes. This thought made them seem less formidable, since they would thus be instruments of food rather than weapons of war. Meanwhile we drifted on as before, and the natives watched us, running along the shore abreast of us, so as to keep up with the boat. There seemed over a hundred of them. We could see no signs of any habitations--no huts, however humble; but we concluded that their abodes were farther inland. As for the natives themselves, the longer we looked at them the more abhorrent they grew. Even the wretched aborigines of Van Dieman's Land, who have been classed lowest in the scale of humanity, were pleasing and congenial when compared with these, and the land looked worse than Tierra del Fuego. It looked like a land of iron, and its inhabitants like fiends.

Agnew again proposed to land, but I refused.

"No," I said; "I'd rather starve for a week, and live on hope. Let us drift on. If we go on we may have hope if we choose, but if we land here we shall lose even that. Can we hope for anything from such things as these? Even if they prove friendly, can we live among them? To stay here is worse than death; our only hope is to go on."

Agnew made no reply, and we drifted on for two hours, still followed by the natives. They made no hostile demonstrations. They merely watched us, apparently from motives of curiosity. All this time we were drawing steadily nearer to the line of lofty mountains, which with their icy crests rose before us like an inaccessible and impassable barrier, apparently closing up all farther progress; nor was there any indication of any pass or any opening, however narrow, through which the great stream might run. Nothing was there but one unbroken wall of iron cliffs and icy summits. At last we saw that the

sloping shores grew steeper, until, about a mile or two before us, they changed to towering cliffs that rose up on each side for about a thousand feet above the water; here the stream ran, and became lost to view as completely as though swallowed up by the earth.

"We can go no farther," said Agnew. "See--this stream seems to make a plunge there into the mountains. There must be some deep canyon there with cataracts. To go on is certain death. We must stop here, if only to deliberate. Say, shall we risk it among these natives? After all, there is not, perhaps, any danger among them. They are little creatures and seem harmless. They are certainly not very good-looking; but then, you know, appearances often deceive, and the devil's not so black as he's painted. What do you say?"

"I suppose we can do nothing else," said I.

In fact, I could see that we had reached a crisis in our fate. To go on seemed certain death. To stop was our only alternative; and as we were armed we should not be altogether at the mercy of these creatures. Having made this decision we acted upon it at once, for in such a current there was no time for delay; and so, seizing the oars, we soon brought the boat ashore.

As we approached, the crowd of natives stood awaiting us, and looked more repulsive than ever. We could see the emaciation of their bony frames; their toes and fingers were like birds' claws; their eyes were small and dull and weak, and sunken in cavernous hollows, from which they looked at us like corpses--a horrible sight. They stood quietly, however, and without any hostile demonstration, holding their spears carelessly resting upon the ground.

"I don't like the looks of them," said I. "I think I had better fire a gun."

"Why?" cried Agnew. "For Heaven's sake, man, don't hurt any of them!"

"Oh no," said I; "I only mean to inspire a little wholesome respect."

Saying this I fired in the air. The report rang out with long echoes, and as the smoke swept away it showed us all the natives on the ground. They had seated themselves with their hands crossed on their laps, and there they sat looking at us as before, but with no manifestation of fear or even surprise. I had expected to see them run, but there was nothing of the kind. This puzzled us. Still, there was no time now for any further hesitation. The current was sweeping us toward the chasm between the cliffs, and we had to land without delay. This we did, and as I had another barrel still loaded and a pistol, I felt that with these arms and those of Agnew we should be able to defend ourselves. It was in this state of mind that we landed, and secured the boat by means of the grappling-iron.

The natives now all crowded around us, making many strange gestures, which we did not understand. Some of them bowed low, others prostrated themselves; on the whole these seemed like marks of respect, and it occurred to me that they regarded us as superior beings of some sort. It was evident that there was nothing like hostility in their minds. At the same time, the closer survey which I now made of them filled me with renewed horror; their meagre frames, small, watery, lack-lustre

eyes, hollow, cavernous sockets, sunken cheeks, protruding teeth, claw-like fingers, and withered skins, all made them look more than ever like animated mummies, and I shrank from them involuntarily, as one shrinks from contact with a corpse.

Agnew, however, was very different, and it was evident that he felt no repugnance whatever. He bowed and smiled at them, and shook hands with half a dozen of them in succession. The hand-shaking was a new thing to them, but they accepted it in a proper spirit, and renewed their bows and prostrations. After this they all offered us their lances. This certainly seemed like an act of peace and good-will. I shook my head and declined to touch them; but Agnew accepted one of them, and offered his rifle in return. The one to whom he offered it refused to take it. He seemed immensely gratified because Agnew had taken his lance, and the others seemed disappointed at his refusal to take theirs. But I felt my heart quake as I saw him offer his rifle, and still more when he offered it to one or two others, and only regained my composure as I perceived that his offer was refused by all.

They now made motions to us to follow, and we all set forth together.

"My dear More," said Agnew, cheerily, "they're not a bad lot. They mean well. They can't help their looks. You're too suspicious and reserved. Let's make friends with them, and get them to help us. Do as I do."

I tried to, but found it impossible, for my repugnance was immovable. It was like the horror which one feels toward rats, cockroaches, earwigs, or serpents. It was something that defied reason. These creatures seemed like human vermin.

We marched inland for about half a mile, crossed a ridge, and came to a valley, or rather a kind of hollow, at the other side of which we found a cave with a smouldering fire in front. The fire was made of coal, which must exist here somewhere. It was highly bituminous, and burned with a great blaze.

The day was now drawing to a close; far away I could see the lurid glow of the volcanoes, which grew brighter as the day declined: above, the skies twinkled with innumerable stars, and the air was filled with the moan of rushing waters.

We entered the cave. As we did so the natives heaped coal upon the fire, and the flames arose, lighting up the interior. We found here a number of women and children, who looked at us without either fear or curiosity. The children looked like little dwarfs; the women were hags, hideous beyond description. One old woman in particular, who seemed to be in authority, was actually terrible in her awful and repulsive ugliness. A nightmare dream never furnished forth a more frightful object. This nightmare hag prostrated herself before each of us with such an air of self-immolation that she looked as though she wished us to kill her at once. The rough cave, the red light of the fire, all made the scene more awful; and a wild thought came to me that we had actually reached, while yet living, the infernal world, and that this was the abode of devils. Yet their actions, it must be confessed, were far from devilish. Everyone seemed eager to serve us. Some spread out couches formed of the skins of birds for us to sit on; others attended to the fire; others offered us gifts of large and beautiful feathers, together with numerous trinkets of rare and

curious workmanship. This kind attention on their part was a great puzzle to me, and I could not help suspecting that beneath all this there must be some sinister design. Resolving to be prepared for the worst, I quietly reloaded the empty barrel of my rifle and watched with the utmost vigilance. As for Agnew, he took it all in the most unsuspecting manner. He made signs to them, shook hands with them, accepted their gifts, and even tried to do the agreeable to the formidable hags and the child-fiends around him. He soon attracted the chief attention, and while all looked admiringly upon him, I was left to languish in comparative neglect.

At length a savory odor came through the cave, and a repast was spread before us. It consisted of some large fowl that looked like a goose, but was twice as large as the largest turkey that I had ever seen. The taste was like that of a wild-goose, but rather fishy. Still to us it seemed delicious, for our prolonged diet of raw seal had made us ready to welcome any other food whatever; and this fowl, whatever it was, would not have been unwelcome to any hungry man. It was evident that these people lived on the flesh of birds of various sorts. All around us we saw the skins of birds dried with the feathers on, and used for clothing, for mats, and for ornaments.

The repast being finished, we both felt greatly strengthened and refreshed. Agnew continued to cultivate his new acquaintances, and seeing me holding back, he said,

"More, old fellow, these good people give me to understand that there is another place better than this, and want me to go with them. Will you go?"

At this a great fear seized me.

"Don't go!" I cried--"don't go! We are close by the boat here, and if anything happens we can easily get to it."

Agnew laughed in my face.

"Why, you don't mean to tell me," said he, "that you are still suspicious, and after that dinner? Why, man, if they wanted to harm us, would they feast us in this style? Nonsense, man! Drop your suspicions and come along."

I shook my head obstinately.

"Well," said he, "if I thought there was anything in your suspicions I would stay by you; but I'm confident they mean nothing but kindness, so I'm going off to see the place."

"You'll be back again?" said I.

"Oh yes," said he, "of course I'll come back, and sleep here."

With these words he left, and nearly all the people accompanied him. I was left behind with the women and children and about a dozen men. These men busied themselves with some work over bird-skins; the women were occupied with some other work over feathers. No one took any notice of me. There did not seem to be any restraint upon me, nor was I watched in any way. Once the nightmare hag came and offered me a small roasted fowl, about the size of a woodcock. I declined it, but

at the same time this delicate attention certainly surprised me.

I was now beginning to struggle with some success against my feelings of abhorrence, when suddenly I caught sight of something which chased away every other thought, and made my blood turn cold in my veins. It was something outside. At the mouth of the cave--by the fire which was still blazing bright, and lighting up the scene--I saw four men who had just come to the cave: they were carrying something which I at first supposed to be a sick or wounded companion. On reaching the fire they put it down, and I saw, with a thrill of dismay, that their burden was neither sick nor wounded, but dead, for the corpse lay rigid as they had placed it. Then I saw the nightmare hag approach it with a knife. An awful thought came to me--the crowning horror! The thought soon proved to be but too well founded. The nightmare hag began to cut, and in an instant had detached the arm of the corpse, which she thrust among the coals in the very place where lately she had cooked the fowl. Then she went back for more.

For a moment my brain reeled, and I gasped for breath. Then I rose and staggered out, I know not how. No one tried to stop me, nor did anyone follow me; and, for my part, I was ready to blow out the brains of the first who dared to approach me. In this way I reached the open air, and passed by the hag and the four men as they were busy at their awful work. But at this point I was observed and followed. A number of men and women came after me, jabbering their uncouth language and gesticulating. I warned them off, angrily. They persisted, and though none of them were armed, yet I saw that they were unwilling to have me leave the cave, and I supposed that they would try to prevent me by force.

The absence of Agnew made my position a difficult one. Had it not been for this I would have burst through them and fled to the boat; but as long as he was away I felt bound to wait; and though I longed to fly, I could not for his sake. The boat seemed to be a haven of rest. I longed to be in her once more, and drift away, even if it should be to my death. Nature was here less terrible than man; and it seemed better to drown in the waters, to perish amid rocks and whirlpools, than to linger here amid such horrors as these. These people were not like human beings. The vilest and lowest savages that I had ever seen were not so odious as these. A herd of monkeys would be far more congenial, a flock of wolves less abhorrent. They had the caricature of the human form; they were the lowest of humanity; their speech was a mockery of language; their faces devilish, their kindness a cunning pretence; and most hideous of all was the nightmare hag that prepared the cannibal repast.

I could not begin hostilities, for I had to wait for Agnew; so I stood and looked, and then walked away for a little distance. They followed me closely, with eager words and gesticulations, though as yet no one touched me or threatened me. Their tone seemed rather one of persuasion. After a few paces I stood still, with all of them around me. The horrible repast showed plainly all that was in store for us. They received us kindly and fed us well only to devote us to the most abhorrent of deaths. Agnew, in his mad confidence, was only insuring his own doom. He was putting himself completely in the power of devils, who were incapable of pity and strangers to humanity. To make friends with such fiends was impossible, and I felt sure that our only plan was to rule by terror--to seize, to slay, to conquer. But still I had to wait for him, and did not dare to resort to violence while he

was absent; so I waited, while the savages gathered round me, contenting themselves with guarding me, and neither touching me nor threatening me. And all this time the hag went on, intent on her preparation of the horrible repast.

While standing there looking, listening, waiting for Agnew, I noticed many things. Far away the volcanoes blazed, and the northern sky was red with a lurid light. There, too, higher up, the moon was shining overhead, the sky was gleaming with stars; and all over the heavens there shone the lustre of the aurora australis, brighter than any I had ever seen--surpassing the moon and illuminating all. It lighted up the haggard faces of the devils around me, and it again seemed to me as though I had died and gone to the land of woe--an iron land, a land of despair, with lurid fires all aglow and faces of fear.

Suddenly, there burst upon my ears the report of a gun, which sounded like a thunder-peal, and echoed in long reverberations. At once I understood it. My fears had proved true. These savages had enticed Agnew away to destroy him. In an instant I burst through the crowd around me, and ran wildly in the direction of that sound, calling his name, as I ran, at the top of my voice.

I heard a loud cry; then another report. I hurried on, shouting his name in a kind of frenzy. The strange courage of these savages had already impressed me deeply. They did not fear our guns. They were all attacking him, and he was alone, fighting for his life.

Then there was another report; it was his pistol. I still ran on, and still shouted to him.

At last I received an answer. He had perhaps heard me, and was answering, or, at any rate, he was warning me.

"More," he cried, "fly, fly, fly to the boat! Save yourself!"

"Where are you?" I cried, as I still rushed on.

"Fly, More, fly! Save yourself! You can't save me. I'm lost. Fly for your life!"

Judging from his cries, he did not seem far away. I hurried on. I could see nothing of him. All the time the savages followed me. None were armed; but it seemed to me that they were preparing to fling themselves upon me and overpower me with their numbers. They would capture me alive, I thought, bind me, and carry me back, reserving me for a future time!

I turned and waved them back. They took no notice of my gesture. Then I ran on once more. They followed. They could not run so fast as I did, and so I gained on them rapidly, still shouting to Agnew. But there was no response. I ran backward and forward, crossing and recrossing, doubling and turning, pursued all the time by the savages. At last, in rage and despair, I fired upon them, and one of them fell. But, to my dismay, the others did not seem to care one whit; they did not stop for one moment, but pursued as before.

My situation was now plain in all its truth. They had enticed Agnew away; they had attacked him. He had fought, and had been overpowered. He had tried to give me warning. His last words had been for me to

fly--to fly: yes, for he well knew that it was better far for me to go to death through the raging torrent than to meet the fate which had fallen upon himself. For him there was now no more hope. That he was lost was plain. If he were still alive he would call to me; but his voice had been silenced for some time. All was over, and that noble heart that had withstood so bravely and cheerily the rigors of the storm, and the horrors of our desperate voyage, had been stilled in death by the vilest of miscreants.

I paused for a moment. Even though Agnew was dead, I could not bear to leave him, but felt as though I ought to share his fate. The savages came nearer. At their approach I hesitated no longer. That fate was too terrible: I must fly.

But before I fled I turned in fury to wreak vengeance upon them for their crimes. Full of rage and despair, I discharged my remaining rifle-barrel into the midst of the crowd. Then I fled toward the boat. On the way I had a frightful thought that she might have been sent adrift; but, on approaching the place, I found her there just as I had left her. The savages, with their usual fearlessness, still pursued. For a moment I stood on the shore, with the grapple in my hand and the boat close by, and as they came near I discharged my pistol into the midst of them. Then I sprang into the boat; the swift current bore me away, and in a few minutes the crowd of pursuing demons disappeared from view.

CHAPTER V

THE TORRENT SWEEPING UNDER THE MOUNTAINS

The boat drifted on. The light given by the aurora and the low moon seemed to grow fainter; and as I looked behind I saw that the distant glow from the volcanic fires had become more brilliant in the increasing darkness. The sides of the channel grew steeper, until at last they became rocky precipices, rising to an unknown height. The channel itself grew narrower, till from a width of two miles it had contracted to a tenth of those dimensions; but with this lessening width the waters seemed to rush far more swiftly. Here I drifted helplessly, and saw the gloomy, rocky cliffs sweep past me as I was hurled onward on the breast of the tremendous flood. I was in despair. The fate of Agnew had prepared me for my own, and I was only thankful that my fate, since it was inevitable, would be less appalling. Death seemed certain, and my chief thought now was as to the moment when it would come. I was prepared. I felt that I could meet it calmly, sternly, even thankfully; far better was a death here amid the roar of waters than at the hands of those abhorrent beings by whose treachery my friend had fallen.

As I went on, the precipices rose higher and seemed to overhang, the channel grew narrower, the light grew fainter, until at last all around me grew dark. I was floating at the bottom of a vast chasm, where the sides seemed to rise precipitously for thousands of feet, where neither watery flood nor rocky wall was visible, and where, far above, I could see the line of sky between the summits of the cliffs, and watch the glowing stars. And as I watched them there came to me the thought that this was my last sight on earth, and I could only

hope that the life which was so swiftly approaching its end might live again somewhere among those glittering orbs. So I thought; and with these thoughts I drifted on, I cannot tell how long, until at length there appeared a vast black mass, where the open sky above me terminated, and where the lustre of the stars and the light of the heavens were all swallowed up in utter darkness.

This, then, I thought, is the end. Here, amid this darkness, I must make the awful plunge and find my death I fell upon my knees in the bottom of the boat and prayed. As I knelt there the boat drew nearer, the black mass grew blacker. The current swept me on. There were no breakers; there was no phosphorescent sparkle of seething waters, and no whiteness of foam. I thought that I was on the brink of some tremendous cataract a thousand times deeper than Niagara; some fall where the waters plunged into the depths of the earth; and where, gathering for the terrific descent, all other movements--all dashings and writhings and twistings--were obliterated and lost in the one overwhelming onward rush. Suddenly all grew dark--dark beyond all expression; the sky above was in a moment snatched from view; I had been flung into some tremendous cavern; and there, on my knees, with terror in my heart, I waited for death.

The moments passed, and death delayed to come. The awful plunge was still put off; and though I remained on my knees and waited long, still the end came not. The waters seemed still, the boat motionless. It was borne upon the surface of a vast stream as smooth as glass; but who could tell how deep that stream was, or how wide? At length I rose from my knees and sank down upon the seat of the boat, and tried to peer through the gloom. In vain. Nothing was visible. It was the very blackness of darkness. I listened, but heard nothing save a deep, dull, droning sound, which seemed to fill all the air and make it all tremulous with its vibrations. I tried to collect my thoughts. I recalled that old theory which had been in my mind before this, and which I had mentioned to Agnew. This was the notion that at each pole there is a vast opening; that into one of them all the waters of the ocean pour themselves, and, after passing through the earth, come out at the other pole, to pass about its surface in innumerable streams. It was a wild fancy, which I had laughed at under other circumstances, but which now occurred to me once more, when I was overwhelmed with despair, and my mind was weakened by the horrors which I had experienced; and I had a vague fear that I had been drawn into the very channel through which the ocean waters flowed in their course to that terrific, that unparalleled abyss. Still, there was as yet no sign whatever of anything like a descent, for the boat was on even keel, and perfectly level as before, and it was impossible for me to tell whether I was moving swiftly or slowly, or standing perfectly still; for in that darkness there were no visible objects by which I could find out the rate of my progress; and as those who go up in balloons are utterly insensible of motion, so was I on those calm but swift waters.

At length there came into view something which arrested my attention and engrossed all my thoughts. It was faint glow that at first caught my gaze; and, on turning to see it better, I saw a round red spot glowing like fire. I had not seen this before. It looked like the moon when it rises from behind clouds, and glows red and lurid from the horizon; and so this glowed, but not with the steady light of the moon, for the light was fitful, and sometimes flashed into a baleful brightness, which soon subsided into a dimmer lustre. New alarm arose

within me, for this new sight suggested something more terrible than anything that I had thus far thought of. This, then, I thought, was to be the end of my voyage; this was my goal--a pit of fire, into which I should be hurled! Would it be well, I thought, to wait for such a fate, and experience such a death-agony? Would it not be better for me to take my own life before I should know the worst? I took my pistol and loaded it, so as to be prepared, but hesitated to use it until my fate should be more apparent. So I sat, holding my pistol, prepared to use it, watching the light, and awaiting the time when the glowing fires should make all further hope impossible. But time passed, and the light grew no brighter; on the contrary, it seemed to grow fainter. There was also another change. Instead of shining before me, it appeared more on my left. From this it went on changing its position until at length it was astern. All the time it continued to grow fainter, and it seemed certain that I was moving away from it rather than toward it. In the midst of this there occurred a new thought, which seemed to account for this light--this was, that it arose from these same volcanoes which had illuminated the northern sky when I was ashore, and followed me still with their glare. I had been carried into this darkness, through some vast opening which now lay behind me, disclosing the red volcano glow, and this it was that caused that roundness and resemblance to the moon. I saw that I was still moving on away from that light as before, and that its changing position was due to the turning of the boat as the water drifted it along, now stern foremost, now sidewise, and again bow foremost. From this it seemed plainly evident that the waters had borne me into some vast cavern of unknown extent, which went under the mountains--a subterranean channel, whose issue I could not conjecture. Was this the beginning of that course which should ultimately become a plunge deep down into some unutterable abyss? or might I ever hope to emerge again into the light of day--perhaps in some other ocean--some land of ice and frost and eternal night? But the old theory of the flow of water through the earth had taken hold of me and could not be shaken off. I knew some scientific men held the opinion that the earth's interior is a mass of molten rock and pent-up fire, and that the earth itself had once been a burning orb, which had cooled down at the surface; yet, after all, this was only a theory, and there were other theories which were totally different. As a boy I had read wild works of fiction about lands in the interior of the earth, with a sun at the centre, which gave them the light of a perpetual day. These, I knew, were only the creations of fiction; yet, after all, it seemed possible that the earth might contain vast hollow spaces in its interior--realms of eternal darkness, caverns in comparison with which the hugest caves on the surface were but the tiniest cells. I was now being borne on to these. In that case there might be no sudden plunge, after all. The stream might run on for many thousand miles through this terrific cavern gloom, in accordance with natural laws; and I might thus live, and drift on in this darkness, until I should die a lingering death of horror and despair.

There was no possible way of forming any estimate as to speed. All was dark, and even the glow behind was fading away; nor could I make any conjecture whatever as to the size of the channel. At the opening it had been contracted and narrow; but here it might have expanded itself to miles, and its vaulted top might reach almost to the summit of the lofty mountains. While sight thus failed me, sound was equally unavailing, for it was always the same--a sustained and unintermittent roar, a low, droning sound, deep and terrible, with no variations of dashing breakers or rushing rapids or falling cataracts. Vague

thoughts of final escape came and went; but in such a situation hope could not be sustained. The thick darkness oppressed the soul; and at length even the glow of the distant volcanoes, which had been gradually diminishing, grew dimmer and fainter, and finally faded out altogether. That seemed to me to be my last sight of earthly things. After this nothing was left. There was no longer for me such a thing as sight; there was nothing but darkness--perpetual and eternal night. I was buried in a cavern of rushing waters, to which there would be no end, where I should be borne onward helplessly by the resistless tide to a mysterious and an appalling doom.

The darkness grew so intolerable that I longed for something to dispel it, if only for a moment. I struck a match. The air was still, and the flame flashed out, lighting up the boat and showing the black water around me. This made me eager to see more. I loaded both barrels of the rifle, keeping my pistol for another purpose, and then fired one of them. There was a tremendous report, that rang in my ears like a hundred thunder-volleys, and rolled and reverberated far along, and died away in endless echoes. The flash lighted up the scene for an instant, and for an instant only; like the sudden lightning, it revealed all around. I saw a wide expanse of water, black as ink--a Stygian pool; but no rocks were visible, and it seemed as though I had been carried into a subterranean sea.

I loaded the empty barrel and waited. The flash of light had revealed nothing, yet it had distracted my thoughts, and the work of reloading was an additional distraction. Anything was better than inaction. I did not wish to waste my ammunition, yet I thought that an occasional shot might serve some good purpose, if it was only to afford me some relief from despair.

And now, as I sat with the rifle in my hands, I was aware of a sound--new, exciting, different altogether from the murmur of innumerable waters that filled my ears, and in sharp contrast with the droning echoes of the rushing flood. It was a sound that spoke of life. I heard quick, heavy pantings, as of some great living thing; and with this there came the noise of regular movements in the water, and the foaming and gurgling of waves. It was as though some living, breathing creature were here, not far away, moving through these midnight waters; and with this discovery there came a new fear--the fear of pursuit. I thought that some sea-monster had scented me in my boat, and had started to attack me. This new fear aroused me to action. It was a danger quite unlike any other which I had ever known; yet the fear which it inspired was a feeling that roused me to action, and prompted me, even though the coming danger might be as sure as death, to rise against it and resist to the last. So I stood up with my rifle and listened, with all my soul in my sense of hearing. The sounds arose more plainly. They had come nearer. They were immediately in front. I raised my rifle and took aim. Then in quick succession two reports thundered out with tremendous uproar and interminable echoes, but the long reverberations were unheeded in the blaze of sudden light and the vision that was revealed. For there full before me I saw, though but for an instant, a tremendous sight. It was a vast monster, moving in the waters against the stream and toward the boat. Its head was raised high, its eyes were inflamed with a baleful light, its jaws, opened wide, bristled with sharp teeth, and it had a long neck joined to a body of enormous bulk, with a tail that lashed all the water into foam. It was but for an instant that I saw it, and then with a sudden plunge the monster dived, while at the same moment all

was as dark as before.

Full of terror and excitement, I loaded my rifle again and waited, listening for a renewal of the noise. I felt sure that the monster, balked of his prey, would return with redoubled fury, and that I should have to renew the conflict. I felt that the dangers of the subterranean passage and of the rushing waters had passed away, and that a new peril had arisen from the assault of this monster of the deep. Nor was it this one alone that was to be dreaded. Where one was, others were sure to be; and if this one should pass me by it would only leave me to be assailed by monsters of the same kind, and these would probably increase in number as I advanced farther into this realm of darkness. And yet, in spite of these grisly thoughts, I felt less of horror than before, for the fear which I had was now associated with action; and as I stood waiting for the onset and listening for the approach of the enemy, the excitement that ensued was a positive relief from the dull despair into which I had sunk but a moment before.

Yet, though I waited for a new attack, I waited in vain. The monster did not come back. Either the flash and the noise had terrified him, or the bullets had hit him, or else in his vastness he had been indifferent to so feeble a creature as myself; but whatever may have been the cause, he did not emerge again out of the darkness and silence into which he had sunk. For a long time I stood waiting; then I sat down, still watchful, still listening, but without any result, until at length I began to think that there was no chance of any new attack. Indeed, it seemed now as though there had been no attack at all, but that the monster had been swimming at random without any thought of me, in which case my rifle-flashes had terrified him more than his fearful form had terrified me. On the whole this incident had greatly benefited me. It had roused me from my despair. I grew reckless, and felt a disposition to acquiesce in whatever fate might have in store for me.

And now, worn out with fatigue and exhausted from long watchfulness and anxiety, I sank down in the bottom of the boat and fell into a deep sleep.

CHAPTER VI

THE NEW WORLD

How long I slept I do not know. My sleep was profound, yet disturbed by troubled dreams, in which I lived over again all the eventful scenes of the past; and these were all intermingled in the wildest confusion. The cannibals beckoned to us from the peak, and we landed between the two volcanoes. There the body of the dead sailor received us, and afterward chased us to the boat. Then came snow and volcanic eruptions, and we drifted amid icebergs and molten lava until we entered an iron portal and plunged into darkness. Here there were vast swimming monsters and burning orbs of fire and thunderous cataracts falling from inconceivable heights, and the sweep of immeasurable tides and the circling of infinite whirlpools; while in my ears there rang the never-ending roar of remorseless waters that came after us, with all their waves and billows rolling upon us. It was a dream in

which all the material terrors of the past were renewed; but these were all as nothing when compared with a certain deep underlying feeling that possessed my soul--a sense of loss irretrievable, an expectation of impending doom, a drear and immitigable despair.

In the midst of this I awoke. It was with a sudden start, and I looked all around in speechless bewilderment. The first thing of which I was conscious was a great blaze of light--light so lately lost, and supposed to be lost forever, but now filling all the universe--bright, brilliant, glowing bringing hope and joy and gladness, with all the splendor of deep blue skies and the multitudinous laughter of ocean waves that danced and sparkled in the sun. I flung up my arms and laughed aloud. Then I burst into tears, and falling on my knees, I thanked the Almighty Ruler of the skies for this marvellous deliverance.

Rising from my knees I looked around, and once more amazement overwhelmed me. I saw a long line of mountains towering up to immeasurable heights, their summits covered with eternal ice and snow. There the sun blazed low in the sky, elevated but a few degrees above the mountain crests, which gleamed in gold and purple under its fiery rays. The sun seemed enlarged to unusual dimensions, and the mountains ran away on every side like the segment of some infinite circle. At the base of the mountains lay a land all green with vegetation, where cultivated fields were visible, and vineyards and orchards and groves, together with forests of palm and all manner of trees of every variety of hue, which ran up the sides of the mountains till they reached the limits of vegetation and the regions of snow and ice.

Here in all directions there were unmistakable signs of human life--the outlines of populous cities and busy towns and hamlets; roads winding far away along the plain or up the mountain-sides, and mighty works of industry in the shape of massive structures, terraced slopes, long rows of arches, ponderous pyramids, and battlemented walls.

From the land I turned to the sea. I saw before me an expanse of water intensely blue--an extent so vast that never before in all my ocean voyages had anything appeared at all comparable with it. Out at sea, wherever I had been, the water had always limited the view; the horizon had never seemed far away; ships soon sank below it, and the visible surface of the earth was thus always contracted; but here, to my bewilderment, the horizon appeared to be removed to an immeasurable distance and raised high in the air, while the waters were prolonged endlessly. Starting from where I was, they went away to inconceivable distances, and the view before me seemed like a watery declivity reaching for a thousand miles, till it approached the horizon far up in the sky. Nor was it any delusion of the senses that caused this unparalleled spectacle. I was familiar with the phenomena of the mirage, and knew well that there was nothing of that kind here; for the mirage always shows great surfaces of stillness, or a regular vibration--glassy tides and indistinct distances; but here everything was sharply defined in the clear atmosphere: the sky overhung a deep blue vault; the waves danced and sparkled in the sun; the waters rolled and foamed on every side; and the fresh breeze, as it blew over the ocean, brought with it such exhilarating influences that it acted upon me like some reviving cordial.

From the works of nature I turned to those of man. These were visible

everywhere: on the land, in cities and cultivated fields and mighty constructions; on the sea, in floating craft, which appeared wherever I turned my eyes--boats like those of fishermen, ships long and low, some like galleys, propelled by a hundred oars, others provided with one huge square-sail, which enabled them to run before the wind. They were unlike any ships which I had ever seen; for neither in the Mediterranean nor in Chinese waters were there any craft like these, and they reminded me rather of those ancient galleys which I had seen in pictures.

I was lost in wonder as to where I was, and what land this could be to which I had been brought. I had not plunged into the interior of the earth, but I had been carried under the mountains, and had emerged again into the glad light of the sun. Could it be possible, I thought, that Agnew's hope had been realized, and that I had been carried into the warm regions of the South Pacific Ocean? Yet in the South Pacific there could be no place like this--no immeasurable expanse of waters, no horizon raised mountain high. It seemed like a vast basin-shaped world, for all around me the surface appeared to rise, and I was in what looked like a depression; yet I knew that the basin and the depression were an illusion, and that this appearance was due to the immense extent of level surface with the environment of lofty mountains. I had crossed the antarctic circle; I had been borne onward for an immense distance. Over all the known surface of the earth no one had ever seen anything like this; there were but two places where such an immeasurable plain was possible, and those were at the flattened poles. Where I was I now knew well. I had reached the antarctic pole. Here the earth was flat--an immense level with no roundness to lessen the reach of the horizon but an almost even surface that gave an unimpeded view for hundreds of miles.

The subterranean channel had rushed through the mountains and had carried me here. Here came all the waters of the Northern ocean pouring into this vast polar sea, perhaps to issue forth from it by some similar passage. Here, then, was the South Pole--a world by itself: and how different from that terrible, that iron land on the other side of the mountains!--not a world of ice and frost, but one of beauty and light, with a climate that was almost tropical in its warmth, and lands that were covered with the rank luxuriance of a teeming vegetable life. I had passed from that outer world to this inner one, and the passage was from death unto life, from agony and despair to sunlight and splendor and joy. Above all, in all around me that which most impressed me now was the rich and superabundant life, and a warmth of air which made me think of India. It was an amazing and an unaccountable thing, and I could only attribute it to the flattening of the poles, which brought the surface nearer to the supposed central fires of the earth, and therefore created a heat as great as that of the equatorial regions. Here I found a tropical climate--a land warmed not by the sun, but from the earth itself. Or another cause might be found in the warm ocean currents. Whatever the true one might be, I was utterly unable to form a conjecture.

But I had no time for such speculations as these. After the first emotions of wonder and admiration had somewhat subsided, I began to experience other sensations. I began to remember that I had eaten nothing for a length of time that I had no means of calculating, and to look around to see if there was any way of satisfying my hunger.

The question arose now, What was to be done? After my recent terrible experience I naturally shrank from again committing myself to the tender mercies of strange tribes; yet further thought and examination showed me that the people of this strange land must be very different from those frightful savages on the other side of the mountains. Everywhere I beheld the manifest signs of cultivation and civilization. Still, I knew that even civilized people would not necessarily be any kinder than savages, and that I might be seized and flung into hopeless imprisonment or slavery.

So I hesitated, yet what could I do? My hunger was beginning to be insupportable. I had reached a place where I had to choose between starvation on the one hand, or a venture among these people on the other. To go back was impossible. Who could breast those waters in the tremendous subterranean channel, or force his way back through such appalling dangers? Or, if that were possible, who could ever hope to breast those mighty currents beyond, or work his way amid everlasting ice and immeasurable seas? No; return was impossible. I had been flung into this world of wonders, and here would be my home for the remainder of my days; though I could not now imagine whether those days would be passed in peace or in bitter slavery and sorrow. Yet the decision must be made and the risk must be run. It must be so. I must land here, venture among these people, and trust in that Providence which had hitherto sustained me.

Having thus resolved at all hazards to try my fate, I rowed in toward the shore. Thus far I had seen galleys passing and small boats, but they had taken no notice of me, for the reason that they were too far away to perceive anything about me that differed from any other boat; but now, as I rowed, I noticed a galley coming down toward me. She seemed to be going in toward the shore at the very point at which I was aiming, and her course and mine must soon meet if I continued to row. After some hesitation I concluded to make signals to her, so as to attract attention; for, now that I had resolved to venture among the people here, I was anxious to end my suspense as soon as possible. So I continued rowing, and gradually drew nearer. The galley was propelled by oars, of which there were fifty on either side. The stem was raised, and covered in like a cabin. At length I ceased rowing, and sat watching her. I soon saw that I was noticed, but this did not occur till the galley was close by me--so close, indeed, that I thought they would pass without perceiving me. I raised my hands, waved them, and gave a cry. The galley at once stopped, a boat was lowered, and some men descended and rowed toward me.

They were men of strange appearance--very small in stature and slender in frame. Their hair was black and straight, their features were quite regular, and their general expression was one of great gentleness. I was surprised to notice that they kept their eyes almost closed, as though they were weak and troubled by the glare of the sun. With their half-closed eyes they blinked at me, and then one who appeared to be their chief spoke to me. I understood not a word; and then I answered him in English, which, of course, was equally unintelligible to him. I then made signs, pointing to the mountains and endeavoring to make known to him that I had come from beyond them--that I had suffered shipwreck, that I had drifted here, and that I needed assistance. Of all this it was quite evident that they understood nothing except the fact that I needed help. The moment that they comprehended this they took me in tow and rowed back to the galley.

I found the galley to be about one hundred and fifty feet in length. For about two thirds of this length forward it was open and filled with seats, where there were about a hundred rowers, who all looked like those that I had first seen, all being of small stature, slender frames, and, moreover, all being apparently distressed by the sunlight. There was in all of them the same mild and gentle expression. In complexion and general outline of features they were not unlike Arabs, but they were entirely destitute of that hardness and austerity which the latter have. They all had beards, which were dressed in a peculiar way in plaits. Their costume varied. The rowers wore a coarse tunic, with a girdle of rope. The officers wore tunics of fine cloth and very elegant mantles, richly embroidered, and with borders of down. They all wore broad-brimmed hats, and the one who seemed to be chief had on his some golden ornaments.

Here once more I tried to explain to them who I was. They looked at me, examining me all over, inspecting my gun, pistol, coat, trousers, boots, and hat, and talking all the time among themselves. They did not touch me, but merely showed the natural curiosity which is felt at the sight of a foreigner who has appeared unexpectedly. There was a scrupulous delicacy and a careful and even ceremonious politeness in their attitude toward me which was at once amazing and delightful. All fear and anxiety had now left me; in the gentle manners and amiable faces of these people I saw enough to assure me of kind treatment; and in my deep joy and gratitude for this even my hunger was for a time forgotten.

At length the chief motioned to me to follow him. He led the way to the cabin, where, opening the door, he entered, and I followed, after which the others came in also and then the door was shut. At first I could see nothing. There were no windows whatever, and only one or two slight crevices through which the light came. After a time my eyes grew more accustomed to the darkness, and I could see that the cabin was a spacious compartment, adorned with rich hangings of some unknown material. There was a large table and seats. Taking me by the hand, the chief led me to this, where I seated myself, while the others remained standing. Then some of them went away, and soon returned with food and drink. The food was of different kinds--some tasting like goose, others like turkey, others like partridge. It was all the flesh of fowls, though, judging from the slices before me, they must have been of great size. I wondered much at the behavior of the officers of the ship, who all, and the chief himself more than all, stood and waited upon me; but it was a new world, and I supposed that this must be the fashion; so I made no objections, but accepted the situation and ate with a thankful heart.

As the first keenness of my appetite was satisfied I had more leisure to make observations. I noticed that the eyes of my new friends no longer blinked; they were wide open; and, so far as I could make them out, their faces were much improved. Weakness of eyes seemed common among these people, and therefore the officers had their cabin darkened, while the unfortunate rowers had to labor in the blazing sun. Such was my conclusion, and the fact reminded me of the miserable fellahin of Egypt, who have ophthalmia from the blazing sun and burning sand.

After the repast they brought me water in a basin, and all stood around me. One held the basin, another a towel, another a flask, another took a sponge and proceeded to wash my face and hands.

This was all strange to me, yet there was nothing left for me but submission. Then the chief, who had stood looking on with a smile on his face took off his rich furred mantle and handed it to me. I was half inclined to refuse it, but was afraid of giving offence, so I accepted it, and he himself fastened it around my shoulders. The others seemed actually to envy the chief, as though he had gained some uncommon good-fortune. Then they offered me various drinks, of which I tasted several kinds. Some were sweet waters of different flavors, others tasted like mild wine, one was a fermented drink, light, sweet, and very agreeable to the palate. I now wished to show my generous entertainers that I was grateful; so I raised my cup, bowed to all of them, particularly the chief, and drank their health. They all watched this ceremony with very sober faces, and I could not quite make out whether they took my meaning or not. They certainly did not look pleased, and it seemed to me as though they felt hurt at any expression of gratitude, so I concluded for the future to abstain from all such demonstrations.

Yet with every moment the manners of these people grew more bewildering. It was strange, indeed, for me to find myself so suddenly the centre of interest and of generous intentions. For a moment the thought occurred to me that they regarded me as some wonderful being with superior powers, and were trying to propitiate me by these services; yet I soon saw that these services were not at all acts of propitiation; they looked rather like those loving and profuse attentions which a family showers down upon some dear one long absent and at last returned, and with this my wonder grew greater than ever.

The galley had long since resumed her progress. I heard the steady beat of the oars as they all moved in time, and at length the motion ceased. The chief then signed to me and went out. I followed, and the rest came after. And now as I emerged from the gloom of the cabin, I found myself once more in the glorious light of day, and saw that we had reached the land. The galley was hauled up alongside a stone quay, and on the shore there were buildings and walls and trees and people. The chief went ashore at once and I accompanied him. We walked for some distance along a road with stone walls on either side, from behind which there arose trees that from a distance had looked like palms. I now found them to be giant ferns, arching overhead with their broad fanlike leaves and branches in dense masses, making the roadway quite dark in the shadow. Astonished as I was at the sight of these trees, I soon forgot them in a still more astonishing sight, for after going onward about a hundred paces I stopped, and found myself in a wide space where four cross-roads met. Here there were three birds of gigantic stature. They had vast bodies, short legs, short necks, and seemed as large as an ordinary-sized ox. Their wings were short, and evidently could not be used for flight; their beaks were like that of a sea-gull; each one had a man on his back, and was harnessed to a car. The chief motioned to me to enter one of these cars. I did so. He followed, and thereupon the driver started the bird, which set forth with long, rapid strides, at a pace fast as that of a trotting horse. So astonished was I that for some time I did not notice anything else; but at length, when my first feeling had subsided, I began to regard other objects. All the way the dense fern foliage arched overhead, throwing down deep shadows. They grew on either side in dense rows, but between their stalks I could see the country beyond, which lay all bright in the sunlight.

Here were broad fields, all green with verdure; farther away arose

clumps of tree-ferns; at every step of the way new vistas opened; amid the verdure and the foliage were the roofs of structures that looked like pavilions, and more massive edifices with pyramidal roofs. Our road constantly ascended, and at length we came to a crossing. This was a wide terrace at the slope of the mountain; on the lower side was a row of massive stone edifices with pyramidal roofs, while on the upper there were portals which seemed to open into excavated caverns. Here, too, on either side arose the giant ferns, overarching and darkening the terrace with their deep shadow. From this point I looked back, and through the trunks of the tree-ferns I could see fields and pavilions and the pyramidal roofs of massive edifices, and broad, verdant slopes, while in the distance there were peeps of the boundless sea. We continued on our way without stopping, and passed several successive terraces like the first, with the same caverns on the upper side and massive edifices on the lower, until at last the ascent ended at the fifth terrace, and here we turned to the left. Now the view became more varied. The tree-ferns arose on either side, arching overhead; on my right were the portals that opened into caverns, on my left solid and massive houses, built of great blocks of stone, with pyramidal roofs. As far as I could judge, I was in a city built on the slope of a mountain, with its streets formed thus of successive terraces and their connecting cross-ways, one half its habitations consisting of caverns, while the other half were pavilions and massive stone structures. Few people, however, were to be seen. Occasionally I saw one or two groping along with their eyes half shut, seeking the darkest shadows; and it seemed to me that this extraordinary race of men had some natural and universal peculiarity of eyesight which made them shun the sunlight, and seek the darkness of caves and of dense, overshadowing foliage.

At length we came to a place where the terrace ran back till it formed a semicircle against the mountain slope, when several vast portals appeared. Here there was a large space, where the tree-ferns grew in long lines crossing each other, and making a denser shade than usual. On the lower side were several stone edifices of immense size; and in the middle of the place there arose a singular structure, shaped like a half pyramid, with three sides sloping, and the fourth perpendicular, flat on the top, which was approached by a flight of steps. We now went on until we reached the central portal of the range of caverns, and here we stopped. The chief got out and beckoned to me. I followed. He then led the way into the cavern, while I, full of wonder, walked behind him.

CHAPTER VII

SCIENTIFIC THEORIES AND SCEPTICISM

Thus far Melick had been reading the manuscript, but at this point he was interrupted by the announcement that dinner was ready. Upon this he stopped abruptly; for on board the Falcon dinner was the great event of the day, and in its presence even the manuscript had to be laid aside. Before long they were all seated around the dining-table in the sumptuous cabin, prepared to discuss the repast which had been served up by the genius of the French chef whom Lord Featherstone had brought with him.

Let us pause here for a moment to take a minuter survey of these four friends. In the first place, there was Lord Featherstone himself, young, handsome, languid, good-natured to a fault, with plenty of muscle if he chose to exert it, and plenty of brain if he chose to make use of it--a man who had become weary of the monotony of high life, and, like many of his order, was fond of seeking relief from the ennui of prosperity amid the excitements of the sea. Next to him was Dr. Congreve, a middle-aged man, with iron-gray hair, short beard and mustache, short nose, gray eyes, with spectacles, and stoutish body. Next came Noel Oxenden, late of Trinity College, Cambridge, a college friend of Featherstone's--a tall man, with a refined and intellectual face and reserved manner. Finally, there was Otto Melick, a litterateur from London, about thirty years of age, with a wiry and muscular frame, and the restless manner of one who lives in a perpetual fidget.

For some time nothing was said; they partook of the repast in silence; but at length it became evident that they were thinking of the mysterious manuscript. Featherstone was the first to speak.

"A deuced queer sort of thing this, too," said he, "this manuscript. I can't quite make it out. Who ever dreamed of people living at the South Pole--and in a warm climate, too? Then it seems deuced odd, too, that we should pick up this copper cylinder with the manuscript. I hardly know what to think about it."

Melick smiled. "Why, it isn't much to see through," said he.

"See through what?" said the doctor, hastily, pricking up his ears at this, and peering keenly at Melick through his spectacles.

"Why, the manuscript, of course."

"Well," said the doctor, "what is it that you see? What do you make out of it?"

"Why, anyone can see," said Melick, "that it's a transparent hoax, that's all. You don't mean to say, I hope, that you really regard it in any other light?"

"A transparent hoax!" repeated the doctor. "Will you please state why you regard it in that light?"

"Certainly," said Melick. "Some fellow wanted to get up a sensation novel and introduce it to the world with a great flourish of trumpets, and so he has taken this way of going about it. You see, he has counted on its being picked up, and perhaps published. After this he would come forward and own the authorship."

"And what good would that do?" asked the doctor, mildly. "He couldn't prove the authorship, and he couldn't get the copyright."

"Oh, of course not; but he would gain notoriety, and that would give him a great sale for his next effort."

The doctor smiled. "See here, Melick," said he, "you've a very vivid imagination, my dear fellow; but come, let us discuss this for a little while in a common-sense way. Now how long should you suppose that this manuscript has been afloat?"

"Oh, a few months or so," said Melick.

"A few months!" said the doctor. "A few years you mean. Why, man, there are successive layers of barnacles on that copper cylinder which show a submersion of at least three years, perhaps more."

"By Jove! yes," remarked Featherstone. "Your sensation novelist must have been a lunatic if he chose that way of publishing a book."

"Then, again," continued the doctor, "how did it get here?"

"Oh, easily enough," answered Melick. "The ocean currents brought it."

"The ocean currents!" repeated the doctor. "That's a very vague expression. What do you mean? Of course it has been brought here by the ocean currents."

"Why, if it were thrown off the coast of England it would be carried away, in the ordinary course of things, and might make the tour of the world."

"The ocean currents," said the doctor, "have undoubtedly brought this to us. Of that I shall have more to say presently--but just now, in reference to your notion of a sensation novelist, and an English origin, let me ask your opinion of the material on which it is written. Did you ever see anything like it before? Is it paper?"

"No," said Melick; "it is evidently some vegetable substance. No doubt the writer has had it prepared for this very purpose, so as to make it look natural."

"Do you know what it is?" asked the doctor.

"No."

"Then I'll tell you; it's papyrus."

"Papyrus?"

"Yes, actual papyrus. You can find but little of that in existence at the present day. It is only to be found here and there in museums. I know it perfectly well, however, and saw what it was at the first glance. Now, I hold that a sensation novelist would never have thought of papyrus. If he didn't wish to use paper, he could have found a dozen other things. I don't see how he could have found anyone able to prepare such a substance as this for writing. It must have come from a country where it is actually in use. Now, mark you, the papyrus-plant may still be found growing wild on the banks of the upper Nile, and also in Sicily, and it is made use of for ropes and other things of that sort. But as to making writing material out of it, that is hardly possible for the art is lost. The ancient process was very elaborate and this manuscript is written on leaves which resembled in a marvellous manner those of the Egyptian papyrus books. There are two rolls at Marseilles which I have seen and examined, and they are identical with this. Now these papyrus leaves indicate much mechanical skill, and have a professional look. They seem like the work of an experienced manufacturer."

"I don't see," said Melick, obstinately, "why one shouldn't get papyrus now and have it made up into writing material."

"Oh, that's out of the question," said the doctor. "How could it ever enter into anyone's head? How could your mere sensation-monger procure the raw material? That of itself would be a work of immense difficulty. How could he get it made up? That would be impossible. But, apart from this, just consider the strong internal evidence that there is as to the authenticity of the manuscript. Now, in the first place, there is the description of Desolation Island, which is perfectly accurate. But it is on his narrative beyond this that I lay chief stress. I can prove that the statements here are corroborated by those of Captain Ross in his account of that great voyage from which he returned not very long ago."

The doctor, who had been talking with much enthusiasm, paused here to take breath, and then went on:

"I happen to know all about that voyage, for I read a full report of it just before we started, and you can see for yourselves whether this manuscript is credible or not."

"Captain James Clarke Ross was sent forth on his expedition in 1839. On January 1, 1841, he passed the antarctic circle in 178 degrees east longitude. On the 11th he discovered land in 70 degrees 41' south latitude, 172 degrees 36' east longitude. He found that the land was a continuous coast, trending southward, and rising to peaks of ten thousand feet in height, all covered with ice and snow. On the 12th he landed and took possession in the name of the Queen. After this he continued his course as far as 78 degrees 4' south latitude, tracing a coast-line of six hundred miles. Observe, now how all this coincides with More's narrative. Well, I now come to the crowning statement. In 77 degrees 32' south latitude, 167 degrees east longitude, he came in sight of two enormous volcanoes over twelve thousand feet in height. One of these was in an active state of eruption. To this he gave the name of Mount Erebus. The other was quiet; it was of somewhat less height, and he gave it the name of Mount Terror. Mark, now, how wonderfully this resembles More's account. Well, just here his progress was arrested by a barrier which presented a perpendicular wall of over a hundred and fifty feet in height, along which he coasted for some distance. On the following year he penetrated six miles farther south, namely, 78 degrees 11' south latitude, 161 degrees 27' west longitude. At this point he was again stopped by the impassable cliffs, which arose here like an eternal barrier, while beyond them he saw a long line of lofty mountains covered with ice and snow."

"Did you hear the result of the American expedition?" asked Melick.

"Yes," replied the doctor. "Wilkes pretends to have found a continent, but his account of it makes it quite evident to my mind that he saw nothing but ice. I believe that Wilkes's antarctic continent will some day be penetrated by ships, which will sail for hundreds of miles farther south. All that is wanted is a favorable season. But mark the coincidence between Ross's report and More's manuscript. This must have been written at least three years ago, and the writer could not have known anything about Ross's discoveries. Above all, he could not have thought of those two volcanoes unless he had seen them."

"But these volcanoes mentioned by More are not the Erebus and Terror, are they?" said Lord Featherstone.

"Of course not; they are on the other side of the world."

"The whole story," said Melick, "may have been written by one of Ross's men and thrown overboard. If I'd been on that expedition I should probably have written it to beguile the time."

"Oh yes," said the doctor; "and you would also have manufactured the papyrus and the copper cylinder on board to beguile the time."

"I dare say the writer picked up that papyrus and the copper cylinder in China or Japan, and made use of it in this way."

"Where do you make out the position of More's volcanoes?" asked Featherstone.

"It is difficult to make it out accurately," said the doctor. "More gives no data. In fact he had none to give. He couldn't take any observations."

"The fact is," said Melick, "it's not a sailor's yarn at all. No sailor would ever express himself in that way. That's what struck me from the first. It has the ring of a confounded sensation-monger all through."

The doctor elevated his eyebrows, but took no notice of this.

"You see," he continued, addressing himself to the others, "Desolation Island is in 50 degrees south latitude and 70 degrees east longitude. As I make out, More's course led him over about ten degrees of longitude in a southwest course. That course depended altogether upon the ocean currents. Now there is a great antarctic drift-current, which flows round the Cape of Good Hope and divides there, one half flowing past the east coast of Africa and the other setting across the Indian Ocean. Then it unites with a current which flows round the south of Van Dieman's Land, which also divides, and the southernmost current is supposed to cross the Pacific until it strikes Cape Horn, around which it flows, dividing as before. Now my theory is, that south of Desolation Island--I don't know how far--there is a great current setting toward the South Pole, and running southwest through degrees of longitude 60, 50, 40, 30, 20, 10, east of Greenwich; and finally sweeping on, it would reach More's volcanoes at a point which I should judge to be about 80 degrees south latitude and 10 degrees west longitude. There it passes between the volcanoes and bursts through the vast mountain barrier by a subterranean way, which has been formed for it in past ages by some primeval convulsion of nature. After this it probably sweeps around the great South Polar ocean, and emerges at the opposite side, not far from the volcanoes Erebus and Terror."

Here the doctor paused, and looked around with some self-complacency.

"Oh," said Melick, "if you take that tone, you have us all at your mercy. I know no more about the geography of the antarctic circle than I do of the moon. I simply criticize from a literary point of view, and I don't like his underground cavern with the stream running through it. It sounds like one of the voyages of Sinbad the Sailor."

Nor do I like his description; he evidently is writing for effect. Besides, his style is vicious; it is too stilted. Finally, he has recourse to the stale device of a sea-serpent."

"A sea-serpent!" repeated the doctor. "Well, for my part I feel by no means inclined to sneer at a sea-serpent. Its existence cannot be proved, yet it cannot be pooh-poohed. Every schoolboy knows that the waters of the sea were once filled with monsters more tremendous than the greatest sea-serpent that has ever been imagined. The plesiosaurus, with its snakelike head, if it existed now, would be called a sea-serpent. Some of these so-called fossil animals may have their representatives still living in the remoter parts of the world. Think of the recently discovered ornithorhynchus of Australia!"

"If you please, I'd really much rather not," said Melick with a gesture of despair. "I haven't the honor of the gentleman's acquaintance."

"Well, what do you think of his notice of the sun, and the long light, and his low position on the horizon?"

"Oh, that's all right," said Melick. "Anyone who chose to get up this thing would of course read up about the polar day, and all that. Everyone knows that at the poles there is a six-months' day, followed by a six-months' night."

"You are a determined sceptic," said the doctor.

"How is it about the polar day?" asked Featherstone.

"Well," said the doctor, "at the poles themselves there is one day of six months, during which the sun never sets, and one night of six months, during which he never rises. In the spaces between the polar circles the quantities of the continuous day and continuous night vary in accordance with the distance from the pole. At the north point of Nova Zembla, 75 degrees north latitude, there is uninterrupted light from May 1st to August 12th, and uninterrupted darkness from November 8th to February 9th. At the arctic circle at the summer solstice the day is twenty-four hours long. At the antarctic circle at the same time the night is twenty-four hours long."

Upon this Melick filled the doctor's wine-glass with a great deal of ceremony.

"After all those statistics," he said, "you must feel rather dry. You should take a drink before venturing any further."

The doctor made no reply, but raised the glass to his lips and swallowed the wine in an abstracted way.

"The thing that struck me most," said Oxenden, "in all that has been read thus far, is the flatness of the South Pole, and the peculiar effect which this produces on the landscape."

"I must say," added Melick, "that the writer has got hold of a very good idea there, and has taken care to put it forward in a very prominent fashion."

"What is the difference," asked Oxenden, "between the two diameters of

the earth, the polar and the equatorial? Is it known?"

"By Jove!" said Featherstone, "that's the very question I was going to ask. I've always heard that the earth is flattened at the poles, but never knew how much. Is there any way by which people can find out?"

The doctor drew a long breath, and beamed upon the company with a benevolent smile.

"Oh yes," said he; "I can answer that question, if you care to know and won't feel bored."

"Answer it, then, my dear fellow, by all means," said Featherstone, in his most languid tone.

"There are two ways," said the doctor, "by which the polar compression of the earth has been found out. One is by the measurement of arcs on the earth's surface; the other is by experiments with pendulums or weights with regard to the earth's gravity at different places. The former of these methods is, perhaps, the more satisfactory. Measurements of arcs have been made on a very extensive scale in different parts of the world--in England, France, Lapland, Peru, and India. Mr. Ivory, who devoted himself for years to an exhaustive examination of the subject, has deduced that the equatorial radius of the earth is over 3962 miles, and the polar radius over 3949 miles. This makes the depression at either pole upward of thirteen miles. A depression of over thirteen miles, as you must plainly see, should produce strange results in the scenery at the poles. Of course, if there are mountains, no difference would be noticed between this and any other part of the earth's surface; but if there is water, why, we ought to expect some such state of things as More describes. The gravitation test has also been tried, with very nearly the same result. The surface of the earth at the equator, being farthest from the centre of gravity, indicates the least weight in bodies; but at the poles, where the surface is nearest the centre of gravity, there must be the greatest weight. It is found, in fact, that the weight of bodies increases in passing from the equator to the poles. By experiments made in this way the polar compression is ascertained to be the same as I have mentioned."

"What effect would this have on the climate at the poles?" asked Oxenden.

"That's a complicated question," said the doctor. "In answer to that we must leave ascertained facts and trust to theories, unless, indeed, we accept as valid the statements of this remarkable manuscript. For my own part, I see no reason why it should not be as More says. Remember, this polar world is thirteen miles nearer to the centre of the earth. Whether this should affect the climate or not, depends upon the nature of the earth's interior. That interior, according to the popular theory of the present day is a mass of fire. This theory affirms that the earth was once a red-hot mass, which has cooled down; but the cooling process has only take place on the surface, leaving the interior still a molten mass of matter in a state of intense heat and combustion. At the poles the surface is thus thirteen miles nearer to these tremendous fires. Of course it may be supposed that the earth's crust is of about equal thickness on all parts; yet still, even if this be so, thirteen miles ought to make some difference. Now at the North Pole there seem to be causes at work to counterbalance

the effect of the internal heat, chiefly in the enormous accumulation of polar ice which probably hems it in on every side; and though many believe in an open polar sea of warm water at the North Pole, yet still the effect of vast ice-masses and of cold submarine currents must be to render the climate severe. But at the South Pole it is different. The observations of Ross and of More show us that there is a chain of mountains of immense height, which seem to encircle the pole. If this be so, and I see no reason to disbelieve it, then the ice of the outer seas must be kept away altogether from that strange inner sea of which More speaks. Ross saw the volcanoes Erebus and Terror; More saw two others. How many more there may be it is impossible to say; but all this shows that the effect of the earth's internal fires is very manifest in that region, and More has penetrated to a secluded world, which lies apart by itself, free from the influence of ice-masses, left to feel the effect of the internal fires, and possessing what is virtually a tropical climate."

"Well," said Melick, "there is no theory however wild and fantastic, which some man of science will not be ready to support and to fortify by endless arguments, all of the most plausible kind. For my own part, I still believe More and his south polar world to be no more authentic than Sindbad the Sailor."

But the others evidently sympathized with the doctor's view, and regarded Melick as carrying his scepticism to an absurd excess.

"How large do you suppose this south polar ocean to be?" asked Featherstone.

"It is impossible to answer that question exactly," said the doctor. "It may be, as More hints, a thousand miles in extent, or only five hundred, or two hundred. For my own part, however, I feel like taking More's statements at their utmost value; and the idea that I have gathered from his narrative is that of a vast sea like the Mediterranean, surrounded by impassable mountains, by great and fertile countries, peopled with an immense variety of animals, with a fauna and flora quite unlike those of the rest of the world; and, above all, with great nations possessing a rare and unique civilization, and belonging to a race altogether different from any of the known races of men."

"Well," said Melick, "that at least is the idea which the writer of the manuscript tries to convey."

By this time they had finished dinner.

"And now," said Featherstone, "let's have some more of the manuscript. Melick is tired of it, I dare say. I would relieve him, but I'm an infernally bad reader. Doctor, what do you say? Will you read the next instalment!"

"With all my heart," said the doctor, briskly.

"Very well, then," said Featherstone; "we will all be your attentive hearers."

And now the doctor took up the manuscript and began to read.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CAVE-DWELLERS

The cavern into which the chief led me was very spacious, but had no light except that which entered through the portal. It was with difficulty that I could see anything, but I found that there were many people here moving about, all as intent upon their own pursuits as those which one encounters in the streets of our cities. As we went on farther the darkness increased, until at last I lost sight of the chief altogether, and he had to come back and lead me. After going a little farther we came to a long, broad passage-way like a subterranean street, about twenty feet in width, and as many in height. Here there were discernible a few twinkling lamps, which served to make the darkness less intense and enabled me to see the shadowy figures around. These were numerous, and all seemed busy, though what their occupation might be I could not guess. I was amazed at the extent of these caverns, and at the multitude of the people. I saw also that from the nature of their eyes the sunlight distressed them, and in this cavern gloom they found their most congenial dwelling-place. From what I had thus far seen, this extraordinary people shrank from the sunlight; and when they had to move abroad they passed over roads which were darkened as much as possible by the deep shadows of mighty ferns, while for the most part they remained in dark caverns, in which they lived and moved and had their being. It was a puzzle to me whether the weakness of their eyes had caused this dislike of light, or the habit of cave-dwelling had caused this weakness of eyes. Here, in this darkness, where there was but a faint twinkle from the feeble lamps, their eyes seemed to serve them as well as mine did in the outer light of day; and the chief, who outside had moved with an uncertain step, and had blinked painfully at objects with his eyes almost closed, now appeared to be in his proper element; and while I hesitated like a blind man and groped along with a faltering step, he guided me, and seemed to see everything with perfect vision.

At length we stopped, and the chief raised up a thick, heavy mat which hung like an unwieldy curtain in front of a doorway. This the chief lifted. At once a blaze of light burst forth, gleaming into the dark, and appearing to blind him. His eyes closed. He held up the veil for me to pass through. I did so. He followed, and then groped his way slowly along, while I accompanied and assisted him.

I now found myself in a large grotto with an arched roof, from which was suspended an enormous lamp, either golden or gilded. All around were numerous lamps. The walls were adorned with rich hangings; couches were here, with soft cushions, and divans and ottomans; soft mats were on the floor, and everything gave indications of luxury and wealth. Other doors, covered with overhanging mats, seemed to lead out of this grotto. To one of these the chief walked, and raising the mat he led the way into another grotto like the last, with the same bright lights and the same adornments, but of smaller size. Here I saw someone who at once took up all my attention.

It was a young maiden. Her face and form, but especially her eyes, showed her to be of quite a different race from these others. To me she was of medium height, yet she was taller than any of the people

here that I had hitherto seen. Her complexion was much lighter; her hair was dark, luxuriant, and wavy, and arranged in a coiffure secured with a golden band. Her features were of a different cast from those of the people here, for they were regular in outline and of exquisite beauty; her nose was straight; she had a short upper lip, arched eyebrows finely pencilled, thin lips, and well-rounded chin. But the chief contrast was in her eyes. These were large, dark, liquid, with long lashes, and with a splendid glow in their lustrous depths. She stood looking at me with her face full of amazement; and as I caught the gaze of her glorious eyes I rejoiced that I had at last found one who lived in the light and loved it—one who did not blink like a bat, but looked me full in the face, and allowed me to see all her soul revealed. The chief, who still was pained by the glare of light, kept his eyes covered, and said a few hasty words to the maiden. After this he hurried away, leaving me there.

The maiden stood for a moment looking at me. As the chief spoke to her a change came over her face. She looked at me in silence, with an expression of sad and mournful interest, which seemed to increase every moment. At length she approached and said something in the same strange language which the chief had used. I shook my head and replied in English, whereupon she shook her head with a look of perplexity. Then, anxious to conciliate her, I held out my hand. She looked at it in some surprise. Upon this I took her hand, and pressed it to my lips, feeling, however, somewhat doubtful as to the way in which she might receive such an advance. To my great delight she accepted it in a friendly spirit, and seemed to consider it my foreign fashion of showing friendship and respect. She smiled and nodded, and pointed to my gun, which thus far I had carried in my hand. I smiled and laid it down. Then she pointed to a seat. I sat down, and then she seated herself close by me, and we looked at each other in mutual wonder and mutual inquiry.

I was full of amazement at thus meeting with so exquisite a being, and lost myself in conjectures as to her race, her office, and her position here. Who was she, or what? She was unlike the others, and reminded me of those Oriental beauties whose portraits I had seen in annuals and illustrated books. Her costume was in keeping with such a character. She wore a long tunic that reached from the neck to the ground, secured at the waist with a golden girdle; the sleeves were long and loose; over this she had a long mantle; on her feet were light slippers, white and glistening. All about her, in her room and in her costume, spoke of light and splendor and luxury. To these others who shrank so from the light she could not be related in any way. The respect with which she was treated by the chief, the peculiar splendor of her apartments, seemed to indicate some high rank. Was she, then, the queen of the land? Was she a princess? I could not tell. At any rate, whatever she was, she seemed anxious to show me the utmost attention. Her manner was full of dignity and sweet graciousness, and she appeared particularly anxious to make herself understood. At first she spoke in a language that sounded like that of the chief, and was full of gutturals and broad vowels; afterward she spoke in another that was far more euphonious. I, on the other hand spoke in English and in French; but of course I was as unintelligible to her as she was to me.

Language was, therefore, of no use. It was necessary to go back to first principles and make use of signs, or try to gain the most elementary words of her language; so first of all I pointed to her,

and tried to indicate that I wanted to know her name. She caught my meaning at once, and, pointing to herself, she looked fixedly at me and said, "Almah, Almah!"

I repeated these words after her, saying, "Almah, Almah!" She smiled and nodded, and then pointed to me with a look of inquiry that plainly asked for my name. I said "Adam More." She repeated this, and it sounded like "A-tam-or." But as she spoke this slowly her smile died away. She looked anxious and troubled, and once more that expression of wondering sadness came over her face. She repeated my name over and over in this way with a mournful intonation that thrilled through me, and excited forebodings of evil. "Atamor, Atamor!" And always after that she called me "Atamor."

But now she sat for some time, looking at me with a face full of pity and distress. At this I was greatly astonished; for but a moment before she had been full of smiles, and it was as though something in my name had excited sorrowful thoughts. Yet how could that be, since she could never by any possibility have heard my name before? The beautiful Almah seemed to be not altogether happy, or why should she be so quick to sadness? There was a mystery about all this which was quite unaccountable.

It was a singular situation, and one which excited within me feelings of unutterable delight. This light and splendor, this warmth and peace--what a contrast it offered to the scenes through which I had but lately passed! Those scenes of horror, of ice and snow, of storm and tempest, of cold and hunger, of riven cliff and furious ocean stream, and, above all, that crowning agony in the bleak iron-land of the cannibals--from all these I had escaped. I had been drawn down under the earth to experience the terrors of that unspeakable passage, and had at last emerged to light and life, to joy and hope. In this grotto I had found the culmination of all happiness. It was like a fairy realm; and here was one whose very look was enough to inspire the most despairing soul with hope and peace and happiness. The only thing that was now left to trouble me was this mournful face of Almah. Why did she look at me with such sad interest and such melancholy meaning? Did she know of any evil fate in store for me? Yet how could there be any evil fate to be feared from people who had received me with such unparalleled generosity? No, it could not be; so I resolved to try to bring back again the smile that had faded out of her face.

I pointed to her, and said, "Almah."

She said, "Atam-or."

And the smile did not come back, but the sadness remained in her face.

My eager desire now was to learn her language, and I resolved at once to acquire as many words and phrases as possible. I began by asking the names of things, such as "seat," "table," "mat," "coat," "hat," "shoe," "lamp," "floor," "wall," and all the common objects around. She gave all the names, and soon became so deeply interested that her sadness departed, and the smile came back once more. For my own part, I was always rather quick at learning languages. I had a correct ear and a retentive memory; in my wanderings round the world I had picked up a smattering of many languages, such as French, Italian, Spanish, Arabic, German, Hindoostanee, and a few others. The words which I learned from Almah had a remote resemblance to Arabic; and, in fact,

my knowledge of Arabic was actually of some assistance, though how it was that these people should have a language with that resemblance was certainly a mystery, and I did not try to solve it. The beautiful Almah soon grew immensely interested in my efforts to learn, and also in the English words which I gave when I pointed to any object.

Thus I pointed to myself, and said "Man," then pointing to her, I said, "Woman." She laughed, and pointing to me said "Iz," and pointing to herself said, "Izza." Then I pointed to the row of lights, and said "Light;" she did the same, and said, "Or." Then her face grew mournful, and she pointed to me, saying "Atam-or." It struck me then that there was some chance resemblance between "or," the word meaning "light," and one of the syllables of my name as she pronounced it, and that this might cause her sadness; but as I could make out nothing of this, I dismissed the thought, and went on with my questions. This took up the time, until at length someone appeared who looked like a servant. He said something, whereupon Almah arose and beckoned to me to follow. I did so, and we went to a neighboring apartment, where there was spread a bounteous repast. Here we sat and ate, and Almah told me the names of all the dishes. After dinner we returned to the room.

It was a singular and a delightful position. I was left alone with the beautiful Almah, who herself showed the utmost graciousness and the kindest interest in me. I could not understand it, nor did I try to; it was enough that I had such a happy lot. For hours we thus were together, and I learned many words. To insure remembrance, I wrote them down in my memorandum-book with a pencil and both of these were regarded by Almah with greatest curiosity. She felt the paper, inspected it, touched it with her tongue, and seemed to admire it greatly; but the pencil excited still greater admiration. I signed to her to write in the book. She did so, but the characters were quite unlike anything that I had ever seen. They were not joined like our writing and like Arabic letters, but were separate like our printed type, and were formed in an irregular manner. She then showed me a book made of a strange substance. It was filled with characters like those which she had just written. The leaves were not at all like paper, but seemed like some vegetable product, such as the leaves of a plant or the bark of a tree. They were very thin, very smooth, all cut into regular size, and fastened together by means of rings. This manuscript is written upon the same material. I afterward found that it was universally used here, and was made of a reed that grows in marshes.

Here in these vast caverns there was no way by which I could tell the progress of time, but Almah had her own way of finding out when the hours of wakeful life were over. She arose and said, "Salonla." This I afterward found out to be common salutation of the country. I said it after her. She then left me. Shortly afterward a servant appeared, who took me to a room, which I understood to be mine. Here I found everything that I could wish, either for comfort or luxury; and as I felt fatigue, I flung myself upon the soft bed of down, and soon was sound asleep.

I slept for a long time. When I awoke I heard sounds in the distance, and knew that people were moving. Here in these caverns there was no difference between day and night, but, by modes of which I was ignorant, a regular succession was observed of waking times and sleeping times.

CHAPTER IX

THE CAVERN OF THE DEAD

On going forth into the outer grotto I saw the table spread with a sumptuous repast, and the apartment in a blaze of light. Almah was not here; and though some servants made signs for me to eat, yet I could not until I should see whether she was coming or not. I had to wait for a long time, however; and while I was waiting the chief entered, shading his eyes with his hand from the painful light. He bowed low with the most profound courtesy, saying, "Salonla," to which I responded in the same way. He seemed much pleased at this, and made a few remarks, which I did not understand; whereupon, anxious to lose no time in learning the language, I repeated to him all the words I knew, and asked after others. I pointed to him and asked his name. He said, "Kohen." This, however, I afterward found was not a name, but a title. The "Kohen" did not remain long, for the light was painful. After his departure I was alone for some time, and at length Almah made her appearance. I sprang to meet her, full of joy, and took her hand in both of mine and pressed it warmly. She smiled, and appeared quite free from the melancholy of the previous day.

We ate our breakfast together, after which we went out into the world of light, groping our way along through the dark passages amid the busy crowd. Almah could see better than I in the darkness; but she was far from seeing well, and did not move with that easy step and perfect certainty which all the others showed. Like me, she was a child of light, and the darkness was distressing to her. As we went on we were seen by all, but were apparently not considered prisoners. On the contrary, all looked at us with the deepest respect, and bowed low or moved aside, and occasionally made little offerings of fruit or flowers to one or the other of us. It seemed to me that we were treated with equal distinction; and if Almah was their queen, I, their guest, was regarded with equal honor. Whatever her rank might be, however, she was to all appearance the most absolute mistress of her own actions, and moved about among all these people with the independence and dignity of some person of exalted rank.

At length we emerged into the open air. Here the contrast to the cavern gloom inside gave to the outer world unusual brightness and splendor, so that even under the heavy overarching tree-ferns, which had seemed so dark when I was here before, it now appeared light and cheerful. Almah turned to the right, and we walked along the terrace. But few people were visible. They shrank from the light, and kept themselves in the caverns. Then after a few steps we came to the base of a tall half-pyramid, the summit of which was above the tops of the trees. I pointed to this, as though I wished to go up. Almah hesitated for a moment, and seemed to shrink back, but at length, overcoming her reluctance, began the ascent. A flight of stony steps led up. On reaching the top, I found it about thirty feet long by fifteen wide, with a high stone table in the middle. At that moment, however, I scarce noticed the pyramid summit, and I only describe it now because I was fated before long to see it with different feelings. What I then noticed was the vast and wondrous display of all the glories of nature that burst at once upon my view. There was that same boundless sea,

rising up high toward the horizon, as I had seen it before, and suggesting infinite extent. There were the blue waters breaking into foam, the ships traversing the deep, the far-encircling shores green in vegetation, the high rampart of ice-bound mountains that shut in the land, making it a world by itself. There was the sun, low on the horizon, which it traversed on its long orbit, lighting up all these scenes till the six-months day should end and the six-months night begin.

For a long time I stood feasting my eyes upon all this splendor, and at length turned to see whether Almah shared my feelings. One look was enough. She stood absorbed in the scene, as though she were drinking in deep draughts of all this matchless beauty. I felt amazed at this; I saw how different she seemed from the others, and could not account for it. But as yet I knew too little of the language to question her, and could only hope for a future explanation when I had learned more.

We descended at length and walked about the terrace and up and down the side streets. All were the same as I had noticed before--terraced streets, with caverns on one side and massive stone structures on the other. I saw deep channels, which were used as drains to carry down mountain torrents. I did not see all at this first walk, but I inspected the whole city in many subsequent walks until its outlines were all familiar. I found it about a mile long and about half a mile wide, constructed in a series of terraces, which rose one above another in a hollow of the mountains round a harbor of the sea. On my walks I met with but few people on the streets, and they all seemed troubled with the light. I saw also occasionally some more of those great birds, the name of which I learned from Almah; it was "opkuk."

For some time my life went on most delightfully. I found myself surrounded with every comfort and luxury. Almah was my constant associate, and all around regarded us with the profoundest respect. The people were the mildest, most gentle, and most generous that I had ever seen. The Kohen seemed to pass most of his time in making new contrivances for my happiness. This strange people, in their dealings with me and with one another, seemed animated by a universal desire to do kindly acts; and the only possible objection against them was their singular love of darkness.

My freedom was absolute. No one watched me. Almah and I could go where we chose. So far as I could perceive, we were quite at liberty, if we wished, to take a boat and escape over the sea. It seemed also quite likely that if we had ordered out a galley and a gang of oarsmen, we should have been supplied with all that we might want in the most cheerful manner. Such a thought, however, was absurd. Flight! Why should I think of flying?

I had long ago lost all idea of time; and here, where it was for the present perpetual day, I was more at a loss than ever. I supposed that it was somewhere in the month of March, but whether at the beginning or the end I could not tell. The people had a regular system of wake-time and sleep-time, by which they ordered their lives; but whether these respective times were longer or shorter than the days and nights at home I could not tell at that time, though I afterward learned all about it. On the whole, I was perfectly content--nay, more, perfectly happy; more so, indeed, than ever in my life, and quite willing to forget home and friends and everything in the society of Almah. While in her company there was always one purpose upon which

I was most intent, and that was to master the language. I made rapid progress, and while she was absent I sought out others, especially the Kohen, with whom to practice. The Kohen was always most eager to aid me in every conceivable way or to any conceivable thing; and he had such a gentle manner and showed such generous qualities that I soon learned to regard him with positive affection.

Almah was always absent for several hours after I rose in the morning, and when she made her appearance it was with the face and manner of one who had returned from some unpleasant task. It always took some time for her to regain that cheerfulness which she usually showed. I soon felt a deep curiosity to learn the nature of her employment and office here, and as my knowledge of the language increased I began to question her. My first attempts were vain. She looked at me with indescribable mournfulness and shook her head. This, however, only confirmed me in my suspicions that her duties, whatever they might be, were of a painful nature; so I urged her to tell me, and asked her as well as I could if I might not share them or help her in some way. To all this, however, she only returned sighs and mournful looks for an answer. It seemed to me, from her manner and from the general behavior of the people, that there was no express prohibition on my learning anything, doing anything, or going anywhere; and so, after this, I besought her to let me accompany her some time. But this too she refused. My requests were often made, and as I learned more and more of the language I was able to make them with more earnestness and effect, until at length I succeeded in overcoming her objections.

"It is for your own sake," said she, "that I have refused, Atam-or. I do not wish to lessen your happiness. But you must know all soon; and so, if you wish to come with me and see what I have to do, why, you may come the next jom."

This meant the next day, jom being the division of time corresponding with our day. At this promise I was so full of gratitude that I forgot all about the dark suggestiveness of her words. The next jom I arose sooner than usual and went forth. I found Almah waiting for me. She looked troubled, and greeted me with a mournful smile.

"You will find pain in this," said she; "but you wish it, and if you still wish it, why, I will take you with me."

At this I only persisted the more, and so we set forth. We went through the cavern passages. Few people were there; all seemed asleep. Then we went out-of-doors and came into the full blaze of that day which here knew no night, but prolonged itself into months. For a while Almah stood looking forth between the trees to where the bright sunlight sparkled on the sea, and then with a sigh she turned to the left. I followed. On coming to the next portal she went in. I followed, and found myself in a rough cavern, dark and forbidding. Traversing this we came to an inner doorway, closed with a heavy mat. This she raised, and passed through, while I went in after her.

I found myself in a vast cavern, full of dim, sparkling lights, which served not to illuminate it, but merely to indicate its enormous extent. Far above rose the vaulted roof, to a height of apparently a hundred feet. Under this there was a lofty half-pyramid with stone steps. All around, as far as I could see in the obscure light, there were niches in the walls, each one containing a figure with a light burning at its feet. I took them for statues. Almah pointed in silence

to one of these which was nearest, and I went up close so as to see it.

The first glance that I took made me recoil with horror. It was no statue that I saw in that niche, but a shrivelled human form--a hideous sight. It was dark and dried; it was fixed in a sitting posture, with its hands resting on its knees, and its hollow eyes looking forward. On its head was the mockery of a wreath of flowers, while from its heart there projected the handle and half of the blade of a knife which had been thrust there. What was the meaning of this knife? It seemed to tell of a violent death. Yet the flowers must surely be a mark of honor. A violent death with honor, and the embalmed remains--these things suggested nothing else than the horrid thought of a human sacrifice. I looked away with eager and terrible curiosity. I saw all the niches, hundreds upon hundreds, all filled with these fearful occupants. I turned again with a sinking heart to Almah. Her face was full of anguish.

"This is my duty," said she. "Every jom I must come here and crown these victims with fresh flowers."

A feeling of sickening horror overwhelmed me. Almah had spoken these words and stood looking at me with a face of woe. This, then, was that daily task from which she was wont to return in such sadness--an abhorrent task to her, and one to which familiarity had never reconciled her. What was she doing here? What dark fate was it that thus bound this child of light to these children of darkness? or why was she thus compelled to perform a service from which all her nature revolted? I read in her face at this moment a horror equal to my own; and at the sight of her distress my own was lessened, and there arose within me a profound sympathy and a strong desire to do something to alleviate her misery.

"This is no place for you," continued Almah. "Go, and I will soon join you."

"No," said I, using her language after my own broken fashion--"no, I will not go--I will stay, I will help, if you will permit."

She looked at me earnestly, and seemed to see that my resolution was firmly fixed, and that I was not to be dissuaded from it.

"Very well," said she; "if you do stay and help me, it will be a great relief."

With these simple words she proceeded to carry out her work. At the foot of the pyramid there was a heap of wreaths made out of fresh flowers, and these were to be placed by her on the heads of the embalmed corpses.

"This work," said she, "is considered here the highest and most honorable that can be performed. It is given to me out of kindness, and they cannot understand that I can have any other feelings in the performance than those of joy and exultation--here among the dead and in the dark."

I said nothing, but followed and watched her, carrying the wreaths and supplying her. She went to each niche in succession, and after taking the wreath off each corpse she placed a fresh one on, saying a brief

formula at each act. By keeping her supplied with wreaths I was able to lighten her task, so much so that, whereas it usually occupied her more than two hours, on the present occasion it was finished in less than half an hour. She informed me that those which she crowned were the corpses of men who had been sacrificed during the present season--by season meaning the six months of light; and that though many more were here, yet they wore crowns of gold. At the end of ten years they were removed to public sepulchres. The number of those which had to be crowned by her was about a hundred. Her work was only to crown them, the labor of collecting the flowers and weaving the wreaths and attending to the lamps being performed by others.

I left this place with Almah, sad and depressed. She had not told me why these victims had been sacrificed, nor did I feel inclined to ask. A dark suspicion had come to me that these people, underneath all their amiable ways, concealed thoughts, habits, and motives of a frightful kind; and that beyond all my present brightness and happiness there might be a fate awaiting me too horrible for thought. Yet I did not wish to borrow trouble. What I had seen and heard was quite enough for one occasion. I was anxious, rather, to forget it all. Nor did Almah's words or manner in any way reassure me. She was silent and sad and preoccupied. It was as though she knew the worst, and knowing it, dared not speak; as though there was something more horrible which she dared not reveal. For my part, I feared it so that I dared not ask. It was enough for me just then to know that my mild and self-denying and generous entertainers were addicted to the abhorrent custom of human sacrifices.

CHAPTER X

THE SACRED HUNT

On that very morn the Kohen informed me that they were about to set forth on the "sacred hunt," an event which always occurred toward the end of the season, and he kindly invited me to go. I, eager to find any relief from the horrible thoughts that had taken possession of me, and full of longing for active exertion, at once accepted the invitation. I was delighted to hear Almah say that she too was going; and I learned at the same time that in this strange land the women were as fond of hunting as the men, and that on such occasions their presence was expected.

The sacred hunt was certainly a strange one. I saw that it was to take place on the water; for a great crowd, numbering over a hundred, went down to the harbor and embarked on board a galley, on which there were a hundred others, who served as rowers. The hunters were all armed with long, light javelins and short swords. Some of these were offered to me, for as yet no one supposed that my rifle and pistol were instruments of destruction, or anything else than ornaments. My refusal to accept their weapons created some surprise, but with their usual civility they did not press their offers further. It was evident that this hunting expedition was only made in obedience to some hallowed custom; for the light of the sun pained their eyes, and all their movements were made with uncertainty and hesitation. With these a hunt by sunlight is the same as a hunt by night would be with us. There was the same confusion and awkwardness.

The Kohen was in command. At his word the galley started, and the rowers pulled out to sea with long, regular strokes. I was anxious to know what the expedition was aimed at, and what were the animals that we expected to get; but I could not make out Almah's explanations. Her words suggested something of vague terror, vast proportions, and indescribable ferocity; but my ignorance of the language prevented me from learning anything more.

We went along the coast for a few miles, and then came to the mouth of a great river, which seemed to flow from among the mountains. The current was exceedingly swift, and as I looked back it seemed to me that it must be the very stream which had borne me here into this remote world. I afterward found out that this was so--that this stream emerges from among the mountains, flowing from an unknown source. It was over this that I had been borne in my sleep, after I had emerged from the subterranean darkness, and it was by this current that I had been carried into the open sea. As we crossed the estuary of this river I saw that the shores on either side were low, and covered with the rankest vegetation; giant trees of fern, vast reeds and grasses, all arose here in a dense growth impassable to man. Upon the shallow shores the surf was breaking; and here in the tide I saw objects which I at first supposed to be rocks, but afterward found out to be living things. They looked like alligators, but were far larger than the largest alligators known to us, besides being of far more terrific aspect. Toward these the galley was directed, and I now saw with surprise that these were the objects of the sacred hunt.

Suddenly, as the galley was moving along at half-speed, there arose out of the water a thing that looked like the folds of a giant hairy serpent, which, however, proved to be the long neck of an incredible monster, whose immense body soon afterward appeared above the water. With huge fins he propelled himself toward us; and his head, twenty feet in the air, was poised as though about to attack. The head was like that of an alligator, the open jaws showed a fearful array of sharp teeth, the eyes were fiercely glowing, the long neck was covered with a coarse, shaggy mane, while the top of the body, which was out of the water, was incased in an impenetrable cuirass of bone. Such a monster as this seemed unassailable, especially by men who had no missile weapons, and whose eyes were so dim and weak. I therefore expected that the galley would turn and fly from the attack, for the monster itself seemed as large as our vessel; but there was not the slightest thought of flight. On the contrary, every man was on the alert; some sprang to the bow and stood there, awaiting the first shock; others, amidship, stood waiting for the orders of the Kohen. Meanwhile the monster approached, and at length, with a sweep of his long neck, came down upon the dense crowd at the bows. A dozen frail lances were broken against his horny head, a half-dozen wretches were seized and terribly torn by those remorseless jaws. Still none fled. All rushed forward, and with lances, axes, knives, and ropes they sought to destroy the enemy. Numbers of them strove to seize his long neck. In the ardor of the fight the rowers dropped their oars and hurried to the scene, to take part in the struggle. The slaughter was sickening, but not a man quailed. Never had I dreamed of such blind and desperate courage as was now displayed before my horror-stricken eyes. Each sought to outdo the other. They had managed to throw ropes around the monster's neck, by which he was held close to the galley.

His fierce movements seemed likely to drag us all down under the water; and his long neck, free from restraint, writhed and twisted among the struggling crowd of fighting men, in the midst of whom was the Kohen, as desperate and as fearless as any.

All this had taken place in a very short space of time, and I had scarce been able to comprehend the full meaning of it all. As for Almah, she stood pale and trembling, with a face of horror. At last it seemed to me that every man of them would be destroyed, and that they were all throwing their lives away to no purpose whatever. Above all, my heart was wrung for the Kohen, who was there in the midst of his people, lifting his frail and puny arm against the monster. I could endure inaction no longer. I had brought my arms with me, as usual; and now, as the monster raised his head, I took aim at his eye and fired. The report rang out in thunder. Almah gave a shriek, and amid the smoke I saw the long, snake-like neck of the monster sweeping about madly among the men. In the water his vast tail was lashing the surface of the sea, and churning it into foam. Here I once more took aim immediately under the fore-fin, where there was no scaly covering. Once more I fired. This time it was with fatal effect; and after one or two convulsive movements the monster, with a low, deep bellow, let his head fall and gasped out his life.

I hurried forward. There lay the frightful head, with its long neck and shaggy mane, while all around was a hideous spectacle. The destruction of life had been awful. Nineteen were dead, and twenty-eight were wounded, writhing in every gradation of agony, some horribly mangled. The rest stood staring at me in astonishment, not understanding those peals of thunder that had laid the monster low. There was no terror or awe, however--nothing more than surprise; and the Kohen, whose clothes were torn into shreds and covered with blood, looked at me in bewilderment. I said to him, out of my small stock of words, that the wounded ought at once to be cared for. At this he turned away and made some remarks to his men.

I now stood ready to lend my own services, if needful. I expected to take a part in the tender attentions which were the due of these gallant souls, who had exhibited such matchless valor; these men who thought nothing of life, but flung it away at the command of their chief without dreaming of flight or of hesitation. Thus I stood looking on in an expectant attitude, when there came a moment in which I was simply petrified with horror; for the Kohen drew his knife, stooped over the wounded man nearest him, and then stabbed him to the heart with a mortal wound. The others all proceeded to do the same, and they did it in the coolest and most business-like manner, without any passion, without any feeling of any kind, and, indeed, with a certain air of gratification, as though they were performing some peculiarly high and sacred duty. The mildness and benevolence of their faces seemed actually heightened, and the perpetration of this unutterable atrocity seemed to affect these people in the same way in which the performance of acts of humanity might affect us.

For my own part, I stood for a few moments actually motionless from perplexity and horror; then, with a shriek, I rushed forward as if to prevent it; but I was too late. The unutterable deed was done, and the unfortunate wounded, without an exception, lay dead beside their slain companions. As for myself, I was only regarded with fresh wonder, and they all stood blinking at me with their half-closed eyes. Suddenly the Kohen fell prostrate on his knees before me, and

bowing his head handed me his bloody knife.

"Atam-or," said he, "give me also the blessing of darkness and death!"

At these strange words, following such actions, I could say nothing. I was more bewildered than ever, and horror and bewilderment made me dumb. I turned away and went aft to Almah, who had seen it all. She looked at me with an anxious gaze, as if to learn what the effect of all this had been on me. I could not speak a word, but with a vague sense of the necessity of self-preservation, I loaded my rifle, and tried in vain to make out what might be the meaning of this union of gentleness and kindness with atrocious cruelty. Meanwhile, the men all went to work upon various tasks. Some secured lines about the monster so as to tow it astern; others busied themselves with the corpses, collecting them and arranging them in rows. At length we returned, towing the monster astern.

I could not speak until I was back again in the lighted rooms and alone with Almah; then I told her, as well as I could, the horror that I felt.

"It was honor to those brave men," said she.

"Honor!" said I. "What! to kill them?"

"Yes," said she; "it is so with these people; with them death is the highest blessing. They all love death and seek after it. To die for another is immortal glory. To kill the wounded was to show that they had died for others. The wounded wished it themselves. You saw how they all sought after death. These people were too generous and kind-hearted to refuse to kill them after they had received wounds."

At this my perplexity grew deeper than ever, for such an explanation as this only served to make the mystery greater.

"Here," said she, "no one understands what it is to fear death. They all love it and long for it; but everyone wishes above all to die for others. This is their highest blessing. To die a natural death in bed is avoided if possible."

All this was incomprehensible.

"Tell me, Almah," I said--"you hate darkness as I do--do you not fear death?"

"I fear it above all things," said Almah. "To me it is the horror of life; it is the chief of terrors."

"So it is with me," said I. "In my country we call death the King of Terrors."

"Here," said Almah, "they call death the Lord of Joy."

Not long after, the Kohen came in, looking as quiet, as gentle, and as amiable as ever. He showed some curiosity about my rifle, which he called a sepet-ram, or "rod of thunder." Almah also showed curiosity. I did not care to explain the process of loading it to the Kohen, though Almah had seen me load it in the galley, and I left him to suppose that it was used in some mysterious way.

I cautioned him not to handle it carelessly, but found that this caution only made him the more eager to handle it, since the prospect of an accident found an irresistible attraction. I would not let it go out of my own hands, however; and the Kohen, whose self-denial was always most wonderful to me, at once checked his curiosity.

CHAPTER XI

THE SWAMP MONSTER

A few joms after, I was informed by the Kohen that there was to be another sacred hunt. At first I felt inclined to refuse, but on learning that Almah was going, I resolved to go also; for Almah, though generally mistress of her actions, had nevertheless certain duties to perform, and among these was the necessity of accompanying hunting-parties. I did not yet understand her position here, nor had I heard from her yet how it was that she was so different from the rest of them. That was all to be learned at a future time. For the present I had to be satisfied with knowing that she belonged to a different nation, who spoke a different language, and that all her thoughts and feelings were totally different from those of the people among whom she was living. She loved the light, she feared death, and she had never been able in the slightest degree to reconcile herself to the habits of these people. This I could readily understand, for to me it seemed as though they lived in opposition to nature itself.

We went out into the daylight, and then I saw a sight which filled me with amazement. I saw a flock of birds larger than even the opkuks. They were called "opmahera." They seemed as tall as giraffes, and their long legs indicated great powers of running. Their wings were very short, and not adapted for flight. They were very tractable, and were harnessed for riding in a peculiar way; lines like reins were fastened to the wings, and the driver, who sat close by the neck, guided the bird in this way. Each bird carried two men, but for Almah and me there was a bird apiece. An iron prod was also taken by each driver as a spur. I did not find out until afterward how to drive. At that time the prospect of so novel a ride was such an exciting one that I forgot everything else. The birds seemed quiet and docile. I took it for granted that mine was well trained, and would go with the others of his own accord. We all mounted by means of a stone platform which stood by the pyramid, and soon were on our way.

The speed was amazing; the fastest race-horse at home is slow compared with this. It was as swift as an ordinary railway train, if not more so. For some minutes the novelty of my situation took away all other thoughts, and I held the reins in my hands without knowing how to use them. But this mattered not, for the well-trained bird kept on after the others, while Almah on her bird was close behind me. The pace, as I said, was tremendous, yet no easier motion can be imagined. The bird bounded along with immense leaps, with wings outstretched, but its feet touched the ground so lightly that the motion seemed almost equal to flying. We did not confine ourselves to the roads, for the birds were capable of going over any kind of country in a straight line. On this occasion we passed over wide fields and rocky mountain ridges and deep swamps and sand wastes at the same speed, until at length we reached a vast forest of dense tree-ferns, where the whole band

stopped for a short time, after which we took up a new direction, moving on more slowly. The forest grew up out of a swamp, which extended as far as the eye could reach from the sea to the mountains. Along the edge of this forest we went for some time, until at length there came a rushing, crackling sound, as of something moving there among the trees, crushing down everything in its progress. We halted, and did not have to wait long; for soon, not far away, there emerged from the thick forest a figure of incredible size and most hideous aspect.

It looked like one of those fabled dragons such as may be seen in pictures, but without wings. It was nearly a hundred feet in length, with a stout body and a long tail, covered all over with impenetrable scales. Its hind-legs were rather longer than its fore-legs, and it moved its huge body with ease and rapidity. Its feet were armed with formidable claws. But its head was most terrific. It was a vast mass of bone, with enormous eyes that glared like fire; its jaws opened to the width of six or eight feet, and were furnished with rows of sharp teeth, while at the extremity of its nose there was a tusk several feet long, like the horn of a rhinoceros, curving backward. All this I took in at the first glance, and the next instant the whole band of hunters, with their usual recklessness, flung themselves upon the monster.

For a short time all was the wildest confusion--an intermingling of birds and men, with the writhing and roaring beast. With his huge claws and his curved horn and his wide jaws he dealt death and destruction all around; yet still the assailants kept at their work. Many leaped down to the ground and rushed close up to the monster, thrusting their lances into the softer and more unprotected parts of his body; while others, guiding their birds with marvellous dexterity, assailed him on all sides. The birds, too, were kept well to their work; nor did they exhibit any fear. It was not until they were wounded that they sought to fly. Still, the contest seemed too unequal. The sacrifice of life was horrible. I saw men and birds literally torn to pieces before my eyes. Nevertheless, the utter fearlessness of the assailants confounded me. In spite of the slaughter, fresh crowds rushed on. They clambered over his back, and strove to drive their lances under his bony cuirass. In the midst of them I saw the Kohen. By some means he had reached the animal's back, and was crawling along, holding by the coarse shaggy mane. At length he stopped, and with a sudden effort thrust his lance into the monster's eye. The vast beast gave a low and terrible howl; his immense tail went flying all about; in his pain he rolled over and over, crushing underneath him in his awful struggles all who were nearest. I could no longer be inactive. I raised my rifle, and as the beast in his writhings exposed his belly I took aim at the soft flesh just inside his left fore-leg, and fired both barrels.

At that instant my bird gave a wild, shrill scream and a vast bound into the air, and then away it went like the wind--away, I know not where. That first bound had nearly jerked me off; but I managed to avoid this and now instinctively clung with all my might to the bird's neck, still holding my rifle. The speed of the bird was twice as great as it had been before--as the speed of a runaway horse surpasses that of the same horse when trotting at his ordinary rate and under control. I could scarcely make out where I was going. Rocks, hills, swamps, fields, trees, sand, and sea all seemed to flash past in one confused assemblage, and the only thought in my mind was that I was

being carried to some remote wilderness, to be flung there bruised and

maimed among the rocks, to perish helplessly. Every moment I expected to be thrown, for the progress of the bird was not only inconceivably swift, but it also gave immense leaps into the air; and it was only its easy mode of lighting on the ground after each leap that saved me from being hurled off. As it was, however, I clung instinctively to the bird's neck, until at last it came to a stop so suddenly that my hands slipped, and I fell to the ground.

I was senseless for I know not how long. When at last I revived I found myself propped up against a bank, and Almah bathing my head with cold water. Fortunately, I had received no hurt. In falling I had struck on my head, but it was against the soft turf, and though I was stunned, yet on regaining my senses no further inconvenience was experienced. The presence of Almah was soon explained. The report of the rifle had startled her bird also, which had bounded away in terror like mine; but Almah understood how to guide him, and managed to keep him after me, so as to be of assistance in case of need. She had been close behind all the time, and had stopped when I fell, and come to my assistance.

The place was a slope looking out upon an arm of the sea, and apparently remote from human abode. The scenery was exquisitely beautiful. A little distance off we saw the edge of the forest; the open country was dotted with clumps of trees; on the other side of the

arm of the sea was an easy declivity covered with trees of luxuriant foliage and vast dimensions; farther away on one side rose the icy summits of impassable mountains; on the other side there extended the blue expanse of the boundless sea. The spot where I lay was over-shadowed by the dense foliage of a tree which was unlike anything that I had ever seen, and seemed like some exaggerated grass; at our feet a brook ran murmuring to the shore; in the air and all around were innumerable birds.

The situation in which I found myself seemed inexpressibly sweet, and all the more so from the gentle face of Almah. Would it not be well, I thought, to remain here? Why should Almah go back to her repulsive duties? Why should we return to those children of blood, who loved death and darkness? Here we might pass our days together unmolested. The genial climate would afford us warmth; we needed no shelter except the trees, and as for food, there were the birds of the air in innumerable flocks.

I proposed this to her; she smiled sadly. "You forget," said she, "this season of light will not last much longer. In a few more joms the dark season will begin, and then we should perish in a place like this."

"Are there no caverns here?"

"Oh no. This country has no inhabitants. It is full of fierce wild beasts. We should be destroyed before one jom."

"But must we go back?" said I. "You have a country. Where is it? See, here are these birds. They are swift. They can carry us anywhere. Come, let us fly, and you can return to your own country."

Almah shook her head. "These birds," said she, "cannot go over the sea, or through these endless forests. My country can only be reached by sea."

"Can we not hurry back, seize a boat, and go? I know how to sail over the water without oars."

"We certainly might leave the country; but there is another difficulty. The dark season is coming, and we should never be able to find our way. Besides, the sea is full of monsters, and you and I would perish."

"At any rate, let us try. I have my sepet-ram."

"We could never find our way."

"Only tell me," said I, "where it lies, and I will go by the stars."

"The trouble is," said she, "that even if we did succeed in reaching my land, I should be sent back again; for I was sent here as a sacred hostage, and I have been here four seasons."

But in the midst of this conversation a sound arrested our attention--heavy, puffing, snorting sound, as of some living thing. Hastily I started up, rifle in hand, and looked; and as I looked I felt my nerves thrill with horror. There, close by the shore, I saw a vast form--a living thing--full sixty feet in length. It had a body like that of an elephant, the head of a crocodile, and enormous glaring eyes. Its immense body was covered with impenetrable armor, and was supported on legs long enough to allow it to run with great speed. It differed in many respects from the monster of the swamp--the legs being longer, the tail shorter and thinner, and its head and jaws larger and longer. I shrank back, thinking of seizing Almah and hiding. But I saw that she had already taken the alarm, and with more presence of mind than I had she had hurried to the birds, who were standing near, and had made them lie down. As I turned, she beckoned to me without a word. I hurried to her. She told me to mount. I did so at once; she did the same. Scarce had we mounted than the monster perceived us, and with a terrible bellow came rushing toward us. Almah drove her goad deep into her bird, which at once rose and went off like the wind, and mine started to follow. The vast monster came on. His roar sounded close behind, and I heard the clash of his tremendous jaws; but the swift bird with a bound snatched me from his grasp, and bore me far away out of his reach. Away I went like the wind. Almah was ahead, looking back from time to time, and waving her hand joyously. So we went on, returning on our course at a speed almost as great as that with which we had come. By this time the novelty had in part worn away, and the easy motion gave me confidence. I noticed that we were travelling a wild, uninhabited, and rocky district by the sea-side. Before me the country spread far away, interspersed with groves, terminating in forests, and bounded in the far distance by mountains. The country here was so rough that it seemed as if nothing could pass over it except such creatures as these--the opmaheras.

At length we arrived at the spot which we had left--the scene of the hunt. We could see it from afar, for the opmaheras stood quietly around, and the men were busy elsewhere. As we drew nearer I saw the vast body of the monster. They had succeeded in killing it, yet--oh heavens, at what a cost! One half of all the party lay dead. The rest

were unharmed, and among these was the Kohen. He greeted me with a melancholy smile. That melancholy smile, however, was not caused by the sad fate of his brave companions, but, as I afterward learned, simply and solely because he himself had not gained his death. When I saw that there were no wounded, a dark suspicion came over me that the wounded had again been put to death. I did not care to ask. The truth was too terrible to hear, and I felt glad that accident had drawn me away. It was all a dark and dreadful mystery. These people were the most gentle, the most self-sacrificing, and the most generous in the world; yet their strange and unnatural love of death made them capable of endless atrocities. Life and light seemed to them as actual evils, and death and darkness the only things worthy of regard.

Almah told me that they were going to bring the monster home, and had sent for opkuks to drag it along. The dead were also to be fetched back. There was no further necessity for us to remain, and so we returned at once.

On the way, Almah said, "Do not use the sepet-ram again. You can do no good with it. You must not make it common. Keep it. The time may come when you will need it: you are not fond of death."

I shuddered.

"Never forget," she said, "that here death is considered the chief blessing. It is useless for you to interfere in their ways. You cannot change them."

Some more joms passed. The bodies were embalmed, and Almah had more victims to crown with garlands in the horrible cheder nebilin.

CHAPTER XII

THE BALEFUL SACRIFICE

I resolved to go on no more sacred hunts. I was sickened at the horrible cruelty, the needless slaughter, the mad self-sacrifice which distinguished them. I was overwhelmed with horror at the merciless destruction of brave comrades, whose wounds, so gallantly received, should have been enough to inspire pity even in a heart of stone. The gentleness, the incessant kindness, the matchless generosity of these people seemed all a mockery. What availed it all when the same hand that heaped favors upon me, the guest, could deal death without compunction upon friends and relatives? It seemed quite possible for the Kohen to kill his own child, or cut the throat of his wife, if the humor seized him. And how long could I hope to be spared among a people who had this insane thirst for blood?

Some more joms had passed, and the light season had almost ended. The sun had been sinking lower and lower. The time had at last come when only a portion of his disk would be visible for a little while above the hills, and then he would be seen no more for six months of our time. This was the dark season, and, as I had already learned, its advent was always hailed with joy and celebrated with solemn services, for the dark season freed them from their long confinement, permitted them to go abroad, to travel by sea and land, to carry on their great

works, to indulge in all their most important labors and favorite amusements. The Kohen asked me to be present at the great festival, and I gladly consented. There seemed to be nothing in this that could be repellent. As I was anxious to witness some of their purely religious ceremonies, I wished to go. When I told Almah, she looked sad, but said nothing. I wondered at this, and asked her if she was going. She informed me that she would have to go, whereupon I assured her that this was an additional reason why I should go.

I went with Almah. The Kohen attended us with his usual kind and gracious consideration. It seemed almost as though he was our servant. He took us to a place where we could be seated, although all the others were standing. Almah wished to refuse, but I prevailed upon her to sit down, and she did so.

The scene was upon the semicircular terrace in front of the cavern, and we were seated upon a stone platform beside the chief portal. A vast crowd was gathered in front. Before us arose the half-pyramid of which I have already spoken. The light was faint. It came from the disk of the sun, which was partly visible over the icy crest of the distant mountains. Far away the sea was visible, rising high over the tops of the trees, while overhead the brighter stars were plainly discernible.

The Kohen ascended the pyramid, and others followed. At the base there was a crowd of men, with emaciated forms and faces, and coarse, squalid attire, who looked like the most abject paupers, and seemed the lowest in the land. As the Kohen reached the summit there arose a strange sound--a mournful, plaintive chant, which seemed to be sung chiefly by the paupers at the base of the pyramid. The words of this chant I could not make out, but the melancholy strain affected me in spite of myself. There was no particular tune, and nothing like harmony; but the effect of so many voices uniting in this strain was very powerful and altogether indescribable. In the midst of this I saw the crowd parting asunder so as to make way for something; and through the passage thus formed I saw a number of youths in long robes, who advanced to the pyramid, singing as they went. Then they ascended the steps, two by two, still singing, and at length reached the summit, where they arranged themselves in order. There were thirty of them and they arranged themselves in three rows of ten each, and as they stood they never ceased to sing, while the paupers below joined in the strain.

And now the sun was almost hidden, and there was only the faintest line from the upper edge of his disk perceptible over the icy mountain-tops. The light was a softened twilight glow. It was to be the last sight of the sun for six months, and this was the spectacle upon which he threw his parting beam. So the sun passed away, and then there came the beginning of the long dark season. At first, however, there was rather twilight than darkness, and this twilight continued long. All this only served to heighten the effect of this striking scene; and as the light faded away, I looked with increasing curiosity upon the group at the top of the pyramid. Almah was silent. I half turned, and said something to her about the beauty of the view. She said nothing, but looked at me with such an expression that I was filled with amazement. I saw in her face something like a dreadful anticipation--something that spoke of coming evil. The feeling was communicated to me, and I turned my eyes back to the group on the pyramid with vague fears in my soul.

Those fears were but too well founded, for now the dread ceremony began. The Kohen drew his knife, and placed himself at the head of the stone table. One of the youths came forward, stepped upon it, and lay down on his back with his head toward the Kohen. The mournful chant still went on. Then the Kohen raised his knife and plunged it into the heart of the youth. I sat for a moment rooted to the spot; then a groan burst from me in spite of myself. Almah caught my hands in hers, which were as cold as ice.

"Be firm," she said, "or we are both lost. Be firm, Atam-or!"

"I must go," said I, and I tried to rise.

"Don't move," she said, "for your life! We are lost if you move. Keep still--restrain yourself--shut your eyes."

I tried to do so, but could not. There was a horrible fascination about the scene which forced me to look and see all. The Kohen took the victim, and drawing it from the altar, threw it over the precipice to the ground beneath. Then a loud shout burst forth from the great crowd. "Sibgu Sibgin! Ranenu! Hodu lecosck!" which means, "Sacrifice the victims! Rejoice! Give thanks to darkness!"

Then another of the youths went forward amid the singing, and laid himself down to meet the same fate; and again the corpse was flung from the top of the pyramid, and again the shout arose. All the others came forward in the same manner. Oh, horrible, horrible, thrice horrible spectacle! I do not remember how I endured it. I sat there with Almah, trying to restrain myself as she had entreated me, more for her sake than for my own, a prey to every feeling of horror, anguish, and despair. How it all ended I do not know, nor do I know how I got away from the place; for I only remember coming back to my senses in the lighted grotto, with Almah bending anxiously over me.

After this there remained a dark mystery and an ever-present horror. I found myself among a people who were at once the gentlest of the human race and the most blood-thirsty--the kindest and the most cruel. This mild, amiable, and self-sacrificing Kohen, how was it possible that he should transform himself to a fiend incarnate? And for me and for Almah, what possible hope could there be? What fate might they have in reserve for us? Of what avail was all this profound respect, this incessant desire to please, this attention to our slightest wish, this comfort and luxury and splendor, this freedom of speech and action? Was it anything better than a mockery? Might it not be the shallow kindness of the priest to the victim reserved for the sacrifice? Was it, after all, in any degree better than the kindness of the cannibal savages on those drear outer shores who received us with such hospitality, but only that they might destroy us at last? Might they not all belong to the same race, dwelling as they did in caverns, shunning the sunlight, and blending kindness with cruelty? It was an awful thought!

Yet I had one consolation. Almah was with me, and so long as she was spared to me I could endure this life. I tried for her sake to resist the feelings that were coming over me. I saw that she too was a prey to ever-deepening sadness. She felt as I did, and this despair of soul might wreck her young life if there were no alleviation. And so I sought to alleviate her distress and to banish her sadness. The songs

of these people had much impressed me; and one day, as I talked about this with Almah, she brought forth a musical instrument of peculiar shape, which was not unlike a guitar, though the shape was square and there were a dozen strings. Upon this she played, singing at the same time some songs of a plaintive character. An idea now occurred to me to have an instrument made according to my own plans, which should be nothing less than a violin. Almah was delighted at the proposal, and at once found a very clever workman, who under my direction succeeded in producing one which served my purpose well. I was a good violinist, and in this I was able to find solace for myself and for Almah for many a long hour.

The first time that I played was memorable. As the tones floated through the air they caught the ears of those outside, and soon great numbers came into the apartment, listening in amazement and in rapt attention. Even the painful light was disregarded in the pleasure of this most novel sensation, and I perceived that if the sense of sight was deficient among them, that of hearing was sufficiently acute. I played many times, and sometimes sang from among the songs of different nations; but those which these people liked best were the Irish and Scottish melodies--those matchless strains created by the genius of the Celtic race, and handed down from immemorial ages through long generations. In these there was nothing artificial, nothing transient. They were the utterance of the human heart, and in them there was that touch of nature which makes all men kin. These were the immortal passions which shall never cease to affect the soul of man, and which had power even here; the strains of love, of sadness, and of pathos were sweet and enticing to this gentle race; for in their mild manners and their outburst of cruelty they seemed to be not unlike the very race which had created this music, since the Celt is at once gentle and blood-thirsty.

I played "Tara," "Bonnie Doon," "The Last Rose of Summer," "The Land of the Leal," "Auld Lang Syne," "Lochaber." They stood entranced, listening with all their souls. They seemed to hunger and thirst after this music, and the strains of the inspired Celtic race seemed to come to them like the revelation of the glory of heaven. Then I played more lively airs. Some I played a second time, singing the words. They seemed eager to have the same one played often. At last a grisly thought came to me: it was that they would learn these sweet strains, and put their own words to them so as to use them at the awful sacrifices. After that I would play no more.

It is a land of tender love and remorseless cruelty. Music is all-powerful to awaken the one, but powerless to abate the other; and the eyes that weep over the pathetic strains of "Lochaber" can gaze without a tear upon the death-agonies of a slaughtered friend.

CHAPTER XIII

THE AWFUL "MISTA KOSEK"

The terrible sacrifice marked the end of the light season. The dark season had now begun, which would last for half the coming year. No more sunlight would now be visible, save at first for a few joms,

when at certain times the glare would be seen shooting up above the icy crests of the mountains. Now the people all moved out of the caverns into the stone houses on the opposite side of the terraces, and the busy throng transferred themselves and their occupations to the open air. This with them was the season of activity, when all their most important affairs were undertaken and carried out; the season, too, of enjoyment, when all the chief sports and festivals took place. Then the outer world all awoke to life; the streets were thronged, fleets of galleys came forth from their moorings, and the sounds of labor and of pleasure, of toil and revelry, arose into the darkened skies. Then the city was a city of the living, no longer silent, but full of bustle, and the caverns were frequented but little. This cavern life was only tolerable during the light season, when the sun-glare was over the land; but now, when the beneficent and grateful darkness pervaded all things, the outer world was infinitely more agreeable.

To me, however, the arrival of the dark season brought only additional gloom. I could not get rid of the thought that I was reserved for some horrible fate, in which Almah might also be involved. We were both aliens here, in a nation of kind-hearted and amiable miscreants--of generous, refined, and most self-denying fiends; of men who were highly civilized, yet utterly wrong-headed and irreclaimable in their blood-thirsty cruelty. The stain of blood-guiltiness was over all the land. What was I, that I could hope to be spared? The hope was madness, and I did not pretend to indulge it.

The only consolation was Almah. The manners of these people were such that we were still left as unconstrained as ever in our movements, and always, wherever we went, we encountered nothing but amiable smiles and courteous offices. Everyone was always eager to do anything for us--to give, to go, to act, to speak, as though we were the most honored of guests, the pride of the city. The Kohen was untiring in his efforts to please. He was in the habit of making presents every time he came to see me, and on each occasion the present was of a different kind; at one time it was a new robe of curiously wrought feathers, at another some beautiful gem, at another some rare fruit. He also made incessant efforts to render my situation pleasant, and was delighted at my rapid progress in acquiring the language.

On the jom following the sacrifice I accompanied Almah as she went to her daily task, and after it was over I asked when the new victims would be placed here. "How long does it take to embalm them?" I added.

Almah looked at me earnestly. "They will not bring them here; they will not embalm them," said she.

"Why not?" I asked; "what will they do with them?"

"Do not ask," said she. "It will pain you to know."

In spite of repeated solicitation she refused to give me any satisfaction. I felt deeply moved at her words and her looks. What was it, I wondered, that could give me pain? or what could there still be that could excite fear in me, who had learned and seen so much? I could not imagine. It was evidently some disposal of the bodies of the victims--that was plain. Turning this over in my mind, with vague conjectures as to Almah's meaning, I left her and walked along the terrace until I came to the next cavern. This had never been open

before, and I now entered through curiosity to see what it might be. I saw a vast cavern, quite as large as the cheder nebilin, full of people, who seemed to be engaged in decorating it. Hundreds were at work, and they had brought immense tree-ferns, which were placed on either side in long rows, with their branches meeting and interlacing at the top. It looked like the interior of some great Gothic cathedral at night, and the few twinkling lights that were scattered here and there made the shadowy outline just visible to me.

I asked one of the bystanders what this might be, and he told me that it was the Mista Kosek, which means the "Feast of Darkness," from which I gathered that they were about to celebrate the advent of the dark season with a feast. From what I knew of their character this seemed quite intelligible, and there was much beauty and taste in the arrangements. All were industrious and orderly, and each one seemed most eager to assist his neighbor. Indeed, there seemed to be a friendly rivalry in this which at times amounted to positive violence; for more than once when a man was seen carrying too large a burden, someone else would insist on taking it from him. At first these altercations seemed exactly like the quarrels of workmen at home, but a closer inspection showed that it was merely the persistent effort of one to help another.

I learned that the feast was to take place as soon as the hall was decorated, and that it would be attended by a great multitude. I felt a great interest in it. There seemed something of poetic beauty in this mode of welcoming the advent of a welcome season, and it served to mitigate the horrible remembrance of that other celebration, upon which I could not think without a shudder. I thought that it would be pleasant to join with them here, and resolved to ask Almah to come with me, so that she might explain the meaning of the ceremonies. Full of this thought, I went to her and told her my wish. She looked at me with a face full of amazement and misery. In great surprise I questioned her eagerly.

"Ask me nothing," said she. "I will answer nothing; but do not think of it. Do not go near it. Stay in your room till the fearful repast is over."

"Fearful? How is it fearful?" I asked.

"Everything here is fearful," said Almah, with a sigh. "Every season it grows worse, and I shall grow at length to hate life and love death as these people do. They can never understand us, and we can never understand them. Oh, if I could but once more stand in my own dear native land but for one moment--to see once more the scenes and the faces that I love so well! Oh, how different is this land from mine! Here all is dark, all is terrible. There the people love the light and rejoice in the glorious sun, and when the dark season comes they wait, and have no other desire than long day. There we live under the sky, in the eye of the sun. We build our houses, and when the dark season comes we fill them with lamps that make a blaze like the sun itself."

"We must try to escape," I said, in a low voice.

"Escape!" said she. "That is easy enough. We might go now; but where?"

"Back," said I, "to your own country. See, the sky is dotted with stars: I can find my way by them."

"Yes," said she, "if I could only tell you where to go; but I cannot. My country lies somewhere over the sea, but where, I know not. Over the sea there are many lands, and we might reach one even worse than this."

"Perhaps," said I, "the Kohen might allow us to go away to your country, and send us there. He is most generous and most amiable. He seems to spend most of his time in efforts to make us happy. There must be many seamen in this nation who know the way. It would be worth trying."

Almah shook her head. "You do not understand these people," said she. "Their ruling passion is the hatred of self, and therefore they are eager to confer benefits on others. The only hope of life that I have for you and for myself is in this, that if they kill us they will lose their most agreeable occupation. They value us most highly, because we take everything that is given us. You and I now possess as our own property all this city and all its buildings, and all the people have made themselves our slaves."

At this I was utterly bewildered.

"I don't understand," said I.

"I suppose not," said Almah; "but you will understand better after you have been here longer. At any rate, you can see for yourself that the ruling passion here is self-denial and the good of others. Everyone is intent upon this, from the Kohen up to the most squalid pauper."

"_Up_ to the most squalid pauper?" said I. "I do not understand you. You mean _down_ to the most squalid pauper."

"No," said Almah; "I mean what I say. In this country the paupers form the most honored and envied class."

"This is beyond my comprehension," said I. "But if this is really so, and if these people pretend to be our slaves, why may we not order out a galley and go?"

"Oh, well, with you in your land, if a master were to order his slaves to cut his throat and poison his children and burn his house, would the slaves obey?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, our slaves here would not--in fact could not--obey a command that would be shocking to their natures. They think that we are in the best of all lands, and my request to be sent home would be utterly monstrous."

"I suppose," said I, "they would kill us if we asked them to do so?"

"Yes," said Almah; "for they think death the greatest blessing."

"And if at the point of death we should beg for life, would they spare us?"

"Certainly not," said Almah. "Would you kill a man who asked for

death? No more would these people spare a man who asked for life."

All this was so utterly incomprehensible that I could pursue the subject no further. I saw, however, that Almah was wretched, dejected, and suffering greatly from home-sickness. Gladly would I have taken her and started off on a desperate flight by sea or land--gladly would I have dared every peril, although I well knew what tremendous perils there were; but she would not consent, and believed the attempt to be useless. I could only wait, therefore, and indulge the hope that at last a chance of escape might one day come, of which she would be willing to avail herself.

Almah utterly refused to go to the feast, and entreated me not to go; but this only served to increase my curiosity, and I determined to see it for myself, whatever it was. She had seen it, and why should not I? Whatever it might be, my nerves could surely stand the shock as well as hers. Besides, I was anxious to know the very worst; and if there was anything that could surpass in atrocity what I had already witnessed, it were better that I should not remain in ignorance of it.

So at length, leaving Almah, I returned to the hall of the feast. I found there a vast multitude, which seemed to comprise the whole city--men, women, children, all were there. Long tables were laid out. The people were all standing and waiting. A choir was singing plaintive strains that sounded like the chant of the sacrifice. Those nearest me regarded me with their usual amiable smiles, and wished to conduct me to some place of honor; but I did not care about taking part in this feast. I wished to be a mere spectator, nothing more. I walked past and came to the next cavern. This seemed to be quite as large as the other. There was a crowd of people here also, and at one end there blazed an enormous fire. It was a furnace that seemed to be used for cooking the food of this banquet, and there was a thick steam rising from an immense cauldron, while the air was filled with an odor like that of a kitchen.

All this I took in at a glance, and at the same instant I saw something else. There were several very long tables, which stood at the sides of the cavern and in the middle, and upon each of these I saw lying certain things covered over with cloths. The shape of these was more than suggestive--it told me all. It was a sight of horror--awful, tremendous, unspeakable! For a moment I stood motionless staring; then all the cavern seemed to swim around me. I reeled, I fell, and sank into nothingness.

When I revived I was in the lighted grotto, lying on a couch, with Almah bending over me. Her face was full of tenderest anxiety, yet there was also apparent a certain solemn gloom that well accorded with my own feelings. As I looked at her she drew a long breath, and buried her face in her hands.

After a time my recollection returned, and all came back to me. I rose to a sitting posture.

"Do not rise yet," said Almah, anxiously; "you are weak."

"No," said I; "I am as strong as ever; but I'm afraid that you are weaker."

Almah shuddered.

"If you had told me exactly what it was, I would not have gone."

"I could not tell you," said she. "It is too terrible to name. Even the thought is intolerable. I told you not to go. Why did you go?"

She spoke in accents of tender reproach, and there were tears in her eyes.

"I did not think of anything so hideous as that," said I. "I thought that there might be a sacrifice, but nothing worse."

I now learned that when I fainted I had been raised most tenderly, and the Kohen himself came with me as I was carried back, and he thought that Almah would be my most agreeable nurse. The Kohen was most kind and sympathetic, and all the people vied with one another in their efforts to assist me--so much so that there was the greatest confusion. It was only by Almah's express entreaty that they retired and left me with her.

Here was a new phase in the character of this mysterious people. Could I ever hope to understand them? Where other people are cruel to strangers, or at best indifferent, these are eager in their acts of kindness; they exhibit the most unbounded hospitality, the most lavish generosity, the most self-denying care and attention; where others would be offended at the intrusion of a stranger, and enraged at his unconquerable disgust, these people had no feeling save pity, sympathy, and a desire to alleviate his distress. And yet--oh, and yet!--oh, thought of horror!--what was this that I had seen? The abhorrent savages in the outer wilderness were surely of the same race as these. They too received us kindly, they too lavished upon us their hospitality, and yet there followed the horror of that frightful repast. Here there had been kindness and generosity and affectionate attention, to be succeeded by deeds without a name. Ah me! what an hour that was! And yet it was as nothing compared to what lay before me in the future.

But the subject was one of which I dared not speak--one from which I had to force my thoughts away. I took the violin and played "Lochaber" till Almah wept, and I had to put it away. Then I begged her to play or sing. She brought an instrument like a lute, and upon this she played some melancholy strains. At length the Kohen came in. His mild, benevolent face never exhibited more gentle and affectionate sympathy than now. He seated himself, and with eyes half closed, as usual, talked much; and yet, with a native delicacy which always distinguished this extraordinary man, he made no allusion to the awful Mista Kosek. For my own part, I could not speak. I was absent-minded, overwhelmed with gloom and despair, and at the same time full of aversion toward him and all his race. One question, however, I had to put.

"Who were the victims of the Mista Kosek?"

"They?" said he, with an agreeable smile. "Oh, they were the victims of the sacrifice."

I sank back in my seat, and said no more. The Kohen then took Almah's lute, played and sang in a very sweet voice, and at length, with his usual consideration, seeing that I looked weary, he retired.

CHAPTER XIV

I LEARN MY DOOM

Horror is a feeling that cannot last long; human nature is incapable of supporting it. Sadness, whether from bereavement, or disappointment, or misfortune of any kind, may linger on through life. In my case, however, the milder and more enduring feeling of sadness had no sufficient cause for existence. The sights which I had seen inspired horror, and horror only. But when the first rush of this feeling had passed there came a reaction. Calmness followed, and then all the circumstances of my life here conspired to perpetuate that calm. For here all on the surface was pleasant and beautiful; all the people were amiable and courteous and most generous. I had light and luxury and amusements. Around me there were thousands of faces, all greeting me with cordial affection, and thousands of hands all ready to perform my slightest wish. Above all, there was Almah. Everything combined to make her most dear to me. My life had been such that I never before had seen anyone whom I loved; and here Almah was the one congenial associate in a whole world of aliens: she was beautiful and gentle and sympathetic, and I loved her dearly, even before I understood what my feelings were. One day I learned all, and found that she was more precious to me than all the world.

It was one jom when she did not make her appearance as usual. On asking after her I learned that she was ill. At this intelligence there came over me a feeling of sickening anxiety and fear. Almah ill! What if it should prove serious? Could I endure life here without her sweet companionship? Of what value was life without her? And as I asked myself these questions I learned that Almah had become dearer to me than life itself, and that in her was all the sunshine of my existence. While she was absent, life was nothing; all its value, all its light, its flavor, its beauty, were gone. I felt utterly crushed. I forgot all else save her illness, and all that I had endured seemed as nothing when compared with this.

In the midst of my own anxiety I was surprised to find that the whole community was most profoundly agitated. Among all classes there seemed to be but one thought--her illness. I could overhear them talking I could see them wait outside to hear about her. It seemed to be the one subject of interest, beside which all others were forgotten. The Kohen was absorbed in her case; all the physicians of the city were more or less engaged in her behalf; and there came forward as volunteers every woman in the place who had any knowledge of sick-duties. I was somewhat perplexed, however, at their manner. They were certainly agitated and intensely interested, yet not exactly sad. Indeed, from what I heard it seemed as though this strange people regarded sickness as rather a blessing than otherwise. This, however, did not interfere in the slightest degree with the most intense interest in her, and the most assiduous attention. The Kohen in particular was devoted to her. He was absent-minded, silent, and full of care. On the whole, I felt more than ever puzzled, and less able than ever to understand these people. I loved them, yet loathed them; for the Kohen I had at once affection and horror. He looked like an anxious father, full of tenderest love for a sick child--full also of delicate sympathy with

me; and yet I knew all the time that he was quite capable of plunging the sacrificial knife in Almah's heart and of eating her afterward.

But my own thoughts were all of Almah. I learned how dear she was. With her the brightness of life had passed; without her existence would be intolerable. Her sweet voice, her tender and gracious manner, her soft touch, her tender, affectionate smile, her mournful yet trustful look--oh, heavens! would all these be mine no more? I could not endure the thought. At first I wandered about, seeking rest and finding none; and at length I sat in my own room, and passed the time in listening, in questioning the attendants, in wondering what I should do if she should be taken from me.

At length on one blessed jom, the Kohen came to me with a bright smile.

"Our darling Almah is better," said he. "Eat, I beseech you. She is very dear to all of us, and we have all felt for her and for you. But now all danger is past. The physicians say that she will soon be well." There were tears in his eyes as he spoke. It may have been caused by the bright light, but I attributed this to his loving heart, and I forgot that he was a cannibal. I took his hands in mine and pressed them in deep emotion. He looked at me with a sweet and gentle smile.

"I see it all," said he, in a low voice--"you love her, Atam-or."

I pressed his hands harder, but said nothing. Indeed, I could not trust myself to speak.

"I knew it," said he; "it is but natural. You are both of a different race from us; you are both much alike, and in full sympathy with one another. This draws you together. When I first saw you I thought that you would be a fit companion for her here--that you would lessen her gloom, and that she would be pleasant to you. I found out soon that I was right, and I felt glad, for you at once showed the fullest sympathy with one another. Never till you came was Almah happy with us; but since you have come she has been a different being, and there has been a joyousness in her manner that I never saw before. You have made her forget how to weep; and as for yourself, I hope she has made your life in this strange land seem less painful, Atam-or."

At all this I was so full of amazement that I could not say one word.

"Pardon me," continued he, "if I have said anything that may seem like an intrusion upon your secret and most sacred feelings. I could not have said it had it not been for the deep affection I feel for Almah and for you, and for the reason that I am just now more moved than usual, and have less control over my feelings."

Saying this, he pressed my hand and left me. It was not the custom here to shake hands, but with his usual amiability he had adopted my custom, and used it as naturally as though he had been to the manner born.

I was encouraged now. The mild Kohen came often to cheer me. He talked much about Almah--about her sweet and gracious disposition, the love that all felt for her, the deep and intense interest which her illness had aroused. In all this he seemed more like a man of my own race than

before, and in his eager desire for her recovery he failed to exhibit that love for death which was his nature. So it seemed: yet this desire for her recovery did not arise out of any lack of love for death; its true cause I was to learn afterward; and I was to know that if he desired Almah's recovery now, it was only that she might live long enough to encounter death in a more terrific form. But just then all this was unknown, and I judged him by myself.

At last I learned that she was much better, and would be out on the following jom. This intelligence filled me with a fever of eager anticipation, so great that I could think of nothing else. Sleep was impossible. I could only wait, and try as best I might to quell my impatience. At last the time came. I sat waiting. The curtain was drawn aside. I sprang up, and, hurrying toward her, I caught her in my arms and wept for joy. Ah me, how pale she looked! She bore still the marks of her illness. She seemed deeply embarrassed and agitated at the fervor of my greeting; while I, instead of apologizing or trying to excuse myself, only grew more agitated still.

"Oh, Almah," I cried. "I should have died if you had not come back to me! Oh, Almah, I love you better than life and I never knew how dearly I loved you till I thought that I had lost you! Oh, forgive me, but I must tell you--and don't weep, darling."

She was weeping as I spoke. She said nothing, but twined her arms around my neck and wept on my breast. After this we had much to say that we had never mentioned before. I cannot tell the sweet words that she said to me; but I now learned that she had loved me from the first--when I came to her in her loneliness, when she was homesick and heartsick; and I came, a kindred nature, of a race more like her own; and she saw in me the only one of all around her whom it was possible not to detest, and therefore she loved me.

We had many things to say to one another, and long exchanges of confidence to make. She now for the first time told me all the sorrow that she had endured in her captivity--sorrow which she had kept silent and shut up deep within her breast. At first her life here had been so terrible that it had brought her down nearly to death. After this she had sunk into dull despair; she had grown familiar with horrors and lived in a state of unnatural calm. From this my arrival had roused her. The display of feeling on my part had brought back all her old self, and roused anew all those feelings which in her had become dormant. The darkness, the bloodshed, the sacrifices, all these affected me as they had once affected her. I had the same fear of death which she had. When I had gone with her to the cheder nebilin, when I had used my sepet-ram to save life, she had perceived in me feelings and impulses to which all her own nature responded. Finally, when I asked about the Mista Kosek, she warned me not to go. When I did go she was with me in thought and suffered all that I felt, until the moment when I was brought back and laid senseless at her feet.

"Then," said Almah, "I felt the full meaning of all that lies before us."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked, anxiously. "You speak as though there were something yet--worse than what has already been; yet nothing can possibly be worse. We have seen the worst; let us now try to shake off these grisly thoughts, and be happy with one another. Your strength will soon be back, and while we have one another we can

be happy even in this gloom."

"Ah me," said Almah, "it would be better now to die. I could die happy now, since I know that you love me."

"Death!" said I; "do not talk of it--do not mention that word. It is more abhorrent than ever. No, Almah, let us live and love--let us hope--let us fly."

"Impossible!" said she, in a mournful voice. "We cannot fly. There is no hope. We must face the future, and make up our minds to bear our fate."

"Fate!" I repeated, looking at her in wonder and in deep concern. "What do you mean by our fate? Is there anything more which you know and which I have not heard?"

"You have heard nothing," said she, slowly; "and all that you have seen and heard is as nothing compared with what lies before us. For you and for me there is a fate--inconceivable, abhorrent, tremendous!--a fate of which I dare not speak or even think, and from which there is no escape whatever."

As Almah said this she looked at me with an expression in which terror and anguish were striving with love. Her cheeks, which shortly before had flushed rosy red in sweet confusion, were now pallid, her lips ashen; her eyes were full of a wild despair. I looked at her in wonder, and could not say a word.

"Oh, Atam-or," said she, "I am afraid of death!"

"Almah," said I, "why will you speak of death? What is this fate which you fear so much?"

"It is this," said she hurriedly and with a shudder, "you and I are singled out. I have been reserved for years until one should be found who might be joined with me. You came. I saw it all at once. I have known it--dreaded it--tried to fight against it. But it was of no use. Oh, Atam-or, our love means death; for the very fact that you love me and I love you seals our doom!"

"Our doom? What doom?"

"The sacrifice!" exclaimed Almah, with another shudder. In her voice and look there was a terrible meaning, which I could not fail to take. I understood it now, and my blood curdled in my veins. Almah clung to me despairingly.

"Do not leave me!" she cried--"do not leave me! I have no one but you. The sacrifice, the sacrifice! It is our doom the great sacrifice--at the end of the dark season. It is at the amir. We must go there to meet our doom."

"The amir?" I asked; "what is that?"

"It is the metropolis," said she.

I was utterly overwhelmed, yet still I tried to console her; but the attempt was vain.

"Oh!" she cried, "you will not understand. The sacrifice is but a part--it is but the beginning. Death is terrible; yet it may be endured--if there is only death. But oh!--oh think!--think of that which comes after--the Mista Kosek!"

Now the full meaning flashed upon me, and I saw it all. In an instant there arose in my mind the awful sacrifice on the pyramid and the unutterable horror of the Mista Kosek. Oh, horror, horror, horror! Oh, hideous abomination and deed without a name! I could not speak. I caught her in my arms, and we both wept passionately.

The happiness of our love was now darkened by this tremendous cloud that lowered before us. The shock of this discovery was overpowering, and some time elapsed before I could rally from it. Though Almah's love was sweet beyond expression, and though as the time passed I saw that every jom she regained more and more of her former health and strength, still I could not forget what had been revealed. We were happy with one another, yet our happiness was clouded, and amid the brightness of our love there was ever present the dread spectre of our appalling doom.

These feelings, however, grew fainter. Hope is ever ready to arise; and I began to think that these people, though given to evil ways, were after all kind-hearted, and might listen to entreaty. Above all, there was the Kohen, so benevolent, so self-denying, so amiable, so sympathetic. I could not forget all that he had said during Almah's illness, and it seemed more than probable that an appeal to his better nature might not be without effect. I said as much to Almah.

"The Kohen," said she; "why, he can do nothing."

"Why not? He is the chief man here, and ought to have great influence."

"You don't understand," said she, with a sigh. "The Kohen is the lowest and least influential man in the city."

"Why, who are influential if he is not?" I asked.

"The paupers," said Almah.

"The paupers!" I exclaimed, in amazement.

"Yes," said Almah. "Here among these people the paupers form the most honored, influential, and envied portion of the community."

This was incomprehensible. Almah tried to explain, but to no purpose, and I determined to talk to the Kohen.

CHAPTER XV

THE KOHEN IS INEXORABLE

I determined to talk to the Kohen, and try for myself whether he might not be accessible to pity. This greatest of cannibals might, indeed,

have his little peculiarities, I thought, and who has not?--yet at bottom he seemed full of tender and benevolent feeling; and as he evidently spent his whole time in the endeavor to make us happy, it seemed not unlikely that he might do something for our happiness in a case where our very existence was at stake.

The Kohen listened with deep attention as I stated my case. I did this fully and frankly. I talked of my love for Almah and of Almah's love for me; our hope that we might be united so as to live happily in reciprocal affection; and I was going on to speak of the dread that was in my heart when he interrupted me:

"You speak of being united," said he. "You talk strangely. Of course you mean that you wish to be separated."

"Separated!" I exclaimed. "What do you mean? Of course we wish to be united."

The Kohen stared at me as I said this with the look of one who was quite puzzled; and I then went on to speak of the fate that was before us, and to entreat his sympathy and his aid that we might be saved from so hideous a doom. To all these words the Kohen listened with an air of amazement, as though I were saying incomprehensible things.

"You have a gentle and an affectionate nature," I said--"a nature full of sympathy with others, and noble self-denial."

"Of course," said the Kohen, quickly, as though glad to get hold of something which he could understand, "of course we are all so, for we are so made. It is our nature. Who is there who is not self-denying? No one can help that."

This sounded strange indeed; but I did not care to criticize it. I came to my purpose direct and said,

"Save us from our fate."

"Your fate?"

"Yes, from death--that death of horror."

"Death?--horror? What do you mean by horror?" said the Kohen, in an amazement that was sincere and unfeigned. "I cannot comprehend your meaning. It seems as though you actually dislike death; but that is not conceivable. It cannot be possible that you fear death."

"Fear death!" I exclaimed, "I do--I do. Who is there that does not fear it?"

The Kohen stared.

"I do not understand you," he said.

"Do you not understand," said I, "that death is abhorrent to humanity?"

"Abhorrent!" said the Kohen; "that is impossible. Is it not the highest blessing? Who is there that does not long for death? Death is the greatest blessing, the chief desire of man--the highest aim. And

you--are you not to be envied in having your felicity so near? above all, in having such a death as that which is appointed for you--so noble, so sublime? You must be mad; your happiness has turned your head."

All this seemed like hideous mockery, and I stared at the Kohen with a gaze that probably strengthened his opinion of my madness.

"Do you love death?" I asked at length, in amazement.

"Love death? What a question! Of course I love death--all men do; who does not? Is it not human nature? Do we not instinctively fly to meet it whenever we can? Do we not rush into the jaws of sea-monsters, or throw ourselves within their grasp? Who does not feel within him this intense longing after death as the strongest passion of his heart?"

"I don't know--I don't know," said I. "You are of a different race; I do not understand what you say. But I belong to a race that fears death. I fear death and love life; and I entreat you, I implore you to help me now in my distress, and assist me so that I may save my life and that of Almah."

"I--I help you!" said the Kohen, in new amazement. "Why do you come to me--to me, of all men? Why, I am nothing here. And help you to live--to live! Who ever heard of such a thing?"

And the Kohen looked at me with the same astonishment which I should evince if a man should ask me to help him to die.

Still, I persisted in my entreaty for his help.

"Such a request," said he, "is revolting; you must be mad. Such a request outrages all the instincts of humanity. And even if I could do such violence to my own nature as to help you to such a thing, how do you think I could face my fellow-men, or how could I endure the terrible punishment which would fall upon me?"

"Punishment!" said I. "What! would you be punished?"

"Punished!" said the Kohen. "That, of course, would be inevitable. I should be esteemed an unnatural monster and the chief of criminals. My lot in life now is painful enough; but in this case my punishment would involve me in evils without end. Riches would be poured upon me; I should be raised to the rank of Kohen Gadol; I should be removed farther away than ever from the pauper class--so far, indeed, that all hope in life would be over. I should be made the first and noblest and richest in all the land."

He spoke these words just as if he had said, "the lowest, meanest, poorest, and most infamous." It sounded like fresh mockery, and I could not believe but that he was amusing himself at my expense.

"This is cruel," said I. "You are mocking me."

"Cruel?--cruel?" said he; "what is cruel? You mean that such a fate would be cruel for me."

"No, no," said I; "but alas! I see we cannot understand one another."

"No," said the Kohen, musingly, as he looked at me. "No, it seems not; but tell me, Atam-or, is it possible that you really fear death--that you really love life?"

"Fear death!--love life!" I cried. "Who does not? Who can help it? Why do you ask me that?"

The Kohen clasped his hands in amazement.

"If you really fear death," said he, "what possible thing is there left to love or to hope for? What, then, do you think the highest blessing of man?"

"Long life," said I, "and riches and requited love."

At this the Kohen started back, and stared at me as though I were a raving madman.

"Oh, holy shades of night!" he exclaimed. "What is that you say? What do you mean?"

"We can never understand one another, I fear," said I. "The love of life must necessarily be the strongest passion of man. We are so made. We give up everything for life. A long life is everywhere considered as the highest blessing; and there is no one who is willing to die, no matter what his suffering may be. Riches also are desired by all, for poverty is the direst curse that can embitter life; and as to requited love, surely that is the sweetest, purest, and most divine joy that the human heart may know."

At this the Kohen burst forth in a strain of high excitement:

"Oh, sacred cavern gloom! Oh, divine darkness! Oh, impenetrable abysses of night! What, oh, what is this! Oh, Atam-or, are you mad? Alas! it must be so. Joy has turned your brain; you are quite demented. You call good evil, and evil good; our light is your darkness, and our darkness your light. Yet surely you cannot be altogether insane. Come, come, let us look further. How is it! Try now to recall your reason. A long life--a life, and a long one! Surely there can be no human being in a healthy state of nature who wishes to prolong his life; and as to riches, it is possible that anyone exists who really and honestly desires riches? Impossible! And requited love! Oh, Atam-or, you are mad to-day! You are always strange, but now you have quite taken leave of your senses. I cannot but love you, and yet I can never understand you. Tell me, and tell me truly, what is it that you consider evils, if these things that you have mentioned are not the very worst?"

He seemed deeply in earnest and much moved. I could not understand him, but could only answer his questions with simple conciseness.

"Poverty, sickness, and death," said I, "are evils; but the worst of all evils is unrequited love."

At these words the Kohen made a gesture of despair.

"It is impossible to understand this," said he. "You talk calmly; you have not the air of a madman. If your fellow-countrymen are all like you, then your race is an incomprehensible one. Why, death is the

greatest blessing. We all long for it; it is the end of our being. As for riches, they are a curse, abhorred by all. Above all, as to love, we shrink from the thought of requital. Death is our chief blessing, poverty our greatest happiness, and unrequited love the sweetest lot of man."

All this sounded like the ravings of a lunatic, yet the Kohen was not mad. It seemed also like the mockery of some teasing demon; but the gentle and self-denying Kohen was no teasing demon, and mockery with him was impossible. I was therefore more bewildered than ever at this reiteration of sentiments that were so utterly incomprehensible. He, on the other hand, seemed as astonished at my sentiments and as bewildered, and we could find no common ground on which to meet.

"I remember now," said the Kohen, in a musing tone, "having heard of some strange folk at the Amir, who profess to feel as you say you feel, but no one believes that they are in earnest; for although they may even bring themselves to think that they are in earnest in their professions, yet after all everyone thinks that they are self-deceived. For you see, in the first place, these feelings which you profess are utterly unnatural. We are so made that we cannot help loving death; it is a sort of instinct. We are also created in such a way that we cannot help longing after poverty. The pauper must always, among all men, be the most envied of mortals. Nature, too, has made us such that the passion of love, when it arises, is so vehement, so all-consuming that it must always struggle to avoid requital. This is the reason why, when two people find that they love each other, they always separate and avoid one another for the rest of their lives. This is human nature. We cannot help it; and it is this that distinguishes us from the animals. Why, if men were to feel as you say you feel, they would be mere animals. Animals fear death; animals love to accumulate such things as they prize; animals, when they love, go in pairs, and remain with one another. But man, with his intellect, would not be man if he loved life and desired riches and sought for requited love."

I sank back in despair. "You cannot mean all this," I said.

He threw at me a piteous glance. "What else can you believe or feel?" said he.

"The very opposite. We are so made that we hate and fear death; to us he is the King of Terrors. Poverty is terrible also, since it is associated with want and woe; it is, therefore, natural to man to strive after riches. As to the passion of love, that is so vehement that the first and only thought is requital. Unrequited love is anguish beyond expression--anguish so severe that the heart will often break under it."

The Kohen clasped his hands in new bewilderment.

"I cannot understand," said he. "A madman might imagine that he loved life and desired riches; but as to love, why even a madman could not think of requital, for the very nature of the passion of love is the most utter self-surrender, and a shrinking from all requital; wherefore, the feeling that leads one to desire requital cannot be love. I do not know what it can be--indeed, I never heard of such a thing before, and the annals of the human race make no mention of such a feeling. For what is love? It is the ardent outflow of the whole

being--the yearning of one human heart to lavish all its treasures upon another. Love is more than self-denial; it is self-surrender and utter self-abnegation. Love gives all away, and cannot possibly receive anything in return. A requital of love would mean selfishness, which would be self-contradiction. The more one loves, the more he must shrink from requital."

"What!" cried I, "among you do lovers never marry?"

"Lovers marry? Never!"

"Do married people never love one another?"

The Kohen shook his head.

"It unfortunately sometimes happens so," said he, "and then the result is, of course, distressing. For the children's sake the parents will often remain with one another, but in many cases they separate. No one can tell the misery that ensues where a husband and wife love one another."

The conversation grew insupportable. I could not follow the Kohen in what seemed the wildest and maddest flights of fancy that ever were known; so I began to talk of other things, and gradually the Kohen was drawn to speak of his own life. The account which he gave of himself was not one whit less strange than his previous remarks, and for this reason I add it here.

"I was born," said he, "in the most enviable of positions. My father and mother were among the poorest in the land. Both died when I was a child, and I never saw them. I grew up in the open fields and public caverns, along with the most esteemed paupers. But, unfortunately for me, there was something wanting in my natural disposition. I loved death, of course, and poverty, too, very strongly; but I did not have that eager and energetic passion which is so desirable, nor was I watchful enough over my blessed estate of poverty. Surrounded as I was by those who were only too ready to take advantage of my ignorance or want of vigilance, I soon fell into evil ways, and gradually, in spite of myself, I found wealth pouring in upon me. Designing men succeeded in winning my consent to receive their possessions; and so I gradually fell away from that lofty position in which I was born. I grew richer and richer. My friends warned me, but in vain. I was too weak to resist; in fact, I lacked moral fibre, and had never learned how to say 'No.' So I went on, descending lower and lower in the scale of being. I became a capitalist, an Athon, a general officer, and finally Kohen.

"At length, on one eventful day, I learned that one of my associates had by a long course of reckless folly become the richest man in all the country. He had become Athon, Melek, and at last Kohen Gadol. It was a terrible shock, but I trust a salutary one. I at once resolved to reform. That resolution I have steadily kept, and have at least saved myself from descending any lower. It is true, I can hardly hope to become what I once was. It is only too easy to grow rich; and, you know, poverty once forfeited can never return except in rare instances. I have, however, succeeded in getting rid of most of my wealth

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