

100 Miles



An Hour

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FIFTEEN
HUNDRED MILES AN HOUR ***

**FIFTEEN
HUNDRED
MILES
AN HOUR**

Edited by

CHARLES DIXON.

Illustrated by Captain ARTHUR LAYARD, late R.E.

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"OUR VOYAGE BEGINS AT LAST."

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INTRODUCTION

The narrative contained in the papers which are given to the world in this book, is of so marvellous a character as to have made me long hesitate before venturing on their publication. Even now I do so in the full expectation of scorn and unbelief.

I owe it to the world to state exactly how these papers came into my hands. That done, I must leave it to their own appearance of truth to command belief.

The year before last, I was travelling through Northern Africa on a scientific expedition. It was early in the month of May that I reached the northern confines of the Great Desert, amongst the feathery palm-groves in the delicious oasis of Biskra.

I had started one day, with the first streak of dawn, upon a short expedition into the desert. My two Arab followers were anxious to cover as much distance as possible before the heat of the sun became oppressive.

It was about ten o'clock before we halted for breakfast, and the oasis of Biskra looked but a black spot on the northern horizon. The heavens up to now were an intensely brilliant blue, but a dark cloud far away over the distant desert could be seen rapidly increasing in size.

Gradually the whole vault of sky assumed a coppery aspect, and the sun shone paler and paler each moment. The heat and oppressiveness were almost unbearable; not a breath of air relieved the suffocating atmosphere. The sun finally disappeared behind the curtain of lowering cloud, and a darkness began to creep over the earth. The Arabs prepared for the storm which they knew from experience was brewing. The dreaded sandstorm was approaching. It came on the wings of the southern gale with terrific speed, and suddenly the air became almost as dark as midnight, full of fine blinding sand. We could not see twenty paces ahead; and now the sluggish atmosphere was stirred with the rushing and shrieking of a mighty wind.

As I gazed for one brief moment upwards during a lull in the storm, my eyes were almost blinded by a brilliant light, brighter than the flame from an incandescent lamp, and a thousand times as large, which seemed to shoot from out of space. At the same awful moment the very dome of heaven seemed cracked asunder by a loud report, different from anything I had ever heard before. It was a solid and metallic sound, louder and sharper than the report of tons of exploding nitro-glycerine. The earth shook and trembled to its utmost foundations, and the rocks seemed to recoil at the frightful explosion. The Arabs were struck dumb and motionless with horror, and I, for several moments, was as one stone-blind. With the report a huge body seemed to have struck the rocks a short distance from us, but it was impossible to tell what it was until the fury of the storm was somewhat spent. The worst was now over; and the sand, the thunder, and the darkness vanished almost as suddenly as they came. But we did not venture forth until the welcome, glorious sun shone down again upon the wet rocks; and then the Arabs engaged in fervent prayer to Allah for our miraculous deliverance from a terrible fate.

Almost the first object that my eyes rested upon, as soon as we left our retreat under the rocks, was a large round mass of dark-looking substance, a hundred yards away. In amazement I walked towards the spot where it lay hissing and steaming on the bare, wet rocks, surrounded by a thick coating of hailstones, which the hot sun was rapidly melting. It was a meteorolite of unusual dimensions, measuring exactly three feet nine inches in height, and was shaped like a huge gourd. A large crack extended completely down one side, about an inch across in its widest part.

I cautioned the Arabs to preserve the strictest secrecy, and made them swear by the Prophet's beard that they would reveal to no man what they had seen, and then we returned to Biskra. It was my intention to obtain a few suitable tools and requisites, and then return to the meteorolite at once to investigate. It would evidently take some hours to cool; besides, if we did not get back, search parties would be scouring the desert in quest of us, and they might by chance discover this wonderful "stone." I felt already that this stone belonged to me. My interest in it was all-absorbing.

Early the next morning, with three Arabs, I went off, armed with wedges, a heavy hammer, some drills, a quantity of gunpowder, and fuse. We found

the stone just as we left it on the previous day, and evidently still unvisited by man.

I first of all tried to force open the crack with the wedges, but the substance was exceedingly tough, the appliances at my command very crude, and I made no progress. Then I set my followers to work to bore two holes into the "stone," and fill them with gunpowder. This plan worked admirably—the drill cutting its way through the soft spongy mass with great quickness, and I was soon ready to fire my fuse, and retire behind the rocks to wait events.

It was an anxious moment for me. We had not to wait long for the reports, which sounded like a couple of rifle cracks, and then we ran forward to examine our prize. Alas! it was shattered into fragments, some of them blown to a distance of many yards.

The charges were too strong. I was profoundly disappointed, and set the Arabs to work to gather up the largest pieces and load our camels with them.

I was sitting dejectedly enough upon the sand, more interested in the action of a pair of vultures than in the doings of my men, when Achmed, one of my Arabs, made his appearance, holding in his arms a very curious-looking fragment of the meteorolite. It looked like a rusty piece of iron ore, oblong in shape, and had evidently undergone great pressure. Examination told me that this substance was iron, and its disproportionate lightness, together with a blow from the hammer, revealed the fact that it was not solid! It looked for all the world like a large conical shot. I set off alone on my camel to the oasis, all impatient to get home and examine my prize.

I could neither eat nor sleep until I had finished my task. Locking myself in my room, I began my investigation with a singular presentiment that I was on the eve of some important discovery. Nor were my feelings unjustified by events. With the aid of a hammer and chisel, after some considerable trouble and labour, I broke open this singular-looking mass of battered rusty iron, and its strange contents rolled out on to the table! Of what were they composed? Nothing but a long and carefully-folded pile of papers—so tightly packed that they might have been under hydraulic pressure; but their appearance filled me with the intensest surprise and most utter amazement! Here and there the edges were burnt and charred, but otherwise they were in

a singularly good state of preservation, and the writing upon them was almost as legible as when it was penned. The paper had evidently been made on earth, for it bore the watermark of a well-known London firm.

The most singular part of all this strange occurrence, however, remains now to be told. Most of these manuscripts were written in a good, bold, upright hand, and they were addressed and dated from

"The City of Edos, Planet of Mars, or Gathma. December the 9th, 1878."

Was I awake or dreaming? Many times did I read those three lines, walking about the room meantime to convince myself that all was reality! This strange letter from an unknown world must have been ten years in the air! These manuscripts were evidently of a scientific as well as of a popular character; and as a scientific man myself, I felt already that a bond of sympathy existed between my unknown correspondent far away out yonder beyond the sky, and myself! A voice from another world; a message from the vast unseen—how I longed to read these papers, to examine them, to revel in their secrets, and to enjoy them! What a hidden world of wonder, of adventure, of exploration, lay before me if the documents were genuine!

I sat up the entire night, eagerly reading through these strange papers.

Africa had now, for the present, lost its charm. I set off back again to Europe with all despatch, bent on investigating the whole matter.

Fortunately, my efforts were crowned with a most gratifying triumph.

Doctor Hermann, F.R.S., F.R.A.S., F.R.G.S., the author of a considerable portion of these manuscripts, I discovered had been an eccentric and little-known individual, living a very secluded life on a small estate near the Yorkshire fells, a wild lonely spot, far from cities. That he was a member of the Royal, the Astronomical, and the Geographical Societies, I easily satisfied myself. He had been absolutely devoted to science—for this all the other enjoyments and obligations of life were discarded; he lived but for one object, the study and investigation of Nature's choicest secrets. This was the all-absorbing faith of his life. From information supplied in these manuscripts, I learned the exact place of his strange abode, and was able to visit it, and to make many enquiries in the immediate neighbourhood concerning him. He was described to me as a tall, spare man, with a benevolent-looking face, past the prime of life, with grey beard and

moustache, clear grey eyes, and close-cropped hair. In nature, gentle and tender as a woman, but brave as a lion, and with a reputation for firmness and great strength of will. I was also told that he had a very big telescope erected in his barn, and some of the old folks living in the fells always insisted that the Doctor and the Devil were on quite too intimate terms. He had no friends in the neighbourhood. One old serving-woman used to look after the house, but she had been dead some years, and had not been on speaking terms with any of the good people living near. His man-of-all-work, Sandy Campbell, generally accompanied his master in all his wanderings. Sandy was almost as much of a character as his master—a close, reticent Scot, who could never be got to talk, even when under the influence of whisky, a liquor he appeared to have been particularly fond of. The Doctor had few visitors. John Temple, a Bradford cotton lord, had been often seen in his company; and a young engineer from Leeds, called Harry Graham, had been also known in the neighbourhood as a frequent guest of the Doctor's. Singularly enough, these names were the ones given in the manuscripts, and therefore help to confirm their truth.

I also learnt that, some fourteen years ago, Doctor Hermann and his man suddenly disappeared from the neighbourhood, and it was said they had gone abroad on a scientific expedition, the house having been denuded of its furniture and left standing empty. From that day to this, no one had occupied the premises. Pursuing my investigations further, I found that at precisely the same time John Temple, the Bradford millionaire, left this country, presumably on a voyage round the world; and enquiries at the great firm of manufacturing engineers in Leeds also revealed the fact that this Harry Graham, their cleverest manager, left their employment to go abroad at the same date. Not one of these persons has been heard of since.

The mystery of all these persons disappearing at the same time, and never being heard of again by mortal man, is now cleared away! I hold the secret, which was flashed to me on the wings of the storm, from boundless space, upon the sands of the Sahara. The following weird and startling story will satisfactorily explain the cause and purpose of these individuals' departure, minutely describe their wonderful and thrilling experiences, and publish to the world the reason why the lonely house on the Yorkshire fells remains tenantless, and is rapidly falling into ruins; and the rich estates of John

Temple, cotton lord and millionaire, are still amongst the unclaimed treasures in the jealous keeping of the High Court of Chancery!

The following is in the Doctor's bold and characteristic handwriting.

Extract from Dr. Hermann's instructions to the finder of the MSS.

"Should these manuscripts chance to fall into the hands of any civilised man, it is my earnest wish, though of German extraction myself, that they should be published—if published at all—in the English tongue. Truth shall prevail, and our return to earth shall scatter, like thistle-down before the autumn winds, the scepticism which I mistake not will encircle them, as soon as man may read them. It is my cherished hope to return to my mother world, and to tell in person of that glorious life and those sublime wonders of a New World. Adieu!"

This brief extract must suffice as introduction. The next chapter will begin at once with the story proper, omitting the uninteresting preliminary portion of the manuscripts.

Fifteen Hundred Miles an Hour

CHAPTER I.

WE PREPARE FOR OUR JOURNEY.

"I tell you, Temple, that the thing can be done! From experiments which I have carefully made, and from information which I have laboriously collected during the best part of a lifetime devoted to scientific research, I am in a position confidently to state that my project is removed for ever from the realm of possibility, and is now within measurable distance of becoming an accomplished fact. My plans may seem complicated to you, but to me they are simple in the extreme. You, my dear fellow, are better able to deal with intricate financial questions, discounts, stocks, and bank

rates, rather than the delicate experiments of science. Believe me, I have here in this book every item of my scheme carefully worked out, every design outlined to its simplest detail—all I want is the necessary capital for its accomplishment. My young friend, Harry Graham, here—let me introduce him to you, Temple—whose interest in astronomy I have long been fostering, is willing and ready to superintend the mechanical portion of my undertaking. Our models have turned out satisfactory in every way—all we want now is money. That, friend Temple, you half-promised years ago. May I count upon your assistance still?"

"My dear Doctor, you may. If fifty thousand pounds, aye, or even a hundred thousand, will help you, I am willing to speculate to that amount; and, what is more, the novelty of your undertaking has so captivated me that I am anxious to form one of your party. Who knows, if your efforts are crowned with success, what grand financial harvests may be reaped!"

"Then, Graham, there is nothing now to prevent us beginning to work in real earnest. There is much for us to do; and I am sure we shall deem it an honour to have the financier of our undertaking in our company. Try another cigar, friends, and let Sandy bring us one more bottle of port, and then I will endeavour to give you a brief outline of my plans."

"As you know," continued the Doctor, "I have long been an ardent supporter of the theory of the plurality of worlds. I am a firm believer in the principle of Universal Law; and the theory that these other worlds are the abode of living organisms is to me an almost demonstrable fact. When I first began the study of this interesting question I soon came to the conclusion that the only planet with which I dared hope to obtain any success must be one whose conditions were as nearly like those of our own world as possible. So far as I know, only one orb in the entire planetary system can with any degree of fairness be compared with Earth. That planet is Mars. In short, the beautiful planet Mars is precisely similar in nearly every physical aspect to the Earth—it is, in fact, only a smaller edition of our own world.

"But I am afraid I weary you, Temple, with all this scientific detail. I will not trouble you with more, but come to the practical side of my plans."

"Doctor, your remarks interest me exceedingly. Pray, say all you think desirable."

"Well, then, Temple, the first difficulty I had to contend with was that of bridging the mighty distance between our Earth and this planet. My second task was the enormous journey itself, and the means of obtaining air and sustenance during the progress. Both of these, after many experiments and many failures, have been overcome.

"First, as to my means of conveyance. I have here a design for an air carriage, propelled by electricity, capable of being steered in any direction, and of attaining the stupendous speed of fifteen hundred miles per hour. It can be made large enough to afford all necessary accommodation for at least six persons, and its attendant apparatus is capable of administering to their every requirement. Here is a model of the machine. You will perceive that the material of which it is composed is no metal in common use, nor is its composition, and the method of its manufacture, known to any mortal man but myself. It is remarkable for its extreme lightness, toughness, and power of withstanding heat. Wrought-iron melts at something like 4,500 degrees Fahrenheit; my metal will stand a fiery ordeal three times as great. This is of the utmost importance, for our high rate of speed would soon generate sufficient heat to melt any but the most enduring substance. Here, again, is the exact model of another apparatus for making and storing electricity sufficient for at least two years, working at high pressure. And herein perhaps is the greatest of my discoveries. The one grand problem which electricians have to solve before this force can be of any great advantage to mankind is the method of generating it direct, without the aid of any other motive power. I have solved that problem; and have succeeded by the aid of this curious apparatus in producing electricity direct, not from coal, but from petroleum. By this wonderful invention I am able to carry enough fuel for our journey, compressed into a space that is practicable for all requirements, and the alarming waste of energy that now troubles the electrical engineer is saved. The labour of the world will now be revolutionised when I choose to make my discovery known; for the reign of steam, glorious and wonderful as it has been, will then be over. I can carry in my hand enough fuel to drive the biggest steamer that ploughs the ocean, once round the world.

"But to return. This little attachment tells the exact rate of speed the carriage is travelling. You will also perceive that my motors are on the principle of the paddle-wheel and the screw-propeller combined. The

interior of my carriage is formed of a series of chambers one above the other. There is a laboratory, sleeping and living chambers, engine and apparatus room, and ample space for stores in the basement. The door is situated near the top, and just above it I have placed, as you see, a small balcony, for observations. My port-holes will be glazed with glass of exceptional quality, made by myself, and every apartment is lighted with electricity. The carriage is conical in form, that shape being best adapted to a high rate of speed.

"My next consideration was the supply of air. I think we shall find that the whole planetary system is pervaded with an atmosphere so rare, in some parts of remotest space, as to remain undetected by any instrument yet known to science, but still of sufficient density to offer resistance and lend support to our carriage and its propellers. My condensers are so formed that they will readily convert this ether into air suited to man's requirements.

"I had now but one more task to overcome—food and water. As regards food, I have here a little cake of animal and vegetable substances which have undergone a certain chemical process, by means of which I have been able to compress enough food to support a human being for three days into a space not quite two cubic inches in extent. In this other tablet I have dealt with wheaten flour in a similar satisfactory manner. Tea, sugar, and other luxuries I can reduce to the smallest proportions by a process of condensation and hydraulic pressure. So that I can stow away in the store-room of my carriage enough food to last six persons for nearly three years—a more than ample supply, as I intend shortly to demonstrate.

"It has taken me nearly ten years to solve the problem of my water supply. I have here a small electrical apparatus, by means of which I hope to be able to distil water from ether. Should my experiment fail, I have invented a small lozenge of soda and other chemicals, which will allay thirst. I must also say that I have allowed sufficient space for scientific instruments, a stock of methylated spirits, a selection of books, firearms, and ammunition: nor have I omitted clothes, cigars, tobacco, a few bottles of wine to be used on state occasions, and a fair quantity of brandy and whiskey, so that you, Temple, shall not be without your grog. A medicine chest, camera, and india-rubber boat are also included in my list of necessities. I calculate that my air-carriage will be about forty feet in height, and nine feet in width. What I have disclosed is but a portion of my grand scheme, the one great

work of my life, from which I hope to obtain the most brilliant scientific results.

"The planet Mars will reach his perihelion, or nearest distance to our Earth, in October, 1877. He is then in an unusually favourable position, and affords us a chance of visiting him, which will not occur again in a lifetime. Now, I calculate that our rate of speed will be fifteen hundred miles per hour, so that the thirty-four millions of miles we have to traverse will be accomplished in about two and a-half years' time. We must leave Earth, therefore, not later than the first day of May, 1875. Our stay, of course, will depend on circumstances, which no mortal man can foresee. We may, indeed, reach our destination in much less time than I have anticipated.

"I ought here to mention," continued the Doctor, "that my devoted servant, Sandy, has already expressed his desire and willingness to accompany me on this long journey.

"Now, Temple, and you too, Graham, I wish you to weigh carefully the *pros* and *cons* of this dangerous enterprize. We are about to embark into the solemn, boundless realms of space—to dash boldly away from the Earth, which fosters us, into mysterious regions of which we have none but the scantiest knowledge. On the other hand," continued the Doctor, "there is grandeur in the thought of being able to leave this world of ours for a season, and to visit those orbs which shine so clearly in the midnight sky. If you, of your own free will, are ready and willing cheerfully to cast in your lot with mine, I shall be happy in your company."

There was dead silence for several moments after the Doctor had finished speaking, during which the little timepiece on the mantel struck the hour of midnight with almost painful clearness, when Graham was the first to speak.

"Doctor, you know that, through all the experiments we have conducted together, my one aim has been, provided they were successful, to accompany you."

Temple spoke next.

"The ties, my dear Doctor, that bind me to Earth and to life are small. Wifeless, childless, relationless, what have I to look forward to? I freely

place at your disposal the sum I have already named, and at the same time pledge myself to make your—shall I say OUR—journey a success."

"I thank you, friends, for your kindness, and your proffered assistance, and accept the offer of your company with unqualified pleasure. It is now November. All our preparations must be made during the next six months, that is by the end of April. We must leave Earth no later than that date. I also suggest that all our preparations are made as secretly as possible. Let the carriage be made in sections and parts; let all be brought here, bit by bit. My big barn will suit us for a workshop. Idle curiosity must not be excited. And, as a personal favour, I request that no hint of this journey be given to any mortal man."

Doctor Hermann then filled up his glass, all present following his example, and together we toasted each other, and drank in wild if silent enthusiasm to the success of our awful voyage through space.

CHAPTER II.

WE LEAVE EARTH IN THE "SIRIUS."

"At last, Graham, all is in readiness for our departure. I think it was wise, however, that before finally leaving Earth we tested the capabilities of our carriage." (This trial trip nearly cost the Doctor his secret. A party of farm-labourers stoutly swore that they had seen a big house floating over Whernside, as they came home in the dusk; but they were only laughed at by their neighbours, and accused of being in liquor.) "We now feel a greater amount of satisfaction and confidence in our undertaking, and the several little details we had overlooked will be decided improvements."

"Then you are prepared to start on Saturday, Doctor?"

"Well, if Temple can manage it, yes. It rests with him now, and we must not be too hard or exacting on our generous friend and patron."

"Ah! Sandy, a telegram from Temple, I suppose," says the Doctor, tearing open the orange-coloured envelope, and hastily reading the brief message.

"Yes, Graham, all is well. Temple wires me that he will be here on Saturday to lunch. That means he is ready. We shall start at midnight."

The remaining days of our stay on Earth were spent by Graham in overhauling the various machinery and apparatus he had taken such pains in making and fitting, and by the Doctor in anxious consultation of several leading works on astronomy and mathematics, and in careful revision of every little detail of his gigantic scheme.

At last the eventful morning came, the first day of May, 1875. Glorious indeed was the weather on that memorable day, when, for the first time in the history of mankind, five living creatures were about to leave this planet on a journey to a far-distant orb.

Now behold this dauntless little party, as they stand in the Doctor's garden, watching their last earthly sunset. The white-haired Doctor is the central figure of the group.

As the sun sinks solemnly behind the Pennine peaks, lingering a few moments on the gloomy crowns of Whernside, the Doctor points to the clear southern sky, and says: "Well, friends, our stay on Earth is now very short. In little over four hours' time we must be gone. Yonder is our destination; the star that sheds such brilliant lustre—brightest, to us, of all heavenly orbs to-night—is our bourne. You see it, Temple? From this night, for two years and a-half, it is to be our only guiding light, ever increasing in size and mysterious splendour."

As the evening gloom crept up the valleys, the scene became more and more solemn and impressive, and a strange sense of awe seemed to come over even the bravest heart amongst us. We felt too grave to converse, and the Doctor's remarks were received in silence. At last the oppressive silence was broken by the Doctor exclaiming: "We had better now go in and dine, after which we must see about getting away. Have you finished, Sandy?"

"Yes, Doctor; everything is neat and tidy."

"Well, after dinner, we shall be round to inspect your arrangements for our comfort."

Dinner passed over in comparative silence.

Each one of the diners now fully realised the solemnity of his position, and none seemed to have any desire to make their thoughts known to their companions.

As soon as the meal was over, the ceremony of christening the carriage was performed by Sandy cracking a bottle of wine against the side, and as the ruddy liquid streamed to the ground, the Doctor pronounced the few words that gave to the machine its name of *Sirius*.

"Now, my friends, the all-eventful moment has come," he continued, leading the way to a rope-ladder which was hanging down the dark side of the *Sirius*, from the doorway high overhead. "Let us bid adieu to the Earth that bore and fostered us; it may be that our feet touch its surface for the last time."

The night was gloriously fine; not a cloud to hide the spangled sky. Sandy and his dog were already inside the *Sirius*; and the light-hearted Scot could be heard singing snatches of North-country ballads as he hurried to and fro. Sandy was, evidently, little troubled at the thoughts of Earth. This confidence was inspired by the calm courage of his master.

Graham mounted next, and was soon busy with the machinery, oiling and wiping with greatest care the shining rods and wheels and cranks, which he loved almost as deeply as a father loves his children.

John Temple then ascended, a little paler perhaps than usual, but calm and self-possessed as was his wont.

Doctor Hermann, after carefully walking round the huge machine to see that all was clear, gave one last look towards the old house, and then to the hills he knew and loved so well, before mounting the swaying ladder, which was pulled up after him by Sandy.

All now were waiting for the final signal, which was to fall from the Doctor's lips. He stood calmly and heroically with the little lever grasped in his right hand, his watch held in his left. One minute to midnight! Slowly the minute finger crept round the tiny dial, and the last few seconds of our stay on earth were slipping away.

"Once more, my friends, I ask you if you still adhere to your intention of accompanying me. There is yet time to draw back."

"We are ready and willing, and most anxious to proceed," was the answer from all.

"Then our voyage begins at last," said the Doctor, pressing back the shining lever. "May health and good fortune attend us on our journey, and success crown its termination."

As the Doctor spoke, the huge machine mounted upwards from its staging, lightly and buoyantly as a bird, into the midnight sky. All were exceedingly surprised at the extreme steadiness of the carriage, for it floated upwards and onwards without any disagreeable motion whatever. In fact, it was difficult to believe that the carriage was moving at all.

As soon as we got fairly under way the Doctor suggested that we should go out on the balcony and take a last look at many old familiar landmarks, and bid a long farewell to Yorkshire. We were travelling very slowly, about sixty miles per hour, and nearly four miles above the Earth. We soon crossed the fair vale of York, slumbering peacefully in the gloom, the lights of towns and railways being distinctly visible far below us. We passed over grimy Sheffield, with its gleaming furnaces belching fire and smoke into the night—its glowing coke-ovens looking like small volcanoes.

"I intend to travel comparatively slowly from the immediate neighbourhood of Earth," remarked the Doctor, "so that we may enjoy the wonderful sight of that planet's physical features as viewed from space. Ere morning dawns we shall be sufficiently distant to get a bird's-eye view of the greater part of Europe; by afternoon, if all goes well, our vision will be extended to the entire Eastern hemisphere."

The *Sirius* was now heading rapidly away from Earth; under Graham's superintendence, the motors were hourly increasing their speed. Like a sheet of molten silver, the German Ocean shimmered in the moonlight.

It was bitterly cold, and the entire party of travellers were soon glad to return to the warm interior of the *Sirius*, where Sandy had made everything ready for our comfort. It was now agreed that each should take his turn at keeping watch and guard generally for two hours, whilst the others slept.

Graham undertook the first two hours of this duty; and the Doctor, too excited to sleep, remained up with him discussing the novelty of their position. As for Sandy, he appeared able to sleep under any circumstances;

and Temple was too methodical in his habits to remain up after the first sensations of departure had worn away.

"It seems like a dream to me, Graham, that we are really off at last," began the Doctor. "I have looked forward to this time for many long and weary years."

"Ah, Doctor, I cannot describe how I feel to-night. I am more than gratified to see one who has done so much for me, reaping the harvest he has sown so patiently."

The heavens were now clouded, and rain began to fall heavily, which necessitated closing the port-holes and door, and setting the air-condensers to work. It was the Doctor's intention to travel as long as possible with these open, so that we could obtain enough air from the atmosphere as long as it continued sufficiently dense for our requirements, and thus save the condensing apparatus as much wear and tear as possible.

We soon passed through the rain clouds, and then the view from above them was entrancingly grand. Far as the eye could reach, below and round us, stretched one vast silvery expanse of cloud, lit up with brilliant moonbeams, and so solid in appearance that we felt a strange yearning desire to descend and wander about the fleecy wastes.

Dawn was now fast spreading over the heavens. All through that night of excitement the Doctor and Graham watched together, but Sandy and Temple were up with the first streak of light. The Earth was still enshrouded in shadow.

But our speed had now to be increased, and by the time the Eastern hemisphere was bathed in sunshine we were travelling a thousand miles per hour, shooting upwards to the zenith, but drifting meantime nearly south, towards the equator. Hour after hour increased the glorious aspect of the Earth below, which had the appearance of a shallow basin, the horizon all round us seeming almost level with the *Sirius*. The Earth's concave, instead of convex appearance, was a puzzle to all but the Doctor, who lucidly explained the phenomenon to us.

By mid-day our instruments declared our height above the Earth to be close upon eight thousand miles! Stupendous as this altitude may seem, none of our party experienced the slightest degree of discomfort, so long as the

condensers were kept at work; but a few moments' pause in their movement produced alarming symptoms, especially in Graham, whose bulky frame (he stood six feet eight, and was well made in proportion, a giant among men) seemed to require a larger amount of air than any of the rest of us. As we rapidly shot upwards, at a speed fifteen times greater than the fastest express train, the Earth was constantly changing in appearance.

All small objects were entirely lost to view; only the continents, largest islands, oceans, and seas being visible. The land and sea changed colour rapidly, until the former merged from dark brown to nearly black, and the water from deepest blue to yellow of such dazzling brightness as to be most trying to the eyes. We could distinctly see the noble range of snow-capped Himalayas, glittering beautifully in a dark setting, but the Cape of Good Hope was lost in a dense bank of cloud. As nearly as we could determine, we were now above the Persian Gulf; the entire coast-line of the Eastern hemisphere could be followed at a glance. Due north and south the polar regions glowed in dazzling whiteness, like two brilliant crescents on the horizon. The season of the year was too early to make satisfactory observations of the northern polar regions; for even had land extended to that pole, we should have been unable to detect it, as it would, of course, have been still lying deep in snow. The south polar region was much more favourable to our examination, and, beyond the border of eternal ice and snow, a dark mass could be detected in the district of the pole itself, which is probably land, but at the immense distance from which we viewed it, it was impossible quite satisfactorily to determine. Although we were such a vast distance from the Earth, she seemed to be quite close, though on a much-reduced scale, and no words can describe the awful grandeur of her appearance. Towards evening we had the novel experience of seeing an appalling thunderstorm many thousands of miles below us, over the wide expanse of the Indian Ocean.

We had now for hours been depending upon the air from our condensers. In fact we did not find breathable atmosphere for more than five hundred miles above the surface of the Earth. As the Doctor had predicted, the ether in these remote regions was quite dense enough to be transformed into air suited to the requirements of man. The Doctor's delight at all these wonderful scenes was unbounded. His enthusiasm was almost painful in its intensity. "Glorious! Glorious!" was his oft-repeated exclamation, as he

made rapid notes of the ever-changing phenomena around us. He was too excited to eat; too full of his many experiments to rest; too eager to gather this unparalleled scientific harvest, to sleep! Gradually the sun seemed to sink into the waste of waters behind the western rim of Earth, throwing a lurid glare across the sea, which now looked like liquid gold, and then turned to deepest purple as the last rays shot upwards into immeasurable space.

Faster and faster we sped; the motors at last working to their utmost limits, the dial registering our speed at precisely fifteen hundred miles per hour. None of us yet experienced the slightest inconvenience, either from the immense altitude we had reached, or the terrible velocity with which we were travelling upwards. By midnight, the Doctor calculated our distance from the Earth to be 25,874 miles. Addressing Temple and Graham, he said:

"I think, my friends, that we ought to congratulate ourselves on the exceedingly promising state of our enterprise. In the first place, our carriage is progressing as favourably as we could wish; everything is in the smoothest working order; our air is of the purest; we have food in abundance; water in plenty; light and warmth, as much as we desire. Twenty-four hours ago we were on the Yorkshire fells; we are now well on our way to that New World we are all so eagerly looking forward to reach. When we left Earth, the planet Mars was glimmering low over the southern horizon; it is now in our zenith. We are fast approaching that region where all earthly influence will be past, and where the power of her gravitation will cease. We inaugurate our voyage with every prospect of success."

"I candidly confess, Doctor, that all my unpleasant feelings of danger have passed away. I have every confidence in the good *Sirius* and her talented inventor," remarked Temple.

"The same here, Mr. Temple," said Graham; "I feel perfectly convinced that—accidents barred, of course—we shall reach our destination in triumph."

As might naturally be expected in the clear rarefied atmosphere through which we were travelling, the various heavenly bodies shone much more brilliantly than ever they appear from Earth; and the vast, unfathomable vault of space was intensified in colour—very different from the blue of an earthly night-sky, and entirely free from cloud. The moon was perceptibly

larger than she appears when viewed from Earth; but the other orbs only differed in the intensity and brilliancy of their light.

"Mr. Graham! Doctor! Doctor! the engine is going wrong!" Sandy was heard shouting.

"Be calm, Sandy," said the Doctor, as he and his two friends hurriedly descended into the engine-room. It was manifest that something had gone wrong with the machinery, and the anxiety of all was plainly visible as the Doctor and Graham hastened to make an examination.

"Thank heaven, the motors are safe," said Graham.

"It is only the pin out of the rod of one of the condensing pistons," calmly remarked the Doctor; and Graham soon put all to rights again.

Some time elapsed before the excitable Sandy could be pacified. He fully expected we were going to be dashed to pieces on the distant Earth. The Doctor took this opportunity of pointing out to us how necessary it was to keep a constant watch on our apparatus; for the least mishap might speedily lead to a calamity so appalling as to send a thrill of horror to the stoutest heart amongst us at the mere thought of it.

CHAPTER III.

OUR VOYAGE BEYOND THE CLOUDS.

Long before morning dawned over Earth, on the second day of our voyage through space, we had reached such an enormous altitude, that even the outlines of the continents could not be traced with any degree of clearness. The large masses of land were sharply defined from the oceans, but all trace of peninsulas, isthmuses, and islands was lost. The Polar crescents of gleaming snow stood clearly out in bold relief, but the waters of the Earth were becoming very grey in appearance.

By 9 a.m. on the 3rd of May, we were close upon forty thousand miles above the Earth. Our life in the *Sirius* was very methodical, and a brief

description of one day's routine will be sufficient for the purposes of this narrative.

Every two hours of night the watch was relieved, the person left in charge being responsible for the safe working of the various apparatus. At 7 a.m. Sandy prepared breakfast; at 1 p.m. we had dinner; at 5 p.m., tea; at 9 p.m., supper. The intervals between meals were passed by the Doctor almost exclusively in scientific observations, writing his journals, and carefully inspecting the machinery and instruments. To Graham was allotted the task of keeping all in order, and compiling a record of the distance travelled each day. Temple assisted the Doctor in many of his labours. He was likewise busy upon a work on finance—a great scheme for liquidating the national debts of Europe, which had been a favourite hobby of his for years. He also helped to write much of the present journal. Sandy's time was fully taken up in various domestic arrangements, and in looking after his dog. We usually went to bed at 11 p.m., but if anything exceptional occurred we stayed up later, and sometimes we were too excited to go to rest at all. The Doctor insisted on each one of the party taking a certain amount of exercise daily, and also swallowing a small dose of a drug of his own discovery.

For the first week our voyage was somewhat uneventful. Each day we continued to dash with stupendous speed towards the zenith. The earth, now, was greatly and rapidly changing in appearance. Our nights were remarkably short, and the period of sunlight became longer and longer in duration. We were soon to pass beyond the influence of the Earth's shadow, and to enter a region of perpetual day.

On the tenth day of our departure from Earth, when we were quite 360,000 miles above its surface, the moon completed her sidereal revolution, and we saw the outer surface of the satellite for the first time in the history of mankind.

Unfortunately, we were too far away to make a very minute examination, but the scene vividly depicted through the Doctor's largest telescope was one never likely to be forgotten. We were gazing upon a new world; the eyes of mortal man had never rested on that portion of the moon's surface now before us; and, oh, how different did it appear from that pale orb we are all of us so accustomed to see lighting the darkness of Earth! Perhaps it is well that her gleaming yellow surface remains unchanged, in aspect, to

all mortal eyes. Her surface, to the dwellers upon Earth, has become a symbol of peace, eloquent of deathly calm.

Our nights now became shorter and shorter—with great rapidity, until, at the end of the third week of our departure from Earth, when we had accomplished a distance of 800,000 miles, we reached those remote regions of space where the mighty shadow, cast by our planet, tapers down to a point, and the sun in all his glory reigns eternally supreme.

Our sensations were almost beyond description when the *Sirius* was at last fairly launched into the vast, boundless void of silent space. So long as we felt the influence of Earth, and journeyed on our way under the shelter of her mighty shadow, the bonds that held us to our mother world were still unbroken.

Then, things at least seemed earthly. Now, every Earth-tie was severed; surrounded by a solemn, limitless sea of space, unconceivable, unfathomable, filled with brilliant and eternal light, such as no man had beheld before, every one of us was filled with awe; and even the ever-cool and dauntless Doctor himself was well-nigh overwhelmed with the majestic splendour of the scene around us. We felt as if we had now ceased to be human; that we no longer belonged to Earth, but were outcasts, with no home or bond of human fellowship away from our floating carriage; doomed to live for ever, and to spend eternity in crossing this radiant ether sea! The silence was profound. The calmest stillness of Earth is as the tempest-roar in comparison with the awe-inspiring quietness of Here! The very beating of our pulses rang clearly out on space; the ticking of our watches became even painful in its loud intensity. Our hearts and our courage began to fail us. Only the Doctor, with his nerves of steel, refrained from uttering words of regret for thus rashly leaving Earth for the sake of prying into the very laboratory of the Universe! Supernatural influences seemed to surround us. We started as men; we seemed to be fast evolving into new beings, governed by no human impulses—controlled by no human forces. Still the *Sirius* sped on. Upwards the good air-ship flashed with terrible velocity, bearing us whither—ah, whither? When we became more familiar with the vastness around us, the feelings of dread passed gradually away.

The view from the windows was impressively grand. The sun shone with a brilliancy unknown on Earth, even in the tropics, but the heat was by no means oppressive. Far as the eye could reach, all was brilliant yellow light, endless, profound!

We now derived the greatest benefit from the spectacles, prepared on the same principle as the helioscope, which Doctor Hermann had provided for our use, the brilliancy of the light being most painful and trying to the eyes. Time, now, was one endless day of brightest sunshine, so that our only means of judging the hours of day, and what we still called night for the sake of convenience, was by the aid of our chronometers.

Soon after we reached these remote regions of eternal light, we began to experience considerable difficulty in breathing. At times this became so bad, that all of us lapsed into a state of semi-stupor. This caused us the gravest anxiety and alarm, and as we sped onwards the trouble increased. Clearly something was going wrong. The terrible thought that air was absolutely about to fail us, in spite of all the Doctor's careful experiments and calculations, filled us with thoughts too horrible to express. The condensers worked admirably, but driven at their utmost capacity, they still failed to furnish sufficient breathable atmosphere. Singularly enough, poor Rover felt this diminishing supply of air far more than his human companions, and for hours scarcely moved or breathed. The Doctor was puzzled, Graham was perplexed, Temple and Sandy very much depressed—the latter especially so. After many careful experiments and a thorough examination of the *Sirius*, we at last found the cause in a loosened window. The remedying of this necessitated one of us going out on to the balcony and climbing the corniced sides.

Graham volunteered the hazardous duty.

The Doctor, with his usual forethought, and showing how well he had planned-out his gigantic scheme to the very smallest detail, and how carefully he had provided for all the contingencies human intelligence could foresee, had brought with him a modified diver's helmet, with the air-tubes attached, and a small cock-tap was fastened in the side of the *Sirius*, through which air-pipes could be passed. This apparatus we adjusted on Graham's head, and round his body hung a coil of fine manilla rope. Our speed was now considerably reduced. While the Doctor assisted him to

mount the ladder which led to the door, and opened and closed it as he went through on to the balcony, Temple and Sandy worked the pumps which supplied him with air. This door had to be closed very quickly, to prevent our own air escaping. We eventually heard him at work on the defective window, and the great improvement in the air of our chambers was sufficient evidence that he had succeeded in his task. Still, he did not return; for quite ten minutes we were in the greatest suspense as to his movements. The air-pipes had been drawn out nearly to their fullest extent, which was a singular circumstance, and one that seemed to bode no good, as half their length was amply sufficient for Graham's needs. Our concern rapidly grew into absolute alarm for the safety of our companion, until at last we had the signal that he was waiting to be admitted. It was a welcome relief to us all, and Sandy could not refrain from uttering cheer after cheer of welcome, forgetting his work of pumping until sternly called to his duty by the Doctor. As soon as the door was opened, poor Graham fell into the Doctor's arms, and for several hours he lay unconscious, in spite of all our remedies and careful treatment. Something had happened, and for an explanation of the mystery we had to wait until our friend regained consciousness, and was able to relate his thrilling story. This he must tell in his own words.

"Notwithstanding the still high rate of speed at which we were travelling, I experienced no inconvenience upon getting to the balcony," began Graham, drinking off a small glass of strong brandy which Temple insisted on his taking, "nor did I have any trouble in climbing up the ring ladder to the defective window. The damage was trifling in itself, and easily repaired; but I noticed, as I went up, what looked to be a long crack in the side of the *Sirius*, and determined to lower myself down and examine it. I fastened the rope to one of the rings, and lowered a part of it sufficiently long to reach the supposed crack: the end of the rope hung loosely down into space from the ring above. I cautiously began to descend, hand under hand, down the smooth, gleaming side of the *Sirius*. The distance seemed longer than I had calculated, and I could not see very well out of the glasses, for my breath dimmed them. I went cautiously lower and lower, when to my utter horror the bight of the rope gave way, and I slipped down many yards, to find myself hanging by the hands alone in space, below the *Sirius*.

"ALONE IN SPACE."

"For one brief, awful moment every drop of blood in my body seemed frozen, when I realised the fact that I was swinging by the hands above the unfathomable gulf of space! Thanks to a nerve which has never yet failed me, my presence of mind did not forsake me. I tried to forget what was below, and to concentrate all my thoughts on what was above. Above was safety; below, the most horrible death a human being could suffer. I shudder now to think of it. I knew it was no use to call for assistance, you had it not in your power to relieve me. Not one of you could have lived out there without a proper supply of air. My only chance rested on trying to get back again—a wild and almost hopeless fight for life. The ring which held the rope had broken loose, and was hanging at the end. That saved me. It prevented the rope slipping from my grasp as I fell; and by pulling myself up a little way, I got my feet in the ring, and relieved the terrible strain upon my arms. Big beads of perspiration streamed down my forehead, and the stifling atmosphere in the helmet added to my woes, as I realised all the horrors of my awful position. Then, all the time, I was tormented with the possibility of the air-pipes breaking, and then—ah, then, to meet eternity, and fall downwards—WHERE?"

"Graham, your experiences must have been unutterably terrible," remarked Temple.

"The mental torture of such a terrible situation must have seemed beyond human endurance. Try a little more brandy, and finish your story later on, when you feel stronger," said the Doctor.

"No, thanks, Doctor; I begin to feel myself again, and would like to relate all while the facts are still fresh in my memory."

"With a desperation," continued Graham, "only born of a wild desire for life, I commenced my struggle upwards. Swinging from side to side, and twisting round and round above that gleaming yellow gulf, whose depths no mortal could sound, I slowly climbed, hand over hand, for a little way, and then stopped to rest. I soon, alas! realised the fact that going down was much easier than coming up, and every moment I felt my arms losing strength. Oh! how horribly smooth and remorseless did the shining sides of

the *Sirius* seem! Not a projection of any kind to assist me. Several times I was almost giving up in despair, and ending my frightful misery by dropping quietly into the yawning void below, but the natural love for life implanted in every animate creature held me back, whilst hope whispered encouragement in my ears. I could hear your voices; the sound of my pulse as it throbbed on in its agony was startlingly distinct. I heard Sandy call out the hour—I had only been five minutes in my dreadful position, after all, yet it seemed ages and ages. Suddenly an idea struck me, and that was if I could manage to hold on by one hand, with the other I might pass the end of the rope under my foot and form a loop.

"This I succeeded in doing, and was thus able to rest my arms a little, at intervals, as I slowly struggled upwards. How heavy the helmet seemed to be getting! I felt slowly drifting into unconsciousness, and death. In what seemed to me an eternity, I at last reached the other end of the rope, which I had left hanging loose. By a great effort I got this end through the ring and secured it, thus making a loop in which I was able to stand for a few moments and rest. I cannot tell you how deliciously sweet those few seconds were; they seemed like a respite from the very jaws of death. I actually examined the supposed crack which had been the cause of all my misfortune, and found that it was not a flaw, but a mere scratch in the outer coating of the *Sirius*. After this all was comparatively easy. I soon got on to the balcony, untied the rope, and gave the signal at the door. Then all was blank; my senses left me. I suppose the mental strain had been too much, and that the overstrung nerves had collapsed at last. I remembered nothing more until I found myself under your care, and was surprised to learn that for three hours I had lain unconscious."

"We all congratulate you on your wonderful escape, Graham," said Temple. "A bottle of our best port shall be uncorked. It will put new life into you, man."

"And, Graham," remarked the Doctor, "you will perceive that your perilous undertaking has brought about good results. The air we are now breathing is all right again. We have lost but little time, for the moment we knew you were safe the motors were started again at full pressure."

"The leakage," rejoined Graham, addressing the Doctor, "was absurdly trivial, yet it makes one shudder to think what would be the case did our air

escape in any larger quantity."

"It only shows how scrupulously careful we must be, and neglect no precautions for our safety," said Temple.

"The perils of our position must keep each one of us alert. Unforeseen terrors may surround us; at any moment we may encounter unknown perils; we may be rushing into the midst of forces that will require all our fortitude to contend against them. We are in the midst of danger, and have to grapple with any difficulty that may present itself, without having the benefit of any human experience to guide us. But we shall pull through; we shall pull through, my friends; and think of our glorious reward!" remarked Doctor Hermann, working himself up into an enthusiastic state of excitement as he spoke.

"What are the results of your observations and calculations to-day, Doctor?" said Graham. "I reckon we are now one million two hundred and fifty thousand miles from home!"

"You were asking me, Graham, about the results I arrived at to-day," continued the Doctor. "Briefly, they may be summarised thus. I find that we are now entirely beyond the attractive forces of the planet, Earth. We are now, as it were, in a neutral position; not yet close enough to Mars to come within the influence of his attraction."

Four hours after the Doctor had thus spoken, that is to say at twenty minutes past two in the afternoon, the transit of Earth commenced. He had timed the occurrence to a second. Slowly the sphere of Earth crept into view, and crossed gradually towards the centre of the sun, and finally passed beyond the disc into space again. No words of human tongue can adequately express the sensations we experienced as we watched the planet Earth, now nothing but a small, dark ball in appearance, travel across the fiery background of the sun. To know that that mere speck was a universe peopled with millions of living creatures—to know that that tiny black disc, so far out yonder, was in reality a vast and mighty world, floating in space, yet so small in comparison to other orbs around us, impressed upon our minds the grand sublimity of Nature's works.

For many weeks after the events recorded in this chapter, the *Sirius* sped on without a single notable occurrence to relieve the monotony of the journey.

Our first Christmas Day was observed with all customary honours, Sandy providing us with a royal feast; and the evening was given up to conviviality and amusement. The Doctor and Temple played chess; Sandy, with his short pipe and unlimited whiskey, now and then sang us a North-country ballad; Rover lay quietly at his master's feet; Graham smoked huge Cabanas, told stories, fired off jokes, and sang many a Yorkshire ditty. All of us felt the magic spell of Christmas-tide, and the observance of the festal day filled our hearts with renewed hope, and served to increase and strengthen the bond of brotherly unity in our little party.

We were now 8,820,000 miles from Earth, or, reducing this vast number to more comprehensive language, we had accomplished slightly more than a quarter of our journey. We still continued to find ether sufficiently dense to be converted into a breathable atmosphere, and into water—everything promised well for the ultimate success of our daring enterprise. Alas! for all human hopes and human anticipations; we little dreamed of what the future was about to bring!

CHAPTER IV.

AWFUL MOMENTS.

Day after day, week after week, and month after month sped the *Sirius* on its journey, like a meteor across the gulf of space. We had now been eighteen months away from Earth, and our distance from that planet we computed to be quite nineteen millions of miles. The Earth was remarkably small in appearance, and the moon could only be detected through a glass. On the other hand, Mars had risen in elevation, and sensibly increased in brilliancy and apparent size. Other heavenly bodies had also changed considerably in their aspect. Some had got much larger, others smaller, many had disappeared entirely from our vision, whilst several new orbs had been discovered. The Doctor was able to make many observations of the little-known asteroids which travel round the sun between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter. Scores of new ones were seen.

For a long time Doctor Hermann had been worried by the course which the *Sirius* was taking. In spite of the fact that we were apparently steadily travelling onwards across the vast belt of space between Earth and Mars, certain of his calculations appeared to demonstrate that we were being drawn rapidly towards the sun! The quantity of water we condensed from the atmosphere now became very small, and eventually failed altogether, so that we had to depend upon our scanty store and the lozenges.

After an unusually long and tedious day, the Doctor gloomily threw aside his papers and his instruments, exclaiming to Graham in almost pathetic tones, "It is as I have long expected; the sun is too much for us!"

"But, Doctor, you may have erred in your calculations. Do you really think it wise to take such a pessimistic view of our situation?" answered Graham, with a hopefulness that he was far from actually feeling.

"If Temple can spare us a moment, ask him to join us, and I will endeavour to explain our actual position, and the prospects we have before us."

"A horrible one! A most horrible one!" the Doctor muttered under his breath, as Graham walked thoughtfully away.

Temple and Graham joined the Doctor almost immediately.

"Now, Doctor, what have you got to tell us this time? What new discovery have you made? Nothing unpleasant, I sincerely hope," said Temple, in his usual cheery way.

"My dear friends," began the Doctor, "I am afraid I have bad news to communicate—very bad news. But let us look the situation squarely in the face, and discuss it calmly and philosophically, as becomes intelligent men."

"Many weeks ago," continued the Doctor, "I explained to Graham and yourself that our centre of gravity had changed from the Earth to the sun; instead of earth glimmering at our feet, nineteen millions of miles below us, we have the fiery sun, as both of you cannot have failed to observe. This I must hasten to explain, is cause for no surprise; it is just what I expected would be the case until we came within the attractive forces of Mars. But my instruments have demonstrated that our motors are now absolutely of no use. They are working just as usual, but our speed increases rather than diminishes, and from this I infer we are influenced by some vast attractive

force. That centre of attraction to which we seem hurrying can only be the sun! No further words of mine are needed to render more clear the horrible doom which awaits us."

As he finished speaking, the Doctor rested his head on his hand, the usual attitude he assumed when engaged in deep thought.

"But, Doctor, before we take all this for granted, at least let us satisfy ourselves more completely that things are really so bad," said Graham.

"No use, Graham, no use; I have studied these matters too long and too carefully needlessly to alarm you," answered the Doctor.

"Well, Doctor," said Graham, "at least allow me to stop our motors. Then what you say cannot possibly be refuted."

"I think Graham is right, Doctor," remarked Temple. "It seems to me a very practical suggestion."

"You may do so if you like, but it is trouble thrown away," the Doctor answered.

Graham was already hastening from the laboratory down the steps to the engine-room, followed by his two friends, and a moment afterwards the machinery ceased to work; the bright cranks and wheels and rods were still; the motors ceased to revolve. At last this beautiful monument of engineering skill, which had kept incessantly at work for upwards of eighteen months, was stopped, and breathlessly the three men awaited the result.

Doctor Hermann, cool and collected even in such awful moments, walked slowly back to the laboratory to consult his instruments. Graham and Temple followed, too excited to speak.

"Well, Doctor," said Temple at last, after he had patiently waited his investigation, "what are your conclusions?"

With marvellous coolness, as though answering the merest commonplace remark, Doctor Hermann replied: "It is as I said before; the *Sirius* is falling with ever-increasing speed into the sun! We are lost!

"Our doom, even if our speed goes on increasing, cannot overtake us for several years," continued the Doctor, "but I doubt if our supplies could hold

out for such a period."

"Doctor," broke in Temple excitedly, "that is poor comfort; you ask us too much endurance. I, for one, will not, cannot, go on in such misery, only to be overwhelmed at last. Two alternatives are left to us. We can either go on in a lingering agony of suspense, and meet our doom by starvation, or by fire; or, we can end our woes swiftly and effectually with these"—and as he spoke he pointed to the four nickel-plated revolvers hanging loaded against the wall. "We can but die like men!"

"I must confess, if all hope is really gone, that I incline to Mr. Temple's view of the situation, and would prefer a sharp and practically painless death to, it may be, years of horrible suspense, crowned with the ten thousand times more awful fate of being hurled into yonder furnace at last," said Graham.

"Temple, and you, too, Graham," answered the Doctor, "you surprise me by such a shallow mode of reasoning. Listen to me. Both of you are free agents to act as you may think fit; but before you rashly take your lives, at least wait a little longer. We are in the midst of strange surroundings, and still stranger possibilities. There is nothing to warrant you in taking such extreme measures."

"My sentiments, Doctor, must, I suppose, be attributed to my weakness," answered Temple.

"You may taunt me as you will," said Graham, "but I believe there are rare occasions in life when self-murder can be no crime—nay, is even justified."

"Then all I can say is that your ethics are not mine, that your theology is not half the comfort or support to you in your extremity that my philosophy is to me in mine," remarked the Doctor.

"Once more," said the Doctor, "let me bid you wait. Let the motors be started again, Graham, at full pressure. Some unforeseen occurrence may yet work our salvation."

As time went on, Graham and Temple became more resigned to their fate; and, in answer to the Doctor's urgent entreaties, gave him their promise to think no more of suicide, at least until matters became more desperate. The Doctor never abandoned hope. Calmly he bore up under all difficulties, plodding along with his instruments and his calculations; writing up his

journals, and making voluminous notes, though every word he penned was probably never destined to be read by any other mortal but himself.

During the twentieth month of our absence from Earth, vast clouds of meteorolites passed within a few miles of us; and at one time the whole range of our vision was filled with these brilliant objects, just like a snowstorm of sparkling fire. Many small ones struck the *Sirius*, others exploded close by with sharp reports. We were too much alarmed and too disconsolate thoroughly to enjoy the glorious sight, the effects being beautiful in the extreme, and we were thankful when we passed beyond this shower of fire.

Onwards, onwards and onwards we sped, falling with awful velocity through space. So fast did we travel that our indicators failed to record the rate of speed, but still the sun did not appear any closer.

This was our one assuring hope. The Doctor was assiduous in his observations, but could not arrive at any definite conclusion. A week before our second Christmas in the *Sirius*, after a careful scrutiny through his largest telescope, he joyfully announced that Mars was greatly increasing in apparent size, and that he had actually detected the presence of two satellites revolving round the planet! Here was welcome news, indeed! If this were true, then, after all, we had nothing to fear from the sun. After some further investigation we were thoroughly convinced of our safety. No words can tell our feelings of thankfulness. We felt as though we had been snatched from the very jaws of death.

"I can only explain our apparent fall towards the sun," said the Doctor, "by the extreme rarity of the ether around us. This was not sufficient to float us, nor to afford resistance to our motors: hence we fell into space, instead of being propelled through it. I made the very natural error of supposing that some attractive force was at work, other than that exerted by the planet Mars. Once more our prospect is unclouded. The worst part of the journey is over; we may expect at any time now to find our centre of gravity fixed on Mars, at last—then success may almost be counted upon as a certainty."

Our second Christmas in the *Sirius* was spent as happily as the first. The past year had been an exciting and eventful one for us; full of dangers, full of trials; and three of our party felt that we had overcome them, thanks in a great measure to Doctor Hermann's skill and indomitable courage.

Almost daily we found the ether around us becoming more dense, and the speed of the *Sirius* sensibly decreased. Our water supply once more became plentiful, the condensers now working admirably.

We kept New Year's Day as a great holiday—a red-letter day in our experience, each of us feeling that we ought to inaugurate such an eventful year in not only our own history, but that of mankind, in a manner suited to its vast importance. As the clocks on Earth were striking midnight on the 31st of December, 1876, and New Year's greetings were being exchanged in all parts of the world we had left, four human beings, millions of miles away in space, were doing likewise. Earth shone steadily, like a pale beautiful star, below us. During the first few moments of that glad New Year, we drank with mild and boisterous enthusiasm to the planet Mars, to the men on Earth, and to our own success.

Owing to the increased rate of speed at which we had been travelling, our distance from the Earth had increased much more than we had suspected. The Doctor computed our distance from Earth to be now 28,000,000 miles! If all went well, we should arrive at Mars in about six months' time. We all of us had long felt weary of our close confinement. Owing to the strict rules of hygiene that the Doctor enforced, not one of the party had suffered from disease. Still, it was a great joy to know that we should soon be released from the *Sirius*, and the wonders of a new world were a rich reward in store.

Mars, now, was a most beautiful object in the heavens. Long and often did we peer at it through our telescopes in wondering astonishment, as it shone in brilliant ruddy glory, still millions of miles away. The Doctor was enchanted with his discovery of the satellites of Mars.

By the end of January, 1877, we had crossed those regions of rarefied ether, which were little more than an absolute vacuum; and the *Sirius* was once again propelled by its motive forces alone.

We now thought it advisable slightly to check our engines, and our speed was reduced to about twelve hundred miles per hour. Another interesting phenomenon was the change in our centre of gravity, which was now the planet of Mars. This last great discovery set all our doubts at rest. Between five and six millions of miles had still to be traversed, many perils had still to be undergone, many difficulties remained to be overcome—but Mars, bright, glorious, ruddy Mars, was conquered at last!

CHAPTER V.

THE GLORIES OF THE HEAVENS.

For a month after the last events were chronicled the *Sirius* pursued its way steadily towards Mars, without a single exceptional incident. On the second of February, however, when we were about four and a quarter millions of miles from our destination, we were dreadfully alarmed by a series of majestic natural phenomena.

On the evening of the day just mentioned, or, rather, what would have been evening could we have distinguished night from day, the sun, for the first time since we left the shadow of Earth, began to shine less brightly. As the hours went by he became more and more indistinct, just as he appears through a fog on earth, and finally his fiery rays were hidden behind vast banks of cloud. The blazing light now became a depressing gloom, just as before a thunderstorm. Our dog evidently felt ill at ease, and whined and trembled as with great fear.

Rapidly the gloom increased. Darker and darker grew the fathomless void which we were crossing, until we were surrounded by one vast blackness, such as no dweller on Earth could ever conceive. The *Sirius* was lighted with incandescent lamps, but these only served to make the awful darkness more profound. This terror-inspiring gloom seemed to enter our very souls; we could not only see it, we could absolutely feel it. The Sun seemed as though he had finally burnt himself out, and disappeared for ever from the spangled firmament, leaving all within the focus of his once-glorious rays in unutterable chaotic blackness. It was as though we had penetrated into the very womb of the universe, where no light could ever be!

"I think this is absolutely the most dreadful of our many weird experiences," said Temple to the Doctor.

"It is sublimely grand," answered the Doctor, "and only shows how infinitely little man knows of the forces of Nature away from his own planet."

"Doctor, there is something wrong with our compasses. The needles are revolving with great velocity. I trust the presence of all this electricity round us will not injure any"—

Before Graham could finish, the whole firmament seemed lit up with a dazzling purple light, and a moment afterwards we were struck dumb with horror at the awful sound which followed it. For a moment the *Sirius* seemed about to fall to pieces; every bolt and plate in her vibrated, and we gave ourselves up for lost. The frightful explosion was like nothing heard on Earth: ten thousand thunder-claps in one would be but a feeble imitation of that terrible discharge, which was gone in a moment without a single echo to mark its departure!

Far in the distance we could hear mighty cracking sounds coming nearer and nearer, and then dying away in space. Clap after clap of this awful thunder shook the very vault of heaven in their awful intensity; and flash after flash of brilliant light lit up the vast void across which we were travelling. How the *Sirius* escaped utter annihilation amidst all this mighty display was a mystery to us all. It oscillated tremendously, as though at the mercy of conflicting currents, and reeled like a ship in a heavy gale. What appeared to be glowing meteors rushed by us with a deafening roar, or exploded with a terrible crash. Vast expanses of space were filled with brilliant light, sometimes like glowing mountains and cave-grottoes of fire. Vast sheets of blue and yellow flame rolled up with a crackling noise like huge scrolls of parchment, or curled and twisted into the most grotesque shapes. Purple, yellow, and blue tongues of flame shot across the darkness, sometimes silently as the sheet-lightning of Earth, but more often followed by loud and sharp reports.

Great quantities of fine magnetic dust accumulated on the balcony of the *Sirius*, and once a large globe of purple fire dropped on the roof, and bounded away again into space. As the electrical discharges gradually became less violent, the whole vault of space above us was lit up with one vast aurora, whose enchanting glories were utterly beyond description. Every colour of the rainbow, every combination of colour that man could conceive, was there, all blended into one gorgeous flare of tinted light. Temple, Graham, and Sandy, though no cowards, were at last compelled to turn their amazed and wonder-stricken faces from this appalling scene; but Doctor Hermann, with blanched cheeks, watched the wonderful

phenomena, cool and intrepid among all the fiery strife, controlling his emotions with what must have been an almost superhuman effort of will.

Throughout this period of unparalleled darkness our air was very bad, and the condensers working at their utmost pressure could scarcely keep up a sufficient supply of breathable atmosphere. Most of our electrical apparatus was thrown out of order. We were able to generate little electricity during this wonderful phenomenon, and had it not been for the store of this force we always had by us, our engines would have been stopped. We failed absolutely to obtain water from the ether, so long as we were surrounded by these meteoric clouds.

The view of the heavens through our telescope was now exceedingly beautiful.

During the first week of March, a stupendous comet made its appearance between the *Sirius* and Earth, and such was its exceeding brilliancy that for days it was visible to the naked eye.

Another uneventful month passed away, the only occurrence of interest being the apparently rapidly increasing size of Mars. On the 7th of April our distance from Earth was 32,000,000 miles, which consequently left us about 2,000,000 more miles to travel. Even in the brilliant sunlight Mars was visible without the aid of a glass, and presented a singularly beautiful and ruddy aspect. We were, as yet, too far away to distinguish much of its physical features, but we saw enough to excite our curiosity and interest to the very utmost.

Every available moment of our waking hours was spent in discussing the physical conditions of Mars, and in making our plans for the time when we should land upon its surface. Daily we were more and more convinced of the similarity between the physical conditions of the Earth and Mars, the most important fact of all being the undoubted presence of an atmosphere of considerable density. The satellites of Mars were now becoming very bright and conspicuous.

The *Sirius* continued its rapid flight through space with uninterrupted speed. Our time was mostly spent in astronomical observation, and in discussing the beauties of the firmament as revealed by our telescopes. We never seemed to tire of witnessing the glories of the heavens.

An interesting fact which we could not fail to observe was the apparently much smaller size of the sun's disc, and a sensible decrease both in the amount of his light and the warmth of his rays.

Life in the *Sirius* went uniformly on. It seemed ages since we were on earth, or had communion with our fellow-men.

Every day, Graham carefully recorded the distance we had travelled, and made his report to the Doctor. Our machinery still worked with beautiful precision, and required but little scrutiny or attention.

"Well, Doctor," said Temple, one day after work was over, "suppose you give us an idea of our distance from Mars, and our probable date of arrival?"

"What is our distance for the past twenty-four hours, Graham?" asked the Doctor.

"Twenty-eight thousand eight hundred miles," he answered.

"Then we are still travelling at our reduced speed of twelve hundred miles per hour," rejoined the Doctor. "Well, our last computation of the Earth's distance was made on the 7th of April. It is now the 17th of May. One rate of speed has been maintained throughout this interval, so that we are now 33,123,200 miles from Earth, and just 876,800 miles from the planet Mars. That distance we shall cover in a little over thirty days. If all goes well, we shall reach Mars on the 18th of June."

"Your remarks fill me with the strangest sensations," answered Temple.

"Whatever may come to pass," said the Doctor, "let me impress upon you the importance of keeping cool, and as free from excitement as possible. Our next thirty days will be the strangest that mortal man has ever yet experienced!"

CHAPTER VI.

WE NEAR MARS.

As the *Sirius* sped on its journey from day to day, the apparent size of Mars rapidly increased. We began to feel appalled at our nearness to this new world, now gleaming in brilliant splendour below, instead of above us. Our sensations cannot be expressed.

On the 2nd of June we were again alarmed at losing sight of the sun for a short time, and expected another meteoric visitation.

We began now anxiously to discuss the possibilities of finding living creatures on this planet. It would indeed be a disappointment almost beyond human endurance, to find Mars a dead desolate world, after all! But we took heart at its singularly beautiful appearance, and its similarity in many respects to the world we had left.

We began to notice a considerable difference in the density of the atmosphere. Nearer and nearer we came, awe-struck and dumbfounded at our own temerity. Hour by hour, and day by day, we watched this glorious world become larger and larger to our view. Still no sign of life could be traced. Cold and still, and calm as the grave, this new world appeared to us. The *Sirius* absolutely seemed to creep along, although the good machine was bearing us onward at a speed so enormous, that the fastest express train of Earth was a snail's pace by comparison.

Amid the terrible excitement, and the frightful tension of our nerves which it entailed, the days sped by almost unnoticed, uncounted. But the Doctor, ever cool and collected, through all this trying period, kept a careful record of the distance travelled day by day.

As we approached yet nearer to this magnificent planet, we were able to note most carefully the general distribution of land and water upon its mighty surface.

Daily, nay hourly now, our hopes of finding the planet Mars a peopled world increased.

It was three weeks from the time that the Doctor had last dwelt upon the distance we had travelled, and the size of Mars was becoming appallingly stupendous. On the evening of the 7th of June, we were all seated in the chamber above the engine-room, admiring the glorious splendours of the sunset on this heavenly orb, watching the last rays of the Martial day expire, as we had so often done before. We were too absorbed in the beauties of the

scene before us to speak; each was too overcome by the solemn grandeur of our surroundings, and our strange position, to converse with his fellow-man; until the darkness reached us at last, and broke the magic spell of our silence.

Temple was the first to speak. "Well, Doctor, things are rapidly approaching a crisis now. What are your latest views on our position?"

"Briefly these, Temple. At the rate of speed we are still travelling, in one week from to-day we shall reach our destination on that strange world yonder. Roughly speaking, but little more than two hundred thousand miles remain to be crossed, and, as far as I can determine at present, we shall complete the last few thousands of miles under the cover of darkness. This is well for us: it will enable us to descend unnoticed and unseen by any intelligent, and perhaps hostile, beings that may possibly dwell upon the surface of this planet. On the other hand, the darkness may conceal perils we should have been able to avoid, had we descended in daylight. Of the two evils, I strongly counsel us to choose the former; that is, to drop quietly down at night and await the dawn in concealment. Our future movements must be controlled entirely by events."

The following six days were passed without anything unusual occurring. At dawn on the seventh, we were only about 28,000 miles away from Mars, and his vast size inspired our hearts with increasing awe.

Our last day in the *Sirius*, if all went well, had now arrived.

At five o'clock p.m., the planet began to assume a slightly concave appearance; at six, this became even more pronounced; whilst an hour later still, when we were only about six thousand miles above its surface, the horizon seemed almost level with the *Sirius*. Mars now looked like a huge deep saucer, into which we were rapidly falling.

At eight in the evening, as near as we in our terrible state of excitement could judge, for not one of us referred to our watches, all doubts respecting the presence of life on Mars were expelled; and to our indescribable joy we noted dark belts of vegetation, in which the glittering mountains and active volcanoes were set. Each minute the scene below us became more grandly beautiful.

At a thousand miles above Mars we found we could dispense with our condensers, and actually sustain life with the atmosphere admitted into the *Sirius*. This was encouraging, more so than ever we had even dared to hope; Mars already was beginning to supply every requirement of the children of the Earth!

We now deemed it advisable to reduce our speed somewhat. At a quarter to twelve we could not have been much more than a hundred miles above this new world.

We now climbed out on to the balcony, and peering down into the dark depths, it was apparent to us all that the *Sirius* was over dry land, although a large sheet of water was visible in the distance, shimmering in the moonlight.

In a few minutes more the good air-ship was hovering a thousand feet above the Martial planet, and we began making the few final preparations for our descent upon its surface.

CHAPTER VII.

OUR ARRIVAL AND SAFE DESCENT.

As the *Sirius* gradually descended the last few hundred feet, Sandy was busy getting out the rope ladder; Graham confined his attention to the motors and steering apparatus; whilst on the balcony Temple and the Doctor kept a close watch, the latter on the alert for every possible contingency, and from time to time calling out instructions to Graham for his guidance. We all of us remarked the greater buoyancy of the *Sirius* in the lower Martial atmosphere than was the case in that of the Earth, and our descent was slow and easy in the extreme. In fact, so buoyant had the *Sirius* become, that we had great fears of ever reaching ground at all without assistance from below. But eventually the good *Sirius* settled down through a dense growth of vegetation of some kind, snapping tall tapering stems like straws, crashing through giant reeds like so many grass stalks, and then sinking for a couple of feet into the soft slimy soil of what was evidently a

dismal swampy jungle. Here, at last, the *Sirius* came to rest amidst a forest of mighty stems, whose branches met overhead and formed a gloomy bower above and around it.

We now armed ourselves with our revolvers and hunting-knives before attempting to pass down the ladder, one end of which was already lying on the ground. Each one felt that to Doctor Hermann the honour justly belonged of being the first to set foot on this new world; and, accordingly, he led the way down the steps into the gloom, carrying a powerful electric hand-lamp, followed by Temple and Graham; Sandy, with poor old Rover in his arms, bringing up the rear. The air soon began to have a most remarkable and exhilarating effect upon us all. Each one felt a buoyancy of spirits, a sense of lightness, and an increase of physical strength never known before; these effects we rightly attributed to the specific gravity of Mars, which is so much less than that of Earth. They were intensely exciting moments for us as, one by one, we climbed down the time-and-travel-worn sides of the *Sirius*, fighting our way through the vegetation which clustered around us, until the bottom rung of the ladder was reached, and we felt the ground of a new world beneath our feet. But the country where we had chanced to descend was sullen and uninviting; even the light from the Martial moons, shining so fairly, high up in the dark blue sky, failed to penetrate the dismal shadows of this swampy wilderness; whilst the lurid reflection in the heavens from a distant crater only intensified the horrible scene of gloom.

But amid the shadows and the vapours of this reeking marsh we could see sufficient with our lamp to tell us that we were surrounded by vegetation totally different from anything we had left behind us on Earth. The reeds were stupendous, with fluted and flattened stems, eighteen inches in width, rising straight as arrows from the stagnant water, their crowns lost to view in the night haze, and mingling together far above the roof of the *Sirius*.

The malarious vapours rising from the stagnant water and the rotting vegetation were deadly in their subtleness, and in spite of our ever-increasing excitement and curiosity, Doctor Hermann insisted for our health's sake that we should return to the *Sirius*. A night amidst such poisonous gases might have stricken each one of us down with a fatal fever. It was well that we did so, for before morning dawned the dangers of our position were manifested in various startling ways. Soon, huge banks of

black clouds spread across the sky like shrouds, and drops of rain began to patter on the windows.

"My friends," said Doctor Hermann, "the best advice I can give is that we stay inside the *Sirius* until dawn. Sandy had better prepare us some food; we have not eaten for the past eight hours, and it is of the greatest importance that we take every care of ourselves, for we may have our strength and endurance put to the severest tests in the near future. Besides, this marsh is full of pestilence; we cannot be too careful: and, further, from the closeness of the atmosphere and the look of the heavens, I predict a storm within the next hour or so."

"You are quite right, Doctor," rejoined Temple; whilst Sandy, as became the dutiful servant he was, began to act on the Doctor's wishes, and very soon had spread before us a right royal repast, which bore ample testimony not only to his culinary skill, but to the still ample resources of our larder. A bottle of our best wine was uncorked in honour of the occasion, and we sat down well-prepared to do justice to what Temple called our "triumphal feast."

Convivial and merry was our meal, notwithstanding the dismal surroundings; and so gay and light-hearted did we feel that even the reeking swamp was toasted, for, after all, in spite of its gloom and its pestilential breath, it was the first ground to echo our foot-falls on this new world.

"One more bottle of wine, my comrades," said Temple, as soon as our meal was over, "and let Sandy have a double allowance of whisky to-night. We must inaugurate the termination of our journey in a right festive way."

"What a triumph for Science, for Electricity in particular, we have won!" said Doctor Hermann. "Here's to our continued success, and to the people of Mars, if such there be——"

But before the Doctor could complete his toast the whole apartment was filled with a lurid flash of bluish light, and before we could recover from our surprise the vault of heaven was shaken by an appalling peal of thunder.

"The storm is on us, Doctor," exclaimed Graham, "and to all appearance it is far too close to be pleasant."

A few moments after, another and a brighter flash of lightning lit up the gloomy swamp, and almost simultaneously the thunder bellowed out in a

quick succession of cracking reports, dying away in rumblings and growlings which were tossed from echo to echo in the wilderness. Then down came the rain in a drowning deluge, roaring on the foliage, and churning the surface of the sleeping lake into a torrent of bubbling, boiling foam.

Towards the end of the storm we had another surprise, which filled us with the direst alarm. An exclamation from Temple brought us all to the window of the *Sirius* which overlooked the lake. With blanched face, and eyes fixed intently upon the water, he pointed to the seething pool.

"Tell me if I am mad or dreaming," he shouted in his terror.

ITS HUGE, SCALY CARCASE.

Truly, indeed, his alarm was not without cause, for there, coming slowly from the water on to the shore, and in the direction of the *Sirius*, was the first representative we had seen of animal life in Mars. How shall we attempt to describe this hideous amphibious monster, as it appeared lit up by the almost incessant flashes of lightning? Only its enormous head and forequarters were yet visible—a huge scaly carcase, mapped out with phosphorescent light, a square-looking head with pointed snout, and with two monstrous eyes attached to stalk-like shafts about a foot in length, which in the brief intervals of darkness shone like balls of fire. Raising its head on its long pliant neck, it sniffed the air as if in anger, and then began to crawl out of the pool, yard after yard of its repulsive body emerging, its head nearly reaching the *Sirius* before its tapering fish-like tail was drawn from the water. We could hear the grinding, crunching sound of its scaly body as it was slowly drawn along the swampy ground, and so near had it come to us that we could see a coarse, bushy mane hanging round its lower neck in dripping folds. The hideous reptile, for such we must call it, passed on without noticing the *Sirius*, although we felt its rough, scaly body rub against the sides; and as its hideous, mighty coils disappeared into the gloomy swamp, leaving a luminous, slimy track behind them we could detect huge protuberances like warts along its back, here and there varied with spiky fins, which were from time to time half-raised, as though the horrible creature were about to engage in combat.

"Doctor," said Temple, in his alarm, "if this is a fair sample of the creatures we have come to live amongst, I really think it time we began to think about getting back again. I don't like the idea of such neighbours at all. Besides, we may yet meet with monsters more terrible still, and what is of greater importance to us, we may not escape their notice so easily next time. We should require an army to protect us from such creatures as this."

"Gently, gently, Temple; you are not a naturalist, and cannot be expected to feel my enthusiasm."

No less than nine of these terrible monsters came from the lake during the hour that we watched, and all took the same beaten track into the swamps that the first had followed, and we saw them no more. Temple could scarcely conceal a shudder, as he looked at the now placid water. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "who would have dreamed that such creatures were lying beneath its surface?"

Certainly the Doctor alarmed us, when we heard him coolly bidding Sandy to seek and slaughter these loathsome creatures.

"Sandy," said he, "you must get me one of those serpents to morrow. It will be most interesting to dissect so magnificent a type of the Reptilia. I may not have another such opportunity."

"Na, na, Doctor, I could na do it—I could na do it, mon," he replied deprecatingly.

"Doctor, I am afraid, if you press your request, we shall have Sandy wanting to give us all a week's notice," said Graham, assuming an air of mock gravity as he spoke.

"I dinna want to do anything o' the kind, Mr. Graham."

"All right, Sandy my boy, I'll make a bargain with you," answered Graham, laughing. "If I kill the beastie, will you help to cut him up?"

"Na, na, Mr. Graham, it is na a joking matter. I will ha' nothing to do with it; for as sure as you do, bad luck'll be followin' us. We'd best not meddle wi' the likes o' them."

"Well, Sandy," said the Doctor, "you must have had sufficient experience of me, by this time, to know that I never ask a man to do anything I am afraid to do myself. I spoke thoughtlessly, and will do the killing myself."

By the time these reptiles had passed out of sight, the storm had well-nigh subsided. Sleep was beyond us, the sight of these reptiles alone was enough to keep us awake for a week. We longed, oh, how we longed for the dawn! But more surprises were in store for us, ere that eventful night had passed away.

The awful storm seemed to have stirred into activity the wild beasts of this lonesome marsh, and many curious cries resounded from its depths. Now a muffled yell, or a chorus of loud bellowings would be heard, as if some gigantic creatures were fighting each other to the death. Then more musical calls would break the oppressive stillness—here, there, and everywhere from the thickets they came, but the animals that produced them were invisible in the gloom. Our curiosity was excited to the utmost limits of human endurance.

It must have been about an hour before the dawn when we were terrified, beyond all description, by a crash against one of the windows of the *Sirius*, followed by a moan as of pain, so appalling, so unearthly, that our very blood seemed to curdle with horror. Even Doctor Hermann himself was visibly disconcerted. Perhaps it was owing to the highly wrought state of our nerves, but all of us, for the moment, were too terror-stricken to move. In the Doctor's case the alarm was only momentary, and with intrepid courage he rushed to the broken window, firing a couple of shots from his revolver at some dread shape struggling to enter the apartment. The Doctor was a poor hand with such a weapon; both bullets missed their mark; and before a third shot could be fired, the frightful creature had vanished. Moan after moan was heard; now near, then far away in the distance, sounding more like the voices of tortured souls, than of any material being. In a few moments, another of these mysterious creatures appeared, and this time we watched it approach with rapt astonishment, as it floated through the air in the full focus of the rays from our electric lamps. No creature of Earth possesses such means of locomotion. It looked like a huge dark ball, perhaps six feet in diameter; and as it came towards us, we noticed that it was revolving with enormous rapidity, forcing its way through the air, evidently on the same principle as a screw-propeller in the water.

Graham had by this time regained his self-possession, and, with his rifle in hand, as this monster approached, he said:

"Doctor, shall I fire?"

"Yes, Graham, by all means; but be absolutely sure of your aim before doing so."

Almost before the Doctor had finished speaking, the crack of Graham's rifle rang out; but the animal continued its course, and came with a crash against the *Sirius*. The shot had told, nevertheless, and we heard its body fall through the reeds, and drop with a heavy thud on the spongy ground.

"Well done, Mr. Graham! A splendid shot! He's doon! He's doon!" sang out Sandy at the top of his voice, evidently both pleased and comforted beyond measure, to see that these strange beings we had come amongst were not proof against earthly powder and ball.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STRANGE WORLD.

In the grey dawn of morning the weather began to clear; white fogs hung low over the densest parts of the swamp, but near the *Sirius* the mist lifted, and the leaden-looking sky was visible. We now climbed out on to the balcony, and though nearly surrounded with the giant reeds, we had a fairly good view of the range of snow-capped mountains which extended beyond the lake. With the break of day the tumultuous carnival of the wild beasts inhabiting the marsh came to an end, and their cries gradually ceased. Buried as we were, among the dense, marshy forest, we could not be absolutely certain, but so far as we could judge, the country seemed more open beyond the lake. We had evidently descended just on the outskirts of the swamp, which was apparently connected with the lake, and formed part of a vast plain extending to the mountains. The lowest of these we computed to be about twelve miles away. As we were thus doing our best to make out a little of the country round us, the distant mountain-tops became illumined with the rays of the rising sun. The snow upon their highest summits gleamed like burnished silver in the light, and as the morning broke, the clouds reflected a rosy radiance of rare beauty. The dawn on

Mars was very similar to the dawn on Earth; and as we watched the sunlight leap from peak to peak, and the heavens change from one glorious hue to another, we could have fancied ourselves watching some of the many magnificent sunrises we had seen in the Alps, or on the lofty Himalayas.

It really appeared as though all the animal life of Mars was nocturnal; for, with the break of day, not a trace of a living creature could be seen or heard—all was silent as the grave. The wind had dropped, and not even the feathery crowns of the giant reeds moved; everything was still.

Our future movements were of such importance, that even Dr. Hermann restrained his eager curiosity to examine the strange beast Graham had shot, and which was lying dead somewhere outside the *Sirius*, and suggested that, as soon as we had breakfasted, we should consult together as to what was best to be done.

The meal was quickly over, none of us having much inclination to eat after the excitement of the previous night.

"It is now time that we began seriously to discuss our future movements," remarked the Doctor, rising from the table, and leading the way to the laboratory, whither we usually retired as soon as our meals were over. "There is much for us to consider and decide."

The sun was now well up in the heavens; the sky was blue and cloudless as on Earth; whilst two of the Martial moons could be seen pale and lustreless above us. Their rays were appreciably less powerful and brilliant. While the Doctor and Temple made notes and prepared for departure, Graham went down on to Mars, to search for his game; but he sought in vain. It had disappeared entirely. A few splashes of blood were to be seen on the sides of the *Sirius*, and a small pool of the same marked the spot where it had fallen. Some kind of creature, hunting in the swamp for prey, had carried it off, and we saw it no more. Graham's disappointment was only excelled by the Doctor's; but they consoled themselves by the thought that they would soon obtain other specimens as curious and as interesting. We were all of us eager to get away from the swamp, and as soon as Graham returned, the Doctor gave the order to start.

But the motors sped round to no purpose—the *Sirius* was held fast in the treacherous mud as in a vice, and the force of suction was so great that we

found it would be impossible to move until we had dug out that portion which was buried in the slimy ground. We were, however, too eager to see something of our new world to stay and do this, and we ultimately agreed to set out and explore the country round about on foot.

We armed ourselves with rifles, knives, revolvers, and plenty of ammunition, whilst Sandy carried sufficient food for our needs during the day.

How can we describe our sensations, as one by one we climbed down from the *Sirius*, and, headed by the Doctor, trooped off in Indian file towards the shore of the adjacent lake; stumbling, struggling, and wading through the swampy forest, full of expectancy, and not without a certain amount of dread as to what might befall us in this strange world? Our dog bounded and barked with wildest delight on regaining his freedom; and so noisy did he become that we had to tie him up, and Sandy led him. Any disinterested spectator would have thought us a queer party; and truly we looked so, for somehow we felt as strangers in a strange land, and out of place with all that surrounded us.

Nothing inspired this feeling to so great an extent as the effect which the much lower specific gravity of Mars than Earth had upon us. We felt too small for our new home; and such was the result of this that we were able to perform feats of jumping and leaping that would have made the athletic champions of Earth turn green with envy. Even staid and elderly Doctor Hermann thought nothing of taking a leap of ten or twelve feet; and our heavy, clumsy collie dog, Rover, seemed transformed into a greyhound, so active and light of foot was he. We felt in much better spirits than we had done for years, younger, stronger, more daring, and courageous. It did not take us long to reach the lake, but the prospect disappointed us. Round the shores, as far as we could see, the forest of reeds extended; but beyond the lake, far away to the westward, the country was more elevated and promising. It was vain to attempt to get round the shore through such a swampy wilderness, and, baffled, we had to retrace our footsteps. Before leaving the lake, however, we ascertained that the water was fresh, and of excellent quality.

"We will not be 'done,' Graham, after all," remarked the Doctor. "We will go back to the *Sirius* and get out our india-rubber boat. She will carry the four

of us comfortably enough."

"A capital idea, Doctor; I quite forgot our boat," exclaimed Temple.

We returned at once to the *Sirius* and got out the boat, which we all helped to carry through the reeds to the water. Some little time was spent in putting the various parts together, but when all was finished our little craft looked splendid, and delighted us with her buoyancy and stability.

As soon as all was ready we embarked upon this unknown lake, Sandy and Graham rowing, Temple steering, and the Doctor keeping a sharp look-out generally. Our dog curled himself up under a seat in the stern, and went to sleep. It was some time before we got out far enough to see much of the surrounding country, and when we did so the prospect was by no means an encouraging one. A vast forest of reeds, intermingled with large trees, whose smooth, spindle-shaped trunks we had already examined with astonishment, extended for miles and miles round the margin of the water. All seemed desolate; not a living creature could be heard or seen. A light breeze now began to ruffle the surface of the lake, and this we took advantage of by hoisting our slender mast, and also a small lug sail, which carried us along famously without the fatigue of rowing.

By the Doctor's advice, Temple steered nearly due west, towards the mountains, and as we sailed along the country assumed a more inviting appearance. The dense fringe of reeds gradually became broken, and drier ground was marked by small hills and tall trees, of graceful outline and dense red foliage, which gleamed very brilliantly as the sun shone full upon them. Objects on the opposite shore became more and more distinct, and we were able to detect a great variety of trees and shrubs clothing the sides of the valleys, which extended gently upwards from the lake into the heart of the distant mountains.

We sailed steadily along, the Doctor picking up a large red leaf which was floating on the water as we passed by. It was about eighteen inches long from point to stem, and the same in width, perfectly diagonal in shape. Its tissues appeared much the same as those composing the leaves of earthly trees. Once the enormous flat head of some water-monster peeped above the surface, and sank again. Nothing further of interest occurred until we reached the shore, although Sandy declared that he saw a large bird flying along, but as none of the rest observed it we concluded that he was probably

mistaken. The bed on this side of the lake was much deeper than on the other, and the bottom was rocky. The water was remarkably clear, and we could see many beautiful plants of strange shapes, the like of which we had never seen before, waving to and fro in the crystal depths. Some were like long lengths of blue-green ribbon; others were cup-shaped, poised on tapering stems; whilst others, yet again, were composed of long slender twigs with no foliage, but a bright scarlet ball, about as big as a pigeon's egg, on the extremity of each. A very beautiful little plant, with a light red, scaly leaf, covered most of the rocks on shore, and many of the pebbles which strewn the beach were exceptionally fine and brilliant; some shone like emeralds, and were almost as clear as that gem. Here the Doctor was in his glory, indeed! He fell down on his knees upon the shore as soon as his feet touched dry ground, and absolutely revelled in the beautiful pebbles, as a miser would in his gold, taking them up by handfuls, and dropping them one by one through his fingers. "Temple," he shouted in his enthusiasm, "Temple, these stones are not of Earth; they are NEW; fairer far than earthly riches; more beautiful, more precious than all the gems of Earth combined; for not all of them could purchase one of these!"

The shore where we landed was for some distance inland rough. Beyond the belt of shrubs were groves and forests, extending far up the mountain slopes, and the trees which composed them were truly magnificent. Many were evidently nondeciduous. The foliage of nearly all was dark red; but here and there a smaller tree, with blue leaves and green flowers, stood out in bold relief from the rest. Many of them were loaded with giant-fruit products, hundreds of pounds in weight, and emerald-green in colour, shaped something like gourds. They were extremely acrid to the taste; but a pink berry, about the size of a walnut, on a vine-like plant, was sweet and deliciously flavoured. It would take up far too much of the space allotted by us for this narrative to attempt to describe a tithe of the wonderful and curious types of vegetation we found in this fair land of promise, where everything we looked at was new to our eyes, absolutely new; and our exclamations of surprise and admiration were almost incessant. We felt as dwellers in a country village must feel upon seeing the wonders of a great metropolis for the first time.

But the day was passing on, and at noon we returned to the shore, and rigging up a shelter from the sun with our sail, we made a fire of some

driftwood on the beach, and prepared our meal. Sandy had loaded himself with fruit and berries of various kinds, which he proceeded to distribute by way of dessert; but the Doctor advised us not to eat them until their properties were better known to us. It was hard to resist such tempting, luscious fare when we were hot and parched, yet we left them untouched, wisely or unwisely, and quenched our thirst at the lake.

Whilst enjoying our after-dinner smoke, and discussing the events of the morning, we were startled by a singularly rich and beautiful song, as of a sweet flute, which issued from a bush clothed in bloom just behind us.

"A bird, I do declare!" excitedly exclaimed the Doctor.

"And one of exceptionally sweet song, too," answered Temple, both rising to their feet as they spoke.

But nothing could be seen; and for several minutes the delicious music was hushed.

"Doctor, it is na bird at a'; it is a butterfly! See, there he is!" shouted Sandy, pointing, as he ran, to a small bush twenty paces ahead.

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed the Doctor, in astonishment, "I believe Sandy is right!"

And right he was, for certain; for this singing insect fluttered lazily along, to a bush much nearer to us; and, poising on one of the topmost blooms, again warbled as sweetly as before.

"Truly, indeed," said the Doctor, in amazement, "we have reached a world of anomalies! To all intents and purposes that is a butterfly, yet its structure must be entirely different from any insect on Earth, or known to man."

Others now appeared. Their wings were of various colours and shapes, denoting, probably, several species; but one with light turquoise-blue pinions was by far the commonest.

Soon after we saw the insects, a flock of white birds, about the size of a thrush, appeared, flying quickly along the side of the lake in a very swallowlike manner. One of them Graham was fortunate enough to shoot; and we were surprised beyond measure to find that it was without legs, and pouched, like the Marsupalia, or kangaroos of Earth. In the pouch were several pinkish eggs; and we inferred that this creature hatched them as it

carried them about the air, requiring no nest for the purpose. It was clothed in plumage more like scales than feathers, the filaments being similar to fine shreds of horn.

Many other species of these curious legless birds, and singing insects, were seen by us as we strolled along the shore. Just, however, as we were about to embark, a magnificent animal trotted down one of the valleys to the lake, to drink. It was certainly three times as big as the largest elephant, though slim and graceful of build as a fawn. Here all further resemblance ceased. It was something like a greyhound in appearance, but the ears were broad and very large, and the dark eye exceptionally prominent. Its tail was long and bushy; its hoof uncloven, and the colour of the skin was as dull copper. We were too much lost in admiration of the beautiful creature to shoot it down, and before we had recovered from our surprise, it bounded away towards the mountains with amazing speed. We subsequently counted eight more of these animals, grazing on the patches of red "grass" on the lower hills.

"Respecting the inhabitants of this new world," said the Doctor; "really, its fauna and flora, so far as we have observed them, are simply grand."

"Bar the serpents, Doctor," said Graham.

"More than satisfied," said Temple, "I am charmed and delighted, and now share your conviction that a higher type of animal still remains to be discovered. You know to what I refer—creatures of intellect, formed in the image of God, like ourselves."

"We had best now return, my friends. By the time we reach the *Sirius* the sun will be near setting, and it is not wise to pass through the swamp at dusk, after what we have already seen of its inhabitants," said the Doctor.

Laden with a great variety of specimens, we made our way to the boat, and were soon rowing across the lake again towards the swamp. The breeze had died away, so that our sail was useless, and we had to pull the entire distance. The sun was sinking behind the range of mountains we had just left, as we stopped and began to pack up our boat; and by the time we had got everything inside the *Sirius*, night had fallen.

Tired and hungry, we were glad to reach our "home" again, and as soon as we had eaten we all of us retired to rest, and passed a peaceful, uneventful

night. If the monsters of the swamp were noisy, we did not hear them; not one of us woke until the sun had long risen.

After breakfast, we commenced our task of digging out the *Sirius* from the mud. The Doctor was busy preserving specimens, dissecting others, and writing his scientific journals. Six hours' hard work sufficed to get the *Sirius* clear enough to start. We also took the precaution of putting a considerable amount of ballast into our air-ship, to replace the stores which had been consumed, so that we should not again experience any difficulty in descending. By the time all this was done the afternoon was well advanced, yet so weary of the swamp were we, that we decided to leave it at once.

"We cannot do better than make for the beach where we landed this morning, on the other side of the lake, ascending about ten thousand feet as we cross. That will enable us to survey a good many miles of country," said the Doctor to Graham.

Slowly we soared away from the marsh forest, high over the reeds, up into the pure, fresh air of heaven, where from the balcony we could view the land and water below us. The swamp was enormous, many, many square miles in extent, and beyond it appeared a dense forest of quite a different kind of vegetation. The country, as far as we could see, from the base of the mountains to the shores of the lake and beyond it, was much the same throughout its area as that which we had already explored the previous day. Certainly none of it bore the appearance of civilisation—all seemed virgin wilderness, and our hearts sank within us. Beyond the belt of dark forest on the other side of the swamp, we could see the ocean; looking landwards, the highest of the mountains concealed the view.

"Do you think it advisable to go further to-day, Doctor?" asked Graham.

"Well, now we are up so high it will certainly be best to do as much surveying as possible, and then we can discuss our position and future movements to-night. Put us up a few more thousand feet, Graham, so that we may clear these mountains and see what the country is like beyond them."

The scene from above the mountain range was indescribably beautiful. We looked down upon lofty snow-capped peaks, romantic valleys, leaping waterfalls, and slumbering lakes; upon wild and lonely plateaux, glaciers,

and snow-fields; upon steep cliffs, gentle slopes, cone-shaped summits, and others like unto pyramids, pinnacles, or spires. We went right over the yawning crater, and looked down into the smoke and fire which rose gently from its hidden depths, now calm and peaceful as a sleeping child. We saw the birthplace of rivers, high up the hillsides, and could trace them from their source to the distant ocean; we noticed the various belts of vegetation growing on the mountain slopes from the lake to the snow-line—but we saw no trace of anything shaped and fashioned as ourselves! Higher and higher we rose, and at last the country to the westward, or behind the mountains, gradually came into view. It was even more charmingly beautiful than the country we had just left behind us—more level, more wooded, better watered, and parts of it apparently under cultivation! Our hearts beat fast within us as we saw what looked like vast enclosures, with long, winding canals running through them; and even more excited still did we become when we distinctly made out a colossal bridge which spanned a deep valley between two hills.

"There! there are the signs of a higher intelligence at last; the brute creation does not reign supreme, as we feared," said Temple, bursting into tears, and unable to control his feelings longer.

Graham waxed eloquent over the engineering qualities of the bridge, the enormous width of its span making the mightiest bridges of Earth seem but as toys in comparison.

We were too far away (quite thirty miles) to see much detail, but we could distinguish, as Temple spoke, two vast cities, one on either hill, joined together by the bridge, with palaces and halls and lofty towers, apparently of white marble, glistening in the rays of the setting sun. Upon seeing this wonderful city, Doctor Hermann very wisely gave the word to descend as quickly as possible, in case we might be observed. In five minutes we were safe on the ground again, the *Sirius* snugly hidden in a beautiful grove of trees and underwood on the banks of a stream, in a spot where we should at all events be able to retreat and readily conceal ourselves in case of emergency.

"Yes, Temple, your fears were all unfounded," answered the Doctor. "Mars is inhabited by reasoning beings. I assure you it is most gratifying to find the speculations of my early days of study, and the conclusions of more

matured years of experience, turning out to be absolute facts. When on Earth, I used to dream of a new race of intellectual beings, far away out here; to ponder over their pursuits and their appearance; to wonder if they were more highly developed, physically and mentally, than we. Now these strangers are but a few hours' walk away from us; and, if I mistake not, those beings that made and dwell in that fair city yonder are of a higher development even than ourselves. I prophesy their intellect is greater, their beauty fairer, their talents more numerous, their civilization more advanced, or not so much decayed as our own! To-morrow we will seek their acquaintance, and make ourselves known unto them!"

To-morrow! How can we spend the hours that divide us from then! But darkness is settling fast around us, and we must wait in patience the coming of a new day.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MORROW—AND WHAT CAME OF IT!

Never did four human beings await the coming of daylight with such feelings as ours. Not one of us slept for a moment, the livelong night; our excitement was too intense, and the result of our doings on the morrow too momentous. We were up and out of the *Sirius* by sunrise, looking westwards across the undulating expanse of country, to obtain a glimpse of the fair city we saw yesterday; but vain were our endeavours; a group of low hills hid all from view. On a hill about twenty miles to the north of where we stood, however, we saw three mighty domes, the central one being more than twice the size of the others. From the way in which they glistened in the sunlight, we concluded that they were roofed with gold, or some metal unknown to us of the same colour and brilliancy. A large wood that surrounded them hid the remainder of the buildings from sight, but their size appeared to be enormous, dwarfing all earthly structures into utter insignificance.

We started off in the yet early morning, fully armed and equipped for our walk across country to the distant city, to make the acquaintance of its yet unknown inhabitants. That they were beings of noble stature we had not the slightest doubt; for only a race of giants could have reared such a colossal city; besides, the very physical conditions of Mars point to the existence of larger types of life than any now prevailing on earth.

We had not walked more than four miles on our way before we reached country evidently in a high state of cultivation. We passed large enclosures of red "grass," divided by hedges of a cactus-like plant, similar to the one we noticed growing in the swamp. These fields were evidently crops, the herbage being finer and longer than that growing wild on the mountain slopes. There were other enclosures full of a creeping plant, something like convolvulus, but bearing a long narrow pod, full of small bean-like seeds; and in others were bushes laden with fruit as big as melons, and very similar in appearance.

We were walking steadily along a broad kind of pathway between these enclosures, when an exclamation from Sandy caused us to halt, and immediately confine our attention to something which the cautious Scot was looking at on the ground before him.

It was the imprint of feet in the soft, bare ground, and evidently the impressions of a being shod with moccasins, and of mighty stature. As we were all stooping down, intently examining the first absolute traces of the intellectual inhabitants of Mars, we did not notice the approach of the being who had doubtless left these tracks behind. He came slowly along the path we were following—a being—shall we say a human being? for in all his outward frame he resembled ourselves, save that in stature he was a giant, quite nine feet in height. His features were noble-looking, almost like the Egyptians of old, and his skin was wonderfully fair and beautiful. His black beard swept downwards to his breast, and his long bushy hair, of the same tint, was confined simply by a ring of some metal which just encircled the crown of his shapely head. He was clothed in a loosely flowing robe of some soft material, almost like silk, which draped from his neck to his knees, girded at the waist with a broad strap, from which dangled several curious articles of which we knew not the use. His legs and feet were covered with the skins of some beast, curiously ornamented. Slowly but without a sign of fear he advanced towards us, carrying in his hands a long

rod made of some metal. His expression was warlike; we had evidently to deal with no coward; but we could plainly see that his curiosity was most intense.

With the exception, perhaps, of the Doctor, all of us were visibly alarmed at this strange bold and haughty man, and had we not been assured by the calm confidence of our friend we should most certainly have felt inclined either to fight our visitor at once, or make the best of our way out of his presence. There was something uncanny about him. Had he even spoken, the awe and mystery surrounding him would not have been so terrible. But he came towards us in absolute silence; and when about a dozen paces away from where we stood, he paused and watched us intently.

Doctor Hermann, foolishly we thought, hailed him successively in German, in English, and in Latin, but he made no sound in reply. He was examining us minutely, evidently full of confidence in the superiority of his size and strength. He must have looked upon us with much the same contemptuous wonder as the old travellers viewed the race of dwarfs that they assure us inhabit the vast forests of Central Africa. Sandy at last hurled at him a perfect torrent of honest Gaelic, which only seemed to rouse his anger, and he uttered several sounds which were evidently meant for words of warning, in a loud, imperious, but not unpleasant voice. His arm was raised as if in threat towards us, and all of us felt thoroughly alarmed, except the Doctor, who advanced a step towards him with both hands held out as if in greeting. At this he pointed the long rod he was carrying towards one of the curious animals we had previously met with near the lake, which happened to be grazing quietly half-a-mile away, and within a second of time we saw the poor creature leap into the air and drop dead! We heard no report, we saw no flash! This was too much for Sandy, and before we could prevent him his revolver was drawn, pointed at the unknown stranger, and fired once, twice, three times into his stalwart body! At the first shot he screamed with pain, and tried to level his rod at us; at the second he fell to the ground; the result of the third we never learned, for we all turned and fled as if for our lives towards the friendly cover which sheltered the *Sirius*. As we ran behind the welcome shelter of the low hills we noticed several more of these strange beings, hastening from various directions to their fallen comrade; and as we had every reason to dread the deadly weapons with which they were most probably armed, we were glad to reach the wooded country and seek our refuge under the cover of the trees.

With thankful hearts we reached the *Sirius*, finding everything as we had left it. Doctor Hermann was angry beyond all measure with Sandy for his foolishness in shooting without just provocation, and threatened that if he did not keep more command over himself in future, he should not carry firearms at all.

"This, Temple, is a most unfortunate occurrence—most unfortunate for us all," continued the Doctor, after he had finished lecturing Sandy, who was now all contrition, and cursing himself for his stupid blunder. "There is no telling what may happen now; it is impossible to estimate the amount of misfortune this unwarranted attack on a harmless being may bring upon us.

It is folly now to think of visiting that fair city yonder, on foot, as I so much desired."

"I quite agree with you, Doctor; yet, after all, there is some little excuse for poor Sandy. Matters certainly looked threatening; my own hand, too, was on my revolver at the time."

"Well," continued Temple, "all our arguments will avail us nothing now. Regrets are useless; we are in a serious position. Like all Englishmen, we have readily got ourselves into a mess; and let us hope, like our countrymen, we shall display the usual quickness of resource in the time of difficulty and danger, and soon see a way out of it."

"True, true, my dear Temple," remarked the Doctor, regaining his usual *sang froid*; "time is pressing. We may rest assured that this morning's work is well noised abroad, and ere long, there will be a hue and cry after us. Although my remarks may savour of egotism, I can frankly say, I have no fear of any living being on this planet. From what little I have seen of its civilisation, I am confident that we shall, at any-rate, receive justice at the hands of its inhabitants. If a low-born labourer of the field—for such I take this Martial, whom we have slain, to be—can show such courage, and be possessed of a weapon that makes the arms of Earth seem but as the toys of barbarians, in comparison—if, I say, the lower classes of this planet's people are so much in advance of ourselves, then its aristocracy must be gifted with intelligence far higher than aught we wot of; and with such a people we have nought to fear, provided we can make them understand who we are, whence we came, and what is our mission. Let us lose no time in getting away from here; let us visit the city yonder in the *Sirius*, boldly and with brave hearts; and I feel sure we shall be received in a manner worthy of our confidence and our courage."

"Doctor, I am afraid your naturally brave nature makes you feel too sanguine. I frankly own that I am unable to acquiesce with all you say; still, I cannot suggest anything so good as an alternative, and am ready to act on your suggestion. Let us hope all may yet be well," said Temple.

"We could start off elsewhere," said Graham. "The good *Sirius* can carry us to some other part of this Martial world, where we may have better luck with the natives."

"Gently, Graham," rejoined the Doctor; "you overlook the fact that we have nearly worn out our machinery. Everything requires a thorough overhaul; as things are now, I much doubt if the *Sirius* would carry us a couple of hundred miles. I ascertained this before we started this morning."

"As an engineer I ought to have known this, Doctor; but, really, the excitement of the last few days seems to have knocked everything out of me. By all means let us visit the city with what little electric force is still left to us, and take our chance," answered Graham, and his remarks were seconded by Temple.

Our conversation was suddenly interrupted by a mighty blast from what we judged to be some instrument like a horn. It sounded so near that we each sprang up to look, fully expecting that the alarm had already been given and that our hiding-place was discovered. As we cautiously peeped between the trees, whilst standing on the balcony of the *Sirius*, we beheld dozens of this mighty race of people, searching everywhere about the countryside; and another blast from the horn, which sounded much nearer than the previous one, informed us that some at least of our pursuers were coming in our direction, and that the discovery of our hiding-place was but a matter of a very short time. The climax was reached a few minutes afterwards when a black-bearded giant of herculean strength burst through the low underwood, and with a curious unearthly shout as of triumph rushed towards the *Sirius*. Perhaps fortunately for us he carried no rod-like weapon—his sole equipment seemed to be a mighty horn, whose bright and gleaming gold-like coils encircled his body several times!

But he came too late! For ere he could get within twenty paces of the *Sirius* the command was given by Doctor Hermann, and Graham set the engines in motion. We shot upwards towards the sky with great speed, and before our astonished pursuer could recover from his surprise we were a thousand feet above him in the air. However superior to us in their intelligence the people of Mars might be, they were evidently nonplussed at our escape, and appeared to be utterly ignorant of aerial navigation in any form whatever. At least we thought so then, as we watched them gathering into terror-stricken groups below us, and ever and anon pointing to the *Sirius*, now almost at rest four thousand feet above them.

"Doctor, how I wish we could manage to well clean our machinery, and be able to rely upon our electricity for safety. This is beating the enemy with a vengeance," said Graham.

"But, my young friend, you forget that we cannot live in the air; our mission is to make friends with these people, not to shun them; to fraternise with them in the common interests of humanity. Now that we are here, a serious responsibility rests upon each and all of us—the teeming millions of our fellow-men, left behind on earth, will expect us to make the very most of our glorious opportunities, and to carry back to them a full history of the wonders of this new world and new race. 'Advance' must be our watchword, until our work is done; even though our lives are lost in the effort. Recall the words you uttered, Graham, years ago, on that fateful evening, when you solemnly pledged yourself to this mission, nay, even devoted your life to its full accomplishment. Our course is clear; put the *Sirius* up another ten thousand feet, and we will let her head towards the beautiful city yonder. We will come to rest on that elevation above it, and then be guided by events."

The country below us seemed teeming with people, spreading about in all directions; and dense bodies of what looked like troops, could be distinguished coming from the city in the direction of the place where the *Sirius* had rested the previous night. Evidently these people had some very rapid means of communication, one with the other. The entire district appeared to be thoroughly aroused, and the commotion was evidently increasing each moment. That we were seen was manifest—thousands of upturned faces told us that the *Sirius* was the centre of attraction, and every movement was keenly noted. We had now a much better view of the three glittering domes; they appeared to be the roof of some magnificent temple, whose walls seemed of white marble; but the dense growth of trees round the entire edifice, still concealed much of its rare beauty from our gaze.

Just as we came over the outskirts of this wonderful town, the *Sirius* received a terrible blow from some missile, which made her quiver from top to bottom, and we quite expected that we were about to fall to the ground. Had the projectile struck us fairly, nothing could have saved us; but by good fortune it glanced obliquely along the sides of the *Sirius*, and spent itself in space.

"If I mistake not, that has been fired at us from the city below; but what the force was that hurled that bullet so high, and with such marvellously accurate aim is unknown to me, for no explosion accompanied it," said the Doctor, with rather a disconcerted air.

"It is time we descended of our own free will, Doctor," answered Temple, "otherwise we shall be brought down as ignominiously as a winged hawk, and there will then be a speedy end to us and our projects."

We were now directly over the city. And such a noble city, too! The buildings were all of colossal grandeur, the streets wide, and at right angles; no smaller houses mingled with the rest—all were uniformly grand, though the variety of the architecture prevented the slightest monotony. There were several magnificent buildings which we concluded were palaces or seats of government, on the larger of the two hills on which the city rested, and some of these were surrounded by gardens. The top of each hill had been levelled, and the bridge between them was a superb structure, quite half a mile in width, and perhaps three miles in length! What surprised us beyond everything was the total absence of conveyances, or of any kind of beasts of burthen whatever in the spacious thoroughfares, which were crowded with people alone.

"What palaces! What domes! What halls and towers! What streets!" shouted Graham, carried away by his admiration for the architects and engineers who had planned and reared them.

After earnest consultation we decided to descend at once, choosing a vast open square before one of the largest edifices, but which appeared to be deserted of people, as the exact spot. Slowly we dropped through the air. Nearer and nearer to the ground we came, each moment the magnificence of the city increasing as our eager scrutiny became closer. One thousand feet more! Five hundred! One hundred only left! Not a living creature in view! Our hearts beat fast; our excitement became agony in its intensity. The courtyard seemed paved with precious stones of every hue, as large as ostrich-eggs; certainly no common stones of Earth are like them, and none known to man, even the most rare, so large. Curious plants and trees grew in well-kept beds; fountains of perfumed water shot like crystal rockets to the sky! All this, and more, we noted in the short time that we were descending the last few feet; but ere the *Sirius* could touch the ground, a

thousand stalwart warrior-giants rushed out from every side! In an instant we were the centre of an excited frenzied throng, and our lives were apparently not worth another moment's purchase!

CHAPTER X.

CAPTIVITY.

As may naturally be inferred, the language spoken on Mars is totally different from any uttered by either of the civilised races on Earth. We, of course, were ignorant of this dialect spoken on Mars, and were unable to understand what was said to us at the time of our capture, or what the Martials were saying to each other. But we were amazed to find how easily their language could be acquired, and in a very short space of time we were able to converse with this new people. Curiously enough, on the other hand, the Martials found great difficulty in mastering any of the languages of Earth; and we were able to try them with Latin, with Greek, Hebrew, German, French, Gaelic, and English; and it was not for many weeks that even the higher classes of inhabitants acquired even a smattering of the latter tongue.

For several moments it seemed as though our fate was sealed, as the gigantic troopers closed round the *Sirius* with fierce and angry gestures, some of them trying to climb up the sides and reach us as we stood in fear and trembling, looking down upon the surging throng from our station on the balcony. Three words which were uttered incessantly by the crowd of soldiers, we were able to distinguish from all the rest of the tumult. They were, as near as we can express them, "Yan ye bo," which being translated into English means "Beings from the sky." Angry shouts of "Emi, emi, tat ya mos" filled the air, and these words we afterwards learned signified "Slay, slay them at once."

Fortunately for us, our situation on the balcony, above the heads of the soldiers, gave us a momentary respite, and before they could find means to drag us from our refuge, a Martial of commanding presence forced his way

through the throng, scattering the troopers to the right and left, and with loud voice uttered the word "Etoba" several times. This was evidently a command, for the soldiers withdrew several yards from the *Sirius* at once, and formed a cordon round us, silent and motionless as though on parade.

All through this trying time, Doctor Hermann stood bare-headed on the balcony of the *Sirius* with hands and arms outspread, endeavouring to inspire the Martials with confidence, and to convince them of our peaceable intentions; but we fear his supplications and his signs were thrown away. Revolver in hand, Temple and Graham stood by the Doctor, at whose urgent entreaty they were persuaded to put up their firearms and face the situation calmly. Sandy, amidst the confusion, disappeared into the *Sirius*, terror-stricken as we thought, but he soon returned, armed with a mighty sword he had brought with him concealed in the *Sirius* unknown to us, and with which he assured us an ancestor of his had fought.

By the time order had been obtained, we could see vast numbers of people crowding up to the square from all directions, and pressing forward to the lines of soldiers, eager to get a glimpse of what was taking place. Keen as was our anxiety, we did not fail to notice the splendid physique of the inhabitants of this wonderful city, the variety in their dress, and the marvellous beauty of the female Martials. The soldiers were clad in tightly-fitting green tunics, below which was a kilt-like dress, reaching to just above the knee. Their muscular limbs were bare, but their feet were shod in high, tightly-fitting laced boots, and each was armed with a long tube of brass. Their heads were encased in what looked to be massive iron helmets. We had not time to notice much, had our excitement permitted us to examine these things in detail, before the commandant stepped up to the *Sirius*, in front of his troops, and bade us descend and yield ourselves into his custody.

"It is very evident that we are about to be taken prisoners," said the Doctor. "We had best submit to the inevitable, without any show of resistance. Force will only incense these people against us; calmness may disarm their suspicions, and ensure us kindly, perhaps even friendly, treatment."

"I don't like the look of things at all, Doctor," answered Temple, "but I am consoled with the thought that we have escaped from perils infinitely more terrible than this."

"We will stick to our revolvers, if we can," said Graham, pocketing his nickel-plated "bull dog" as he spoke. "I, for one, am not going to be slaughtered in cold blood without a fight for it."

"I see no objection to our keeping these arms by us, in case of direst need; but my last advice is to keep calm, to keep calm," answered the Doctor, with great emphasis on the latter word.

Further conversation was impossible, as the officer who had bidden us come forth was beginning to show signs of impatience at our delay.

"Beings from the sky, I, Kaosp, Captain of the King's troops in the City of Edos, command your immediate surrender to me, so that you may explain yourselves to His Majesty's rulers, and inform them from whence ye came and your business here. Delay, or resistance will be visited with instant death."

This seemed language of dreadful import to us, and without understanding a syllable of it, we dropped the ladder from the door, and, headed by the Doctor, climbed slowly down to the ground, the eye of every Martial standing within view being fixed upon us with the keenest attention. Three at least of our little party looked like dwarfs as we stood before the Hercules who had bidden us surrender ourselves to him; but Graham suffered little by comparison with this giant. Erect and defiant he stood before his captor, inch for inch almost as tall as him, broad and well-set in proportion, his muscular arms folded across his massive chest, his clear grey eyes scanning him curiously from head to foot. We could see that Graham had created a favourable impression, and for that we were thankful. We stood in line before the poor old *Sirius*, and awaited the next move in this singular scene.

In a few moments the commander (Kaosp, we will call him for the future), addressed some words to his troops, and then a dozen warriors stepped out from the ranks and formed an escort round us: a dozen more surrounded the *Sirius*. Kaosp then placed himself at the head of his soldiers, and gave the word to march. Surrounded by the troops, we wended our way towards the noble palace across the square, the lines of soldiers opening and making a passage for us as we advanced. We passed under a lofty archway, went up a flight of steps, and then entered a magnificent hall with a domed roof. Here all the guards remained behind, save two, and they and their leader escorted

us across the marble floor to another archway, which led into a smaller hall. Crossing this, we reached a door which opened automatically as we approached, and after going up a flight of steps, we reached a wide corridor. Along this we walked until we came to another door, which opened in the same mysterious manner, and we were ushered into a large apartment, the door closing behind us at once, and we were left to ourselves.

"Beggin' your pardon, Doctor, but this is what I call a shabby way to receive such distinguished visitors as the likes o' we. Just to be popped in here like snared birds in a cage; after comin' all this way, too. Bother tak' sich hospitality, says Sandy Cam'bell."

We were too much absorbed in thinking over our future, to take any heed of Sandy's remarks; and before we had time to form any definite plans, the door of our prison was thrown open, and Kaosp appeared with two guards, and beckoned us to accompany them.

"Once more, my friends, let me implore you to keep cool," the Doctor hurriedly whispered as we were marched away.

We were conducted along vast corridors and through many doorways before we reached the entrance of a magnificent hall, where evidently the King and his ministers were assembled in state awaiting our arrival. The splendours of this building are beyond the power of any description. So suddenly did we find ourselves surrounded by the glitter and pomp of this brilliant gathering, that for several moments we stood still in utter amazement, bewildered, lost, in the glorious scene before us. We heard as in a dream the blast of what seemed a thousand trumpets heralding our approach, and as in a dream were conducted to a small raised platform in the very centre of the vast assembly, directly facing the King and his court. The hall was filled to overflowing with male and female Martials (perhaps we ought to call them men and women), a sea of eager faces greeting our appearance, but the expressions upon those we looked at closely seemed by no means friendly disposed towards us. A hum of intense, yet suppressed excitement broke from the assembled throng as we stepped upon the dais in full view of all.

The day was rapidly drawing to a close, the gloom of coming night beginning to settle on that vast gathering, as the Doctor and his companions in captivity calmly stood, the observed of all observers, awaiting their fate. The half light seemed to increase the magnificence of the spacious building,

by toning down its brilliancy and harmonising the wealth of rare colour that everywhere delighted the eye. The entire dome was covered with a painting of some mighty conflict; the panels of the walls were filled with others, so life-like, so realistic, that we blushed for very shame as we compared in our mind's eye these works of art with the masterpieces of Earthly painters. Noble groups of statuary, carved out of lustrous stones of a flesh-coloured tint, filled us with admiration; urns and vases and quaintly-designed ornaments of wood and metal were arranged with a keen eye for effect on every side; whilst the windows of coloured glass—if glass it was—were superb, both in their wonderful design and harmony of colour. Garlands of foliage, the leaves of fine gold, twined round the marble pillars, bearing clusters of sparkling jewels designed as fruits; whilst before the throne was a fountain of cunning workmanship which cast up from unseen sources jets of scented water, that not only filled the building with a subtle ravishing perfume, but kept the atmosphere cool and refreshing. The audience which filled this hall of splendour was evidently a mixed one. What we took to be those of high degree surrounded the King and his ministers; round them were the guards and minor officers; whilst beyond them again was the populace. The floor rose gradually from the centre, so that every person could see and hear all that took place. The King and his courtiers were one blaze of glittering jewels and gorgeous colour; their robes and vestments being rare and costly to a degree undreamed of on Earth, even by the wildest fancy of man. As in our own world, almost every type of countenance was to be observed among this vast assemblage; yet we could not help remarking that the men of Mars were handsomer as a race than the men of Earth, and that the women of Mars were more beautiful. The old King himself was a grand specimen of manhood; his lofty brow, clearly cut features, long, flowing white beard, and commanding, dignified presence, made him every inch a king. He was surrounded with a host of noble councillors, almost as regal-looking as himself. The younger men were handsome, stalwart fellows—broad of chest and lithe of limb, moustached and bearded, sons of a race evidently at the zenith of its development, both mentally and physically. Our hearts warmed towards them in honest admiration; we felt that we were in the presence of our superiors.

The females at this gathering were remarkable for their exceeding beauty. Edos must be a city of fair women if those assembled here around us were an average specimen of its lady inhabitants. The classic regularity of their

features was superb; their wonderful wealth of hair, their marvellously clear complexion, the rare symmetry of their form, the expression of their beautiful eyes, their commanding presence—all combined in making them attractive to a degree undreamed of by dwellers on Earth.

In all that peerless galaxy of beauty, one magnificent creature with large expressive eyes, and hair of gold, seated close to the King himself, was fairer far than all the rest; her face and figure were sublime! She sat with queenly dignity, with a coronet aflame with jewels upon her lovely brow, gazing intently upon us, stirred to the very depths of her soul with wondering curiosity, and from time to time talking with the aged King, the theme of her conversation evidently being us poor captives; friendless and helpless in the centre of that gazing throng! She was dressed in a robe of delicate purple hue, which, though draped but loosely round her, still displayed in suggestive grace the beauty of her hidden form. Her hair fell in rippling golden tresses far below her waist; her arms, looking white as marble in the deepening twilight, were bare to the shoulder. She sat, or rather reclined on a pile of softest skins, and her feet rested upon a mat of similar material.

We noticed all that we have here described within a very few seconds from the time that we stepped upon the dais. Then suddenly the vast hall was filled with brilliant artificial light, an electric light as far as we could judge, although the source of its supply was cunningly concealed. The effect was magical. The flashing gems and brilliant metals, the statuary, the polished pillars, walls, and floors, the sparkling scented water, the royal troops, the eager throng, formed a scene of unparalleled magnificence and splendour.

As soon as the hall was illuminated as by the light of day, the proceedings began. An aged statesman, amidst breathless silence, rose up from his seat, crossed the floor, and stood opposite to where the King sat in solemn state. Making a low and reverent obeisance, he began to tell the story of our appearance near their city; how we were met by the Martial whose life we took; how we took refuge in the *Sirius*, and, after the alarm had been given, how a search was made and our hiding-place discovered. Then he described our evading further pursuit by soaring up into the air in our curious carriage; how we travelled over the city of Edos, and were fired at by the soldiers; how we eventually came slowly down to the ground again to the square near the palace; and how we had been surrounded and taken

prisoners by His Majesty's troops at last. This address appeared to make a profound impression upon the multitude, and, so far as we could judge, the wrath of the people was exceedingly great. The odds were evidently against us, and each one of us felt—although at the time we did not understand a word of what was being said—that our position was momentarily becoming more serious.

For several minutes after this harangue was finished, the silence was profound. Every eye was turned towards us; the old King's face was grave and stern and troubled. Then, as if to make matters worse, the silence was broken by a loud commotion at one of the entrances to the hall, and the next moment poor old Rover broke through the ring of guards and officers, and leaping and barking for joy, hastened to Sandy's side. At first the direst alarm prevailed, and we noticed the lovely woman by the King's side clutch his arm in terror, for of course our dog was even a stranger animal to the company here assembled than we were ourselves. At a word from Sandy he lay down between us, and, curiously enough, there he was suffered to remain. He had broken out of the *Sirius*, where in the excitement of our departure we had left and forgotten him, and made his way unerringly to his master's side—our only friend.

We afterwards learned that the most serious part of our case was the slaying of the Martial; and as the old minister told this part of his story, one of the guards advanced and pointed with his brass tube to Sandy, indicating that he was the actual culprit. A long and animated discussion took place, in which the King occasionally joined, or was appealed to for his advice. Then a long interval of silence followed, in which the King was evidently considering the facts which had been laid before him. Our hearts beat fast; each one's right hand clasped the revolver concealed within his breast; for each had mentally determined to fight for life unto the bitter end.

"Courage," whispered Dr. Hermann, "and for the love of heaven do not fire until I give the signal. I am going to try and make these people understand a little of our history."

A moment after, the Doctor advanced a few steps towards the King, bowing low and with hands extended as if in welcome. The King watched him curiously, and so did we; for we had not the slightest idea what his intentions were. He then pointed to the open entrance, up into the night sky,

where the planet Earth, by some miraculous good fortune, chanced to be shining with unusual splendour almost alone in the firmament. Then by various signs he attempted to explain how we had come from that particular star; that we were friends, and were anxious to gain their good will. We afterwards learned that the King had comprehended much of what the Doctor had sought to convey; but prejudice ran high, and though personally inclined to befriend us, he was biassed by his ministers.

The Doctor rejoined us once more, and almost directly afterwards the King began to speak. As one man, the mighty throng saluted him and bowed in reverence. Then the multitude, all standing, listening intently to his words, which were as follows:

"Beloved subjects and children: a great event hath happened amongst us, such as hath never been known to you, my people, throughout the long and glorious history of our race. Five strange beings have made their appearance amongst us—from whence they come we know not; who they are, or what their object is in coming here, are also mysteries which we cannot readily solve. By shedding the blood of our poor brother yesterday, we fear these beings are of evil repute, and therefore should be treated as enemies of our race, and die. Their leader, by sundry signs, hath sought to tell us that they come from the star-world Ramos, which they call 'Earth.' If this were true, and their hands were not stained in blood, we would welcome them as brothers, for our wise men have long suspected that beings fashioned like ourselves do dwell thereon. Wisdom cometh slowly, and knowledge is gained by degrees. We will wait and see, my people, if these strangers can prove that what they say by signs is true. We of this world do nothing hurriedly, nor do we take life without just cause. We know not these strangers' tongues; nor they ours. Justice bids us wait. Forty days of grace will we allow them; then here, in this our Hall of Justice, shall they take their trial, and their fate be decided. We have spoken these words with such wisdom as God hath given us, and may He still continue to preserve my people from all harm."

Amidst shouts of approval the King ceased speaking, and as we understood not a word of what he had said, we concluded that our doom was decided. In all that mighty throng we had not one to befriend us. Each face was stern and of forbidding aspect! Yet, stay, there was one whose eyes were even wet with tears at our misfortune, and whose shy, pitying glances steeled our

nerves anew. The lady by the King's side breathed hope in her glances. Her lovely eyes were dimmed with tears for us, and we felt as men once more. Love's all-potent power was working. By what attractive force was the latent spark of compassion ignited in that fair Martial breast? She alone of all that multitude was drawn towards us by a bond of sympathy! Who knows but that, all unconsciously, her spirit and ours may have mingled in that Silent World of shadows, where language, race, or creed form no barrier to friendly intercourse, and where the inconveniences of space, as we experience them in our mortal shapes, are unknown? Who, after this, shall say that lives may not be governed and influenced by beings on other worlds, in other spheres, just as the attraction of one planet can sway another from its course across the sky?

By some subtle influence, we felt reassured; all thoughts of fighting for our lives departed, and when Kaosp and his guards stepped forward, we followed them even cheerfully back to our prison, Rover being allowed to trot behind at our heels.

CHAPTER XI.

LOVE AND JEALOUSY.

Once more we were ushered into the large and lofty room which was to be our prison house. Our guards withdrew, the massive door swung back, moved by hidden automatic action, and we were left to our own sad reflections.

"Oh, for the good *Sirius*, with everything in order!" sighed Graham. "We would soon show these Martial hosts that we are not the poor weak fools they take us to be."

"Tut, tut, Graham," said the Doctor, cheerily. "The game seems against us now, but we may hold the trump cards yet, man! Besides, you have evidently made a conquest," he continued, with sly humour, "and that fair Martial maiden may yet prove a guardian angel."

"Ah, Doctor, sanguine as ever! What a hopeful old boy you are! But I, for one, seem to think we are in a deuce of a hole this time," said Temple, with just a tinge of irritation in his voice.

"I don't see the least call for any such joke at my expense, Doctor," said Graham, smilingly. "But there, it is best to look on the bright side of things."

"Ah, now I was right, after all! Graham, the fair lady who seems so grieved about us, little dreams that she has made a conquest too!"

"Doctor, I feel peckish mysel', and I ken pur old Rover misses his supper. Surely they dinna mean starvin' o' us!"

"All in good time, Sandy; all in good time. Here's a biscuit for Rover, I happened to put in my pocket this morning," remarked the Doctor, good-humouredly.

"Well, Temple," he continued, "we have evidently been respited for some reason or other. That looks as though these strange people were not altogether unfriendly disposed towards us. We must make a lot of allowance for them, after all. Think what a fuss five beings from Mars would make, were they to drop from the sky into Trafalgar Square or Palace Yard, some fine day; and that, mind you, after killing in cold blood an innocent farm-labourer at Ealing or Hendon! Why, all London would be wild with excitement, and a righteously incensed populace would be clamouring for their immediate trial and execution—the evening papers, especially! We take these inoffensive people by surprise, and, really, we are fortunate in having been able so far to conciliate them as to gain time—and that is all we want. We shall be——"

But the Doctor was interrupted by the door swinging open, and Kaosp making his appearance once more, accompanied by the two attendant guards, and five servants bearing dishes. These dishes were of the costliest description, evidently of fine gold, beautifully chased, with curiously-shaped leaves and flowers, the like of which we had never seen before. Each servant bore his dish in silent state, and placed it upon the inlaid marble table, then, bowing low, withdrew. The guards stationed themselves one on either side of the doorway, and then Kaosp advanced, and in his unknown tongue, assisted by signs, conveyed to us the fact that it was by

the King's desire that this food was brought, and that we were to sit down and eat. We began to look on Kaosp almost as a friend; he seemed equally to be kindly disposed towards us, for he smiled and smote his breast—evidently a salute—as he and his guards departed.

"Come, come," said the Doctor, "this is not so bad, after all. We must try and pick up their language, and then I have no doubt, by being able to explain ourselves, we shall be safe with these people. Now, Sandy, uncover our dishes, and let us see on what strange food we are expected to fare."

"Do, Doctor, be serious!" remarked Temple. "What are you going to do?"

"Why, eat, of course, man, since these captors of ours have condescended to supply us with the wherewithal to do so. I must confess, in spite of our bad luck, I begin to feel uncommonly hungry," said the Doctor.

It was all no good, however; Temple seemed thoroughly cast down, and all that we could do or say failed to arouse him from his despondent mood.

Sandy was soon at work, and we found that under each larger cover was a dish divided into compartments, in which a variety of tempting-looking food was placed. We had flesh of various kinds, a liquor like clear soup, fruits, and square tablets of what appeared to be bread, yet very fruity to the taste. The large vase-like vessel contained pure water, and round the lower rim were hung several smaller vases, which were evidently to be used as drinking-cups. Two curious instruments were attached to each dish, which took us some time to comprehend their use. The larger was fashioned something like a spoon, fastened in a carved wooden handle, yet one edge was sharp, and it was ultimately discovered that this served the purpose of knife and spoon in one. The other, a sharply-pointed piece of gold, also set in a handle of carved wood, we took to be a fork, and used it as such. We found the flesh, and one of the dishes of green vegetables, excellent, but the fruit, and what we must call bread, was not very palatable to us.

"I doubt not that if we live here long," remarked Graham, "we shall acquire a taste for the other viands. We can't expect to find everything suited to the tastes and customs of the men of Earth."

"That's true, Graham," said Temple, who was fast recovering his spirits, and beginning to take a more cheerful view of our situation. "It's astonishing

what a difference a little food makes, in a hungry, even in a despondent man."

Our meal was quickly finished, Sandy taking good care that Rover had a plentiful portion of the feast. Then Graham produced his well-filled case, and each one of us enjoyed the precious luxury of a really good cigar—a "Bock" of the choicest quality.

"Make the most of them, my comrades," said Graham, striking a wax taper on the end of his silver match-case. "I have but a dozen, and heaven knows when we may get more. There's a score boxes left, at least, in the *Sirius*, but I suppose they are lost to us for ever."

In the middle of our smoke Kaosp appeared with his guards, and great was his and their amazement to see us smoking. This is evidently an art unknown to the people of Mars—tobacco, apparently, being a plant with which Earth alone is blessed. By some curious action of his, a door in our prison opened and revealed to us another chamber, fitted up with luxuriant couches, soft as eider-down, on which by signs the friendly soldier informed us we might stretch our weary limbs in sleep. We passed into this ante room, and with friendly salute Kaosp withdrew, and the door immediately closed behind him.

It is almost needless to say that we passed a fairly comfortable night, yet we deemed it wisest to keep watch by turns, in case of surprise. The Martial moons shone down through the windows of our prison with great brightness, two of them being visible together, and the planet Earth (now much lower on the horizon than when we were in the Hall of Justice) looked like Venus, as we often see her when fairly placed in the sky of our own world at home.

It is unnecessary here to chronicle all the monotony of our confinement. One day passed much as another, so far as eating, drinking, and sleeping were concerned.

We saw a great deal of the commander, Kaosp, and from him we began to learn the Martial tongue. The Doctor possessed a marvellous aptitude for acquiring any new tongue on Earth, and this served him in good stead on the planet Mars. After a week's intercourse with Kaosp he was able to converse in a broken sort of way, in three weeks he had mastered sufficient

for all ordinary purposes. Temple found it more difficult; Sandy only picked up a few words and phrases from his master, but Graham proved himself an apt pupil, and was almost as good a conversationist as the Doctor, in even less time.

From Kaosp we learned much. He was the only one who acted as our jailor. We learned that the King had commanded him to teach us their language, so that we might be prepared to explain ourselves and our mission to him and his ministers at the trial, which he assured us was to take place in forty days from the time of our capture. We also learned that the beautiful being who sat near the King, in the Hall of Justice, was his own daughter; that her name was Volinè; that she was her father's idol and his people's pride. Many startling facts did Kaosp tell us concerning his race. How their span of life averaged five hundred years, which, as the year of Mars is twice the length of Earth's, would be a thousand years of our time! How war was unknown amongst them; one king and one government ruling all civilized beings; how some parts of Mars were inhabited by savage tribes and semi-human beasts; how their armies were kept up for protection against these uncivilized races, and for Court pageantry; and also how one universal language prevailed. He also told us, among other things, that this stranger world was but thinly peopled, its inhabitants increasing very slowly, the results of a marriage rarely producing more than two or three offspring. That one of the most terrible scourges which troubled the Martial world was the almost universal loss of memory that broke out like a plague from time to time, and that owing to this the people were exceedingly careful in keeping records of their pursuits, history, and progress. From what we learned from Kaosp, respecting our preliminary examination in the Hall of Justice, we concluded that when our trial did take place we should be able to vindicate ourselves and make friends with these people. So that we looked forward to the event with eager interest, being most anxious to regain our liberty and explore this strange world to our hearts' desire.

We also learned from Kaosp that Volinè, the King's daughter, had taken a great interest in us, and had deigned to make numerous enquiries about us from him, he being granted an audience each day, to inform her of whatever portion of our history he had been able to learn. The King himself was also eager to know how his captives fared, but never once did he come to see us in person.

On the tenth morning of our imprisonment, Kaosp brought startling news. Nothing less than that Volinè—Volinè, the King's proud, beautiful daughter, was coming to visit us, in our prison, some time during the day. He told us how she had besought him to let her see us; how he had tried to dissuade her; and how, ultimately, she had commanded him to take her, and that he had not dared to disobey her wish.

We were all full of expectant curiosity. Attendants came, and prepared our large room for the unusual visit; and Sandy's pocket dressing-case—his inseparable companion, even in captivity—was in great requisition by us all; for each of us felt it incumbent to make himself as presentable as possible to our fair and distinguished visitor.

"VOLINÈ."

She came. The day was nearly spent; the sun, in a sea of yellow radiance, was just about to sink behind the hills, as our prison doors were thrown open, and Kaosp, saluting respectfully, with helmet in hand, ushered Volinè and her attendant maidens into our presence. We have already alluded to her marvellous beauty, as we saw her reclining by her father's judgment-seat; but far more did her charms impress us now, as she swept, with all queenly grace, into our apartment, with head held high, and flowing golden tresses, mantling over her glorious bust and shoulders, and falling in silky coils below her waist. Her outer dress was polished black—a loosely-fitting robe, girdled at the waist, and which clung in ravishing folds to her stately form. A diadem of glittering purple stones, like diamonds, encircled her brow, and her robe was fastened across her left shoulder by a jewelled buckle of fabulous richness. Though of such commanding stature, she was grace itself; not a part of her magnificent figure out of proportion with the rest—a woman, yet a goddess, too. Beauty personified! Her lovely violet eyes gave an incomparable expression of saintly beauty to her countenance; and yet there was nothing meek or humble there; fire, and passion, and unbending will, lurked deep down in their purple, dreamy depths. No being in female form, whether human or divine, could have appeared more lovely, as Volinè stood, surrounded by the subdued golden glory of the setting sun, which poured in at the window, and threw a halo round her. A murmur of

admiration involuntarily burst from each one of us, as we stood, in rapt astonishment, gazing upon the fair being before us. Then we each bowed low and respectfully, as she sank into the pillowed seat which had been provided for her. In truth, it was an impressive scene. Two Martial maidens stood on either side, carrying little golden vessels, suspended by chains of the same metal, and containing a subtle perfume, which soon pervaded our chamber with its sweetness. Two other maidens bore long, tapering, white wands in their left hands—in their right hands they had bouquets of rare and curious flowers.

"Strangers," she commenced in a voice that was singularly sweet and musical—"for your names I know not—I, Volinè, daughter of the King, give you greeting. I have bidden our trusty soldier Kaosp conduct me hither, so that mine eyes may see that it is still well with ye, for I feel an interest in your fate. My ears are open to any complaint, which perchance ye may wish to make concerning your treatment in this our palace, since my royal father and his councillors, in their great wisdom, commanded that ye be held prisoners here. We dwellers in the city Edos are not wanting in hospitality to the stranger; but ye are not our people, not of our world; we know ye not, still, Volinè is your friend."

Doctor Hermann advanced and kissed the white, ring-decked hand extended towards him, and did his best to convey our gratitude to the generous girl; telling her that we were friends, fashioned in the same creative mould as her own race; and that we came from the star which is known as Ramos, but to us, its people, as "Earth"; that we had come to study this new world of hers, and to take back our information, if we were spared to do so, to our fellow-men.

John Temple was then commanded by Volinè to come forward and salute her, a mark of royal favour of which he was not slow to avail himself, as what man would not when the donor was so ravishingly beautiful as she! Then Sandy was called for, and bidden to bring Rover, too. Volinè was deeply interested, and asked many questions, through Kaosp, concerning the Scotsman and his dog.

Volinè's voice was distinctly less commanding in its tone, even tender, when with some slight hesitation she asked that Graham might be presented to her; and as he came forward and pressed her hand to his lips for a moment,

we all noticed a blush steal over her lovely face. As a special mark of her favour, she bade one of her attendant maidens hand to him the flowers she was carrying. Graham already was, evidently, held high in her esteem. He was so utterly confounded by such an unexpected mark of royal favour that, beyond kissing the hand held out to him, he was unable to utter a word of gratitude, of compliment, or thanks. Very soon after this the interview came to an end, and Volinè with her attendants withdrew, leaving us to recover ourselves as if from some delicious dream. We had had no feminine society for years, and if the Doctor and Sandy did not miss it, certainly Graham and Temple did, and appreciated the visit of this peerless maiden to the uttermost.

Graham had to run the gauntlet of the Doctor's and Temple's chaff over Volinè's very marked notice of him; but for the first time since we left Earth he failed to enter into the spirit of our jokes, and every now and then we caught him as though engaged in deep and earnest thought. The magic spell of a first love was beginning to work within him, and from this time forth he would never be the same man again!

"Come, come, Graham, my boy," said Temple on the following day, as the two sat together after our morning meal; "what is the matter with you? Why so melancholy? Surely, Volinè's is not the first pretty face you have seen?"

"Mr. Temple," answered Graham, "your last stray shot has hit the mark. No woman on Earth, you know as well as I, is so incomparably beautiful as she. Volinè is a goddess; the soul of Beauty! Would any fellow, especially situated as I am, fancy free, in the pride of early manhood, escape from such seductive attractions unscathed? From the moment that my eyes first fell upon her, I became conscious that I had found my ideal of female beauty at last—found it, alas! under circumstances which admit of no hope, however remote, to become ultimately its proud possessor. I have tried to conceal my feeling from you all; but Love ever betrays itself. She has filled my thoughts by day, and my dreams by night. Yes, I love her! and it is at least consoling to be able to confess my secret to such an old and tried friend as you. It relieves my feelings in some measure to tell them to another who can show some sympathy."

"Why, Graham, you must be hard hit indeed! But your chance is not by any means a hopeless one. From what we can see, Volinè is certainly interested

in us, and in you particularly so."

"But look at the differences of our race and station—ah! and my position, too, a prisoner, whose very life is threatened," Graham sighed.

"All the more need for you to put matters in their best light. Go in and win, man. By doing so, you may gain your heart's desire, and save us from death. Volinè is all-powerful. Her word is second to the King's, and she is his only daughter. She looks upon you with decided favour already; and when once you get that far with a woman, the rest is easy—it is certainly so with the ladies of Earth; and if we believe in Doctor Hermann's theory of Universality, the maidens of Mars must be made of much the same material," answered Temple, laughing.

"What you say, Mr. Temple, certainly puts matters in a different light. That flickering phantom men call Hope, once more appears before me and bids me follow; but whither she may lead me is very doubtful."

"I say, Temple and Graham, you two appear to have a very serious topic for your conversation this morning," said the Doctor, rising from his seat at the other end of the room, where he had been busy writing memoranda in his pocket-book.

The Doctor was here interrupted by a visit from Kaosp, who spent the remainder of the morning with us, helping us to acquire the Martial language.

In the afternoon we had another visit from Volinè and her maidens. Her attention to Graham became even more pronounced, and she never seemed to tire of hearing him tell to her the story of Earth. Indeed, so much did she appear to enjoy his company, that the Doctor and Temple felt completely *de trop*. The Doctor appeared annoyed at Graham for encouraging this flirtation; but Temple was secretly pleased, for he saw in it a possible escape from captivity.

That night Graham retired to rest earlier than usual, pleading a headache for excuse. We now had complete use of the two apartments, thanks to Kaosp, the door separating them having been made to open and close at our will. The Doctor and Temple remained up, discussing one thing and another, until a late hour, the conversation eventually turning to the subject of Volinè and Graham.

"Doctor, I think it is rather a mistake on your part to show such an aversion to Graham's conduct with Volinè. You were the first to express an opinion, and even to hint that this girl might be of service."

"How so? It's bound to end in trouble, not only to him, but to us. And as for the latter part of your remarks, why, it was only a silly joke on my part."

"I differ from you, Doctor. This woman is all-powerful here. The King may govern his people, but his daughter governs him; although he may not know it—what man ever does? And if we can once gain her good word, say even through her betrothal to Graham, we are absolutely safe!"

"All very well; all very well, Temple, if things would turn out so; but when do things turn out exactly as we want them? There is much to be said on the other side of the question. Kings have peculiar ideas as to rank and station; princesses, even in the nineteenth century, may not choose their own partners; at least, as far as our world is concerned. I dare say the King has his own views respecting his daughter, and then when this foolish affair becomes known, as it surely will, we shall only incur a still larger amount of royal anger than we do at present. It is too risky a business, and I will be no party to it. Pray let us drop the subject, Temple; the hour is late, and we had better go to rest."

"As you will, Doctor, but as sure as I am sitting here I am convinced that a love affair between Graham and Volinè is our only chance."

"We shall see, Temple. It is playing a dangerous game with our own lives as well as his own, and I am just as certain that it will end in disaster."

Volinè's visits became more and more frequent. Rarely a day passed now that she did not either come in person, or send one of her attendant maids with flowers or fruits for the captives, but these gifts were really meant for Graham alone. She exercised her royal prerogative and showed her marked preference for him in many ways. We were also allowed more liberty, presumably through her intercession, and were now even permitted to walk for a short time each day in an enclosed garden below our prison windows. This was a great boon, as the close confinement was beginning to tell upon us greatly, seasoned as we were to the lack of exercise through our long sojourn in the *Sirius*.

We had been in prison five weeks, when the love affair between Graham and Volinè assumed a more decided phase. Volinè and he were lovers; more to each other than either thought or knew. Fierce and uncontrollable love was smouldering in each heart, requiring but some accidental spark to set the whole aflame. This was not long in coming. A secret meeting was arranged between them. Kaosp being Love's ambassador, he conveyed the welcome news to Graham that Volinè wished to see him in the grounds. Needless to say, the Doctor was highly displeased at this; but being in the minority he had the good sense to let matters take their own course, satisfying himself by warning Graham of the risk he ran.

Kaosp, too, showed some reluctance to be a party to this meeting. He feared discovery, and the King's anger; but pressure had evidently been put upon him, and as the dusk of evening deepened, he came, and secretly conducted Graham to the garden below. Graham must, of necessity, tell this portion of our narrative in his own words:

"I followed Kaosp, at his bidding, down the silent, deserted corridors, and at last felt the cool, refreshing night air beat against my face, as we passed under an arched gateway of the palace, into the open grounds. Here he left me, telling me to keep along a narrow pathway, until I came to an arbour where I was to wait until Volinè joined me. The night was gloriously fine; the Martial moons were beaming in a cloudless sky; the stars scintillated sharp as swords in the heavens; the far-away Earth shone with a dazzling fairness—the star of the evening. Flowers threw off delicious fragrance, though I could not see them; here and there a tall, tapering tree, towering far above the lower vegetation of this wondrous garden, shone out clearly against the green-hued sky; whilst distant fountains sang their soothing song. Oh, how can I express the expectant rapture that filled my soul, as I watched and waited for my darling! With leaden-flighted wings the moments dragged along; and yet she came not. Was all a dream? If so, oh God! then let me dream for ever! for the suspense of waiting for Volinè in that garden fair would be Paradise, compared with the pain of awaking and finding that all had vanished with my opening eyes.

"Soft, yet distant footsteps at last fell upon my eager ears, and she for whom I waited came stealthily along towards our trysting-place. We met as lovers of long standing, even though no single word of love had passed between us; the kiss I reverently pressed upon her white, upturned brow, was the first

I had ever given her. But the language of love is universal—neither race nor dialect forms a barrier to the communication of its sweet secrets one to the other.

"Volinè, beloved,' I whispered, trembling with joy. 'You, for whom I have waited so long, have come to me at last!'

"Oh! man of Ramos, I am so happy to be with thee,' she answered, as I drew her gently within the shelter of the arbour, and sat down by her side.

"Nay, Volinè, will you not call me "Harry"? I ask it as a royal favour.'

"But "Harry" is not thy name. Still, to please thee, I will grant thy request. "Harry!"—"Harry!" is much prettier, too; I had not thought of that.'

"But I had, Volinè, and have been longing to hear my name fall from your sweet lips.'

"I fear, Harry, that I shall incur my father's anger in coming thus. I have dared his wrath, because I like thee and thy companions much, and because I would save thee and them from all harm. Now tell me all concerning thyself, for my soul is curious to know. Tell me, Harry, more of that mystic world from whence you came. Are the women of that world more fair, more beautiful than we? Doth no maid of Ramos hold thy heart in bondage? Hath not that power you tell me the sons and daughters of earth call Love, yet had no resting-place in thy soul?' And as she spoke these last words, Volinè laid her head upon my breast and gazed up into my face with her radiant love-lit eyes, as though she would read the innermost depths of my soul.

"Ah! Volinè, Volinè, of a truth I tell you no woman has yet moved my heart like you have done,' I answered, gazing down into her peerless face, my pulses thrilled by the magnetic touch of her soft white hand resting trustfully in my own, and by the vision of her marvellous beauty. Her breath intoxicated me with its warm, rich fragrance; her throbbing heart against my own filled my senses with the wild delirium of passionate ecstasy.

"Volinè,' I whispered—'Volinè, the maidens of that Earth Star yonder, glimmering serenely fair in the evening sky, are good and pure, and with no mean measure of beauty—even, Volinè, as you are good, and as you are pure; but such beauty as yours is unknown amongst them. Man only knows of beauty such as yours in the holy legends of his heaven; only the angels of his faith are decked in such graces as are yours; but in his mortal life he

knows them not, save by imagination, and as they have been revealed to him. Such peerless, queenly beauty as yours, Volinè, no mortal man beheld before; such winning grace, such maidenly charm, are what we men of Earth would call immortal and divine!"

"Harry, thy words are sweet unto me, and I feel that they flow from thy heart; but I would have thee tell me more of that Love, by which these men of Earth enslave her daughters. Thy words are full of flattery of my bodily form. Is there nought else to charm thee, and bind thee closer to me, to unite thine immortal soul to mine?"

"My arm stole gently round Volinè's shapely waist without resistance—what bliss!—and I drew her yet nearer to me ere I made reply.

"Volinè, my darling, I know nothing from experience of this Love of which you bid me tell, and of which you are so curious to hear. No woman on that star-world yonder has won it from my heart. Until I saw you I knew not love; but now its fires consume me. Volinè, I love you as never man loved woman yet. For you I would die, and in dying glorify and exalt that love you have inspired! Say, Volinè, that you return my love, and make my happiness complete."

"Harry, thou art dearer to me than all men. Nobles and princes of high degree have sought to woo me; but until I knew thee, I knew not the secret of my own heart."

"Bless you, dear one, for those precious words," I answered, trembling in my great new-found joy. The love that is born of Desire is sweet; but the mysterious power that welds two hearts together, making them throb as one, and bringing perfect harmony to both, is sweeter still. In willing rapture I yielded to the captivity of her arms, which like bonds of ivory whiteness held me. I felt her smooth cheek against my own, burning with modesty and love, and in my new-found happiness I rained hot kisses on her upturned, willing lips. Closer and closer we stole into each other's arms; our sighs mingled together; time for us had now no measure; we lived but for each other; and in silent ecstasy we drank those pleasures that mutual love alone distils.

"Harken, Harry, someone approaches! I shall die of shame to be discovered thus, and my father's wrath will be terrible."

"'Courage, darling; no one shall harm you while I am by your side.' And I gripped with my right hand my revolver.

"But no one came to disturb the measure of our happiness, and the joyful moments, all too fleeting, slipped rapidly away.

"'Harry, now I must bid thee leave me; the hour is getting late, and my absence may be discovered.'

"'Stay, Volinè. On Earth, among my English race, when man makes love unto a woman, he pledges his troth to her with a ring of gold, set with jewels or precious stones, which she, the object of his choice, wears as a token upon the fourth finger of her left hand. So take this ring of mine as our love-pledge; let me place it on your finger—so—and promise me to wear it always there for my sake.'

"'Thy words are strange, Harry, for no such custom is known to us. But what a pretty idea, though! I will take thy ring and wear it as thou sayest. But thou must have one of mine in return'; and as she spoke, Volinè slipped a ring of curious workmanship from her finger, and placed it on my own.

"'Prize it, as thou wouldst prize me; guard it, as thou wouldst guard thy life; for it is a precious talisman, and was given to my mother by Echri, the most sacred of our priests. No man of Gathma dare harm or slay thee, if he knows that ring is on thy hand.'

"'My darling, I will part with it only with my life! Now, one more fond embrace ere you go; and with it I would crave your promise to meet me here again at the same hour——'

"But the sentence was never finished, for a Martial, who by his dress and mien I judged to be someone of high degree, stepped out from the arbour's shadow into the moonlight, saying in a contemptuous voice as he came:

"'So, Volinè, it is thee! Meeting one of thy father's base-born prisoners here, at this hour and alone, to bestow thy favours and to lose thy honour. Edos shall ring with thy shame before another sun hath set, and this evil stranger from the star-world Ramos, and all his foul companions, shall pay with their lives for his insolent temerity this night.'

"With a scream of terror, Volinè tore herself away from my embrace and fled towards the palace, leaving me alone with the stranger.

"Pray, who are you,' I asked, 'to question Volinè's right to meet whomsoever she may please?'

"Who am I? Why should I gratify thy curiosity, thou dirt of Ramos? For little, I would kill thee where thou standest! Get thee back to thy prison cell, and prepare to die, for die thou surely shalt.'

"Dirt, am I, you Martial bully? That insult shall be wiped away at another time and in another place. But by what right do you dictate to her? Breathe her name in scandal to a living soul, and I will thrash you like the cur you are. Nay, more, the lying shame you bring upon her shall be washed away in your own worthless blood.'

"By the right of being her affianced lover,' he hissed, rather than spoke, and turning round, walked quickly away into the gloom.

"Liar,' I shouted, as I watched his retreating form, for a moment half-inclined to shoot him as he went; but prudence forbade such a course, and slowly I returned to the arched doorway, where I found Kaosp anxiously waiting to conduct me back again. Not a word did I breathe to anyone of my adventure in the garden, although I lay awake until the yellow dawn, thinking of Volinè and of my rival, and wondering greatly what the future would bring."

CHAPTER XII.

CONDEMNED TO DIE.

In spite of all the questions put by Temple and the Doctor, Graham resolutely refused to speak about his meeting with Volinè in the garden, and this annoyed the Doctor especially.

"I don't like this want of confidence on your part, Graham," he said, the following day. "Not that I want to pry into a lover's secrets by any means, but our trial, as you well know, takes place in a few days, and I think, as being the leader of this expedition, recognised as such by common consent, and the duty of defending ourselves rightly falling on me, every fact that

might be of service to us should be known to me, as well as any adverse circumstances that may resolve into evidence against us, so that I may be prepared to meet it."

"Doctor," Graham answered, "I admit the justness of your remarks, but am sorry I cannot disclose what took place last night. The honour of the woman I love is involved; but, rest assured, I am quite prepared to defend my conduct if called upon to do so. Believe me, nothing whatever was said respecting our position, nor did I obtain any information likely to be of service to us."

"But did you really see and speak to Volinè last night?" asked Temple.

"I admit that I did. Now, do rest content with that, there's good fellows; and be assured that I am doing the best I can for us all. This ring I wear upon my finger was given to me by her, with the solemn assurance that it was a talisman against evil."

"Fudge, Graham; you must be deep in love to believe such nonsense," said the Doctor, testily.

"Nonsense or not, Doctor, you see I wear it, and what is more, am inclined to believe in its virtues. It may be but a lover's trifle; but some strange instinct, call it superstition if you like, makes me feel that it will yet be of service to us."

"Well, it is my unbroken experience that if discord or trouble comes, a woman is invariably at the bottom of it." And with this parting shot the Doctor walked away to study his note-book.

"What a prejudice the Doctor has against the ladies, Graham!" said Temple. "Why, he is a regular woman-hater. Depend upon it, some girl broke his heart in the long ago."

"It is his only failing, and he is to be pitied more than blamed," Graham answered.

Kaosp entered at this moment. His face wore a grave look, and he was unusually silent. Graham alone guessed the cause; for he had no doubt whatever that what took place within the garden on the previous night was now known to him, although he never alluded to it in any way. He did not stay long, and after enquiring about our health, and various little matters, he

shook each one of us by the hand, as was his custom now every time he went away. This mode of salutation greatly took his fancy, after we had explained it to him, and he seemed proud of his new accomplishment. When Graham's turn to shake hands with him came, he started in surprise, and, drawing back, exclaimed:

"Volinè's talisman! How camest thou by that? Know'st thou the charm of that ring? Dost thou know that he whose finger carries it is safe from every harm that men of Gathma can work? It is a passport from Death itself; for it is the sacred ring of Echri, the most powerful of our priests, before whom the King himself must bow!"

"Good Kaosp, I came by it honestly. This ring was given to me by Volinè herself, and by her its wondrous power was told to me. But these, my companions, ridicule its potency, and refuse to believe in its talismanic properties."

"They know not what they say. I have heard and seen too much of its virtues to scoff at its power. But guard it jealously, for I would warn thee against its loss. No man of Gathma will dare to take it from thee; for if thou hast received it as a gift, that man is cursed who would seek to rob thee of it by force, or yet by stealth."

"Not very likely, Kaosp, for I will part with it only with my life," Graham answered, as the good-natured soldier passed out.

"Well, Doctor, what do you say now?" asked Graham.

"That it's all humbug; and, from the bottom of my heart, I wish Volinè and her ring had been far away before we had the misfortune to visit Edos."

The arrival of our mid-day meal interrupted further conversation; nor did either of us allude to the subject again.

Day after day passed by, Kaosp coming in as usual; but he was reticent, his visits were shorter, and in spite of all that Graham could do, we saw that he evaded his questions. Another thing that perplexed us exceedingly was the absence of Volinè. From the day that Graham met her in the garden she had never been to see us herself, nor had she sent any of her attendants with presents. What had befallen her we knew not. All was mystery. Kaosp would not speak on the subject. This had a most depressing effect upon Graham; he rarely ate, and still more rarely slept. We could see that his

heart was heavy at her absence, and his failing to obtain any news whatever of his loved one made him morose, dispirited, and silent.

"For the love of Heaven," he said to Kaosp on the day before our trial, "will you not tell me news of her? You must know what has taken place. Has any harm befallen her?"

"I am commanded by the King to silence," he answered, not without sorrow in his voice. "He hath bidden me hold no further conversation with you, his prisoners. You will know all on the morrow."

The eventful morning dawned at last that was to decide our fate; to set us free, or mete to us our doom.

"Thank Heaven!" said Graham, earnestly, "all will soon be decided. This silence, this suspense, is slowly killing me."

Outside we could hear that something unusual was taking place. The heavy tramp of troops echoed from the distance in muffled tones; trumpet blasts at intervals sounded afar off, as if an army was being marshalled; and from time to time the noise of hurrying feet was heard in the corridor outside. For the first time Kaosp failed to visit us. New guards came attending the servants that brought us our morning meal. We were all too excited to eat, and the dishes were taken away almost untouched.

"One last word to you all," said the Doctor. "Whatever may be the result of this trial, be sure not to exhibit any anger. It will be no time, nor place, to strike for freedom in yonder Hall of Justice; for such could only end in failure. Keep cool, I implore you, whatever the decision may be. We must wait and watch our opportunity."

A few minutes before ten o'clock our prison doors were opened, and we were commanded by Kaosp and the guards to follow them. We went in single file, our dog bringing up the rear, passing along the corridors, which were lined with Martial troops on either side, through doorway after doorway until we reached an ante-room which we had not visited before. Here we were detained for a few moments; then, amidst a fanfare of trumpets, we passed onward and entered the Great Hall of Justice.

The brilliant scene was much the same as on our previous visit, but more solemnity seemed to pervade the vast gathering. We heard the hum of voices before we reached the Hall; but as we entered a great silence fell

upon the assembled throng, and every eye was turned towards us as we slowly wended our way to the platform, and stepped one by one upon it. A hundred thousand Martials of both sexes, and apparently of the highest grade of society, filled that vast Hall; and from the tumult we could hear outside, as many more must have been clustering round in eager curiosity. The King and his ministers sat in their old places, and below them were a hundred scribes, whose business appeared to be to take down in writing all that was said. We noticed more soldiers than before, and the guard immediately surrounding us had been considerably augmented.

Directly we got upon the platform, Graham's eyes wandered round the circle where the King and his ministers sat. His search was for Volinë; but his quest was vain, for the luxurious throne upon which she had reclined was empty. The vacant seat was the last drop in the cup of his bitterness, and his face reflected the great sorrow that ate like a canker into his heart. Deserted and lonely, even more so than we were, his sufferings were deeper than those of his comrades, and he faced his judges like one in a dream.

The proceedings were commenced at once by the King, who from his throne commanded that the evidence against us should be given. The same aged minister, amid a deathlike silence, rose, and, bowing to the King, arraigned us thus:

"Great and mighty Ruler, King of Gathma, and father of its people, we have assembled here in this our Justice Hall to conduct the strangest proceedings that have ever taken place between its ancient walls. We are here to mete out fair and impartial justice to Beings who belong not to the world on which we live, but have come unbidden amongst us from a region so remote that it appears but a bright and wandering planet in our heavens; for have they not said that they are from the star Ramos, which they call Earth? Beyond our own moons Ramos is the nearest orb to us, but its distance is so vast that no man of science in Gathma hath yet been bold enough to say the space between our world and this can ever be traversed by men in mortal shape who shall survive the journey. This being so, we can only look upon these strangers as practisers of some magic art which they may ultimately employ to the danger of our people. They came here borne in a carriage of curious form and cunning workmanship, dropping from the sky to the east of Edos. Their arrival is immediately celebrated in bloodshed; for the inoffensive Osa, a tiller of the soil, was killed by some explosive machine

carried in their hand, which was turned upon him (here a great trooper, clad in armour, stepped forward and pointed with his weapon to Sandy), and his wife and children are even now mourning sorely for his death. When pressed, they fled to their curious carriage, and escaped into the sky, whither no one of Gathma could follow them; but instead of leaving us in peace, they had the temerity to advance through the air towards our city Edos, and to descend therein, in the very precincts of thy royal palace. They speak a strange tongue; their dress, their manners, and customs are mysterious; their mission here seems one of blood. Hath not holy Echri foretold a great calamity to our people, heralded by signs and appearances in the heavens, from which we may escape if we only act with courage and promptitude? Methinks these strangers are this sign. Then we must take heed of holy Echri's words of warning, and so destroy these men of Ramos that not a trace of them shall be left. Let them and their evil carriage be hurled into the Lake of Melag, from the crag Remagaloth, so that all may be consumed in living fire, and we may see them no more. Oh! mighty King and father, I beseech thee in thy wisdom to heed the words of thy faithful servant, whose hair hath grown hoary with the work of three hundred years in thy illustrious service. Justice shall be done, Osa be avenged, and Gathma saved, if thou shalt only bid these strangers die!"

This speech made a profound sensation, and was greeted with a thunder of applause from the surrounding multitude, as the aged councillor bowed low and returned to his seat. Clearly, popular opinion was on his side, and we feared that our doom was sealed. Graham alone felt relieved when the speech was done, for to his great, though secret joy, Volinè's name had not been mentioned, and evidently the King and his councillors were in ignorance of his love for her, and the untoward occurrence in the garden. His rival had not dared to do as he had threatened, after all.

"Now, strangers from Ramos," said the King, "have you aught to say to vindicate yourselves? No man shall be judged unfairly, or condemned unheard. Speak, so that we may know your history, and learn if there be aught to swing the balance of Justice in your favour. Kaosp hath informed me that you are now able to converse in our tongue, and therefore to understand the charges that have been laid against you."

Hereupon Doctor Hermann, with note-book in hand, stepped forward, amidst a breathless silence, and said:—

"King of Gathma, and citizens of Edos, I and my companions appear before you under circumstances which place us, unfortunately, at a great disadvantage. We came to visit your world, bearing tidings of Peace, and bringing news of your brothers out yonder on the star Ramos, hoping to return to them in due season as messengers of your goodwill, and partakers of your hospitality and kindness. But evil fortune overtook us as soon as we descended upon your soil, and to our everlasting regret our first intercourse with your people has ended fatally for one of your subjects. Believe it or not, O King, but this husbandman, whom you call Osa, threatened us with a deadly weapon, with which he had already slain some beast to intimidate us and to prove his prowess, and we purely in self-defence drew our firearms and struck him dead. We came here to Gathma only as explorers and men of science, in quest of knowledge. We have no desire to slay your people nor to work them harm; of magic we know nothing; we are flesh and blood as yourselves—seekers after truth, who have braved the perils of a frightful voyage across the realms of space, with no other motive than to extend the philosophy of Man. My life has been spent in solving the secrets that barred Man's way across the noble pathway of the planets; my companions have assisted me by their labour, and by their riches, to make that attempt which

we thought we had crowned with such brilliant success. For more than two long years have we sped onwards and onwards across the silent sky, threatened by dangers so awful, that we recall them even now with horror. And yet we find enemies in this new world, instead of friends; our bodies are weary and fain would rest, yet we only meet with strife; and we are condemned to die the most horrible of deaths because we did what any of you, placed as we were, would have done in self-defence. We are not cowards; we are not afraid to die; but in the name of Science we plead for, nay, demand our lives, so that we may return to Earth and tell our brothers yonder of the wonders of this new world."

The Doctor sat down amid a murmur of voices, but whether of approval or dissent we were unable to say. Then the King, with a wave of his hand, made silence, and in a more friendly voice he said:

"Wilt not thy companions speak to us as well? Have they got nought to say?"

"Say what you can, in Martial, Temple. It seems to be expected of us," said the Doctor, in an undertone.

"King and citizens of Edos," said Temple, "the words I shall say are few, for my tongue is not so fluent of your language as that of my friend who has already spoken. His words are my words. But I would ask you to let his great attainments as a man of Science plead in his favour. His name is justly honoured among the men of Earth; and he has triumphed over the secrets of the universe in a manner which should claim the respect and gratitude of such a wise and highly-cultured people as yourselves, rather than your hatred. I can only say that the crime for which we stand on trial to-day was justifiable, and needs no penalty to purge it. We shall be willing to live amongst you for a season, and to teach you much that cannot fail to be of inestimable service to your race. In condemning us to die you rob yourselves, and become guilty of a crime that a just God will visit with punishment."

As Temple withdrew Sandy came to the front, and in excited English asked that mercy might be shown to his companions. "If ye want to murder somebody, murder me. These gentlemen here had no hand in shooting that farmer chap. I did it mysel'; for the fellow was after murderin' o' us. There wa' mischief lurking in his ugly een. I tell ye, they be as innocent as the

lambs on the hillsides. I did it myself, and am ready to die for the deed; but let innocent men alone."

He had spoken so far, although not a word was understood, save by us, and perhaps by Kaosp, before Graham could quieten him.

"Hold your tongue, Sandy," he said, "they can't understand you. Leave it to us. We will do all we can for your sake as well as our own."

"That's true, Mr. Graham, but the blood o' the Cam'bells within me boils with honest indignation when I see innocent men treated as criminals."

Graham now came to the front of the platform to speak. We all felt proud of him, as he stood erect and defiant before the multitude, tall and strong, but with face pale and furrowed with nights of sleepless anxiety over the fate of Volinè. The King scanned him closely, and seemed impressed by his bold and manly bearing; and we noticed many of the ladies near us—women fair and well-formed as goddesses, each one of them—scrutinizing him closely, and whispering one to the other.

"King and people of Gathma," he commenced "my comrades and myself have listened in sorrow more than anger to the words of your learned councillor; and we fain would ask you, O King, in your royal wisdom, to set such bigoted utterances aside, and to decide our case on its simple merits. We came to your world as friends; but we are treated as the vilest of enemies, because we killed one who in another moment would have slain us. Your weapons are more deadly than our own, as we had ample testimony before we struck a blow; and this Osa treated us in no friendly spirit, giving us no opportunity of explaining ourselves to him. Right gladly would we have done so. That we killed him we do not deny, but to say that the deed was premeditated and done in malice, is to say that which is false. We did not seek to escape the consequences of our act, or we could readily have done so in the carriage that bore us hither. We came to this city at once, and yielded ourselves to your authority without resistance, as Kaosp, a worthy captain of your troops, can bear testimony. We are anxious to be friends, to knit together the peoples of Earth and Gathma in tranquil unity. We hold out the hand of brotherhood, the olive branch of peace, from our world to yours. Grasp it in the same spirit in which it is extended towards you, and let each race, strangers now no more, reap the rich harvest of

mutual benefits my comrades and myself have dared and done so much to sow!"

Graham's words produced a marked impression in our favour with the King, which he was not unwilling to show; but before he uttered the words we could see he was about to speak, a Martial, dressed in the uniform of a prince or noble, rose to his feet and in a voice of thunder said:

"Enough! These men of Ramos have spoken well, and with an oily tongue, O King, but hearken to my tidings before thy Majesty decides their fate. One of them standing here before thee hath stained his hands with the innocent blood of thy subject, Osa; but what is Osa's blood compared with the dignity of a mighty monarch, and the honour of that monarch's daughter? The tallest of these men of Ramos here before thee, he who with his persuasive tongue addressed thee last, hath dared to hold private converse with thy daughter Volinè; to steal her heart, and to mantle her with shame! With mine own ears I heard the sweet yet poisoned words of yon seducer poured into thy innocent daughter's ears; with mine own eyes did I see them locked in tight embrace within an arbour in thy garden of Siccoth-trees, at an hour when no maiden should wander forth unattended! If my words are lies, why is not Volinè here by her father's side, as is her unvarying custom? why doth she shun our company? And why doth yonder stripling from Ramos carry the sacred ring of Echri upon his finger?—a gift from her! Why?"——

"Base, craven-hearted bully," Graham shouted, unable to control his anger longer—"coward, who would seek to rob a woman of all that is dearer to her than life—you lie! Volinè is as pure and as free from sin as a babe unborn; her soul is whiter than the snows on your mountains' highest points; and the day shall yet come when I—yes, *I*—will make you proclaim her innocence as loudly as you now have cried her shame!"

"By God! Mr. Graham, and if ye want any help, Sandy Cam'bell will be there," shouted Sandy, carried away in his excitement at the prospect of a fight, yet understanding little of what was being said.

Graham was prevented by a dozen guards from saying more; but we noticed that not a man amongst them treated him roughly. Did the ring he wore possess the magic power of which we had been told?

The King was now filled with rage. Anger so hot and violent filled his heart, that we could see he controlled it with the greatest effort; and the multitude of spectators were worked up into a state of frenzy by what had just been said. No language can express our amazement as we heard the damning words. Graham alone could understand them, and our hearts were filled with despair.

"Say now, O King, if these men of Ramos do not justly perish?" continued the Prince, with a voice in which triumph and revenge were mingled. "Shall they go free who spill innocent blood; yea, sully a woman of thy peerless race, and she thy daughter?"

Stung to madness by this bitter taunt, the King waved his hand towards the speaker, and in a stern and angry voice cried out:——

"Peace, Peace, Perodii. Thou thyself hath fanned our wrath in proclaiming thus publicly our shame; and I bid thee retire at once to my privy chamber, whither I will hold consultation with thee. Heed well thy words, Perodii, for strongest proof of what thou sayest will be required of thee." Then, addressing the officers and ministers of State, the King continued:

"Let these four men of Ramos be taken back and guarded well. Each one of them shall die. Their blood shall wash away our dishonour. Three days hence, at setting of the sun, let them meet their doom without prayer or priest, and be consumed with their handiwork within the fiery depths of Melag, hurled therein from the crag Remagaloth. Lead them hence, and let me see them no more; for they have covered me with humiliation before my people, and bowed mine aged head in naked shame!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CRAG REMAGALOTH.

The sun was slowly setting, blazing in a hundred hues through the many-coloured windows, and filling the great Hall with a mellow glory, as we were conducted back to our chamber, surrounded by an escort of twenty troopers. Kaosp led the way; we could see that his heart was heavy, and that

he sympathised with us in our great trouble. We were weak and faint from want of food. The reaction had come after the excitement of the day, and not one of us spoke to the other as we walked along with drooping heads and faltering steps. It was a great relief to escape from the noisy multitude and find quietness in our own chamber, where, left alone in our sorrow, and as dying men, we could rest and be in peace. There seemed no mercy whatever for us; not the remotest chance of escape from the horrid doom to which we had been condemned. Suicide, it is true, was left, as our revolvers were still hidden in our pockets; for it was a remarkable fact that no one had shown any desire to search us since we had been made prisoners, and we were still unwatched. And yet each one in secret still hoped to escape even now, though he dared not to breathe his thoughts to the rest. Had we not three days! What could we not do in them? Oh! hope, when does man really abandon thee? Only with life. Not even the rejected lover, the ruined gambler, or the man who faces certain death—to the last we all of us cling tightly to thee, Pandora's priceless gift to trouble-burdened Man!

Food was brought to us almost immediately; and we were glad to see that Kaosp continued at his post, as commander of the guard.

"Be ye of stout heart, O men of Ramos. Be not so cast down at misfortune! Death is the portion of us all; and mark ye, the King may yet relent his anger, if he doth but see Perodii's perfidy before three more suns have set," said Kaosp cheerfully, as he shook us by the hand and went his way.

"I am afraid, Doctor, you must feel very bitterly against me," said Graham, as we sadly ate our meal. "Both you and Temple must blame me for all this misfortune. I have no regrets for myself, but it is sore grief indeed to see you fall with me."

"Regrets are useless now, Graham," said Temple. "Besides, I did all I could to further your suit with Volinè, for I believed it wise to do so; I do not blame or reproach you. But we must escape! When, or how, I know not; but, Graham, we must escape."

"Ah! all very well to say that, Mr. Temple, but we are too well guarded, and too closely watched. We had best sleep on the matter now, and consult together in the morning, when we are more refreshed."

"Graham," said the Doctor, who from the moment the King had pronounced our doom had not spoken, "Graham, if we, by any remote possibility, escape from this peril, take my advice on one thing—leave the women alone for the future. I am older than you, have had more experience, and have invariably found that they are the root of all mischief."

Graham answered not a word, but a vision of Volinè, in all her splendid beauty, rose up before him as the Doctor spoke. He saw her as she nestled in his arms, bashfully confessing her love for him in that garden of Siccoth, and in his heart he vowed that nothing but strong Death itself should tear them asunder.

The hour was now late, and we sought to drown our sorrow in slumber. Sandy had already gone to rest, and lay asleep with Rover for his pillow. The nearness of death did not seem to trouble him, for we had explained to him the King's last words of doom. Perhaps our many escapes from great peril had made him careless of danger, and inspired him with the confidence of being able to evade his enemies. Strange to say that now we knew our fate we were more inclined to rest, and speedily we sank into a deep slumber.

"Thou sleepest heavily, O man of Ramos, even with Death beside thee," whispered Kaosp, as he shook Graham roughly in his efforts to awaken him.

"Why, Kaosp, where——what seek you?" said Graham, starting up confused from sleep.

"Hush! Let silence keep thy tongue. Thy comrades sleep. Put on thy garments and follow me. Volinè would see thee!"

"Volinè! Volinè? She here? Good Kaosp, conduct me to her quickly! How can I repay or thank you for such a boon as this?"

"By holding thy peace! I hazard honour and face death to serve thee. Haste thee! Spend not thy precious fleeting moments in catechising me; for she whom thou lovest awaits thee, and thy time is short. In but an hour from now the guard is changed, and thou must be back again!"

"I dressed in silent haste, and followed Kaosp through the larger room out into the corridor. The worthy soldier had managed well; for not a guard was there; and we crept along until I felt his hand tighten on my arm, and heard him whisper:

"Tarry thee one moment, for I would assure myself that all is safe. Should'st unfriendly eyes see us here, my life would be the cost.'

"He listened intently for a moment, but all was still. Then, by some means unknown to me, he slid back a panel in the side of the corridor, and a puff of cold, damp air rushed into our faces. A dark, yawning gulf was before me, and I drew back with an involuntary shudder; but Kaosp bid me enter.

"Haste thee down these steps,' said he; 'they will take thee to a passage, which follow until thou reachest the garden of Siccoth-trees; and there Volinè awaits thee. I will meet thee here when thou returnest. But heed thee well the fleeting time.'

"In another moment Kaosp had closed the panel, and I was groping my way down the steps in perfect darkness. Thirty-four deep steps I counted, and then I came to a passage with a smooth floor, which I walked along with caution, feeling the walls on either side as I went. For fifty paces I walked thus, the damp, poisonous air well-nigh choking me; and then I could hear the playing of the fountains, and directly afterwards I beheld the bright stars shimmering before me.

"I waited and listened for a few seconds, before venturing from the passage out into the open garden; but, with the exception of the splashing fountains, all was silent as death. Then I walked stealthily onwards, with eyes striving to penetrate the gloom, now on this side, now on that, and seeking to discover her whom I loved. Presently, I saw her coming towards me with fleeting steps, down a broad pathway between the shrubs. I ran to meet her, and in another moment we were clasped in each other's arms.

"Harry!"

"Volinè!"

"And so we met again; and as we uttered each other's name, in our reunion joy, I rained kiss after kiss upon her soft cheeks and willing lips; and the hot, scalding tears of grief, that trickled down her white, sorrow-stricken face, ploughed, as with molten fire, across my own. Oh, the joy and yet the

agony of that midnight tryst! We had met, yet only to say good-bye. I and my darling were to love no more in life, for in three fleeting days I must die. Then a great mad thought came unto me; and I planned, in a moment of time, that Volinè and I would flee—that I would take her with me to some far distant place, where we could live and love without fear.

"Darling, we meet once more, but our lives are cloaked with sorrow. You know my fate. It is your royal father's will that I and my comrades die at sunset, three days hence. Death is dreadful to me since the hour I saw and loved you. I, who have met this grim majestic thing called Death in a hundred shapes without fear, do now see it approach with craven nerveless terror, for it comes to part me from you. Dear one, this shall not be. Let us haste away together to-night, let us fly from Edos now!"

"Harry, thou sayest that which is impossible, which cannot be,' she sobbed. 'Knowest thou not that every way from Siccoth is guarded well; nay, doubly guarded since I prevailed upon the King, my father, to let thee and thy companions wander therein.'

"Volinè, your words ring like knells of death and cold despair across my heart.'

"Nay, then, give not such freedom to despair. Thou knowest I love thee; but thou must not show a woman's weakness, or, methinks, I should despise thee. Brave men know not fear, and dangers flee affrighted from advancing courage,' she answered, woman-like, striving to excite a confidence and daring she by no means felt, although cunningly concealing her fears.

"Your words, dear one, have robbed all sting from death, and make me look fearlessly upon my doom.'

"Harry, dear, thou shalt not meet it. The ring I gave thee shall deliver thee from death. How or where, I know not; but Echri's ring shall save thee!"

"Truth in its virtues grows stronger and stronger within my heart. But, darling, the moments are speeding on, and we have much to say. Pray, tell me now of this braggart Perodii. He called you his affianced! He has dared to use your name as a synonym for shame, before a hundred thousand citizens of Edos, and his lying words found favour with your father.'

"Thou speakest truly, yet heed him not. My father now knows that I would rather die than mate with him, prince and noble though he be. I have braved

my father's wrath, and I laughed to scorn Perodii's cowardly blow at my honour, because I love thee! Perodii's arms have never held me thus; his lips have never met my own. When he calleth me his, he lieth; Harry, mark thee well my words—he lieth!

"My precious one," I whispered, 'your words are as strong wine unto me! Tell me also what your father says concerning us, and of our discovery by Perodii, near the harbour.'

"His wrath," she continued, 'was terrible to witness, and I quailed before his bitter words! I told him but the truth, that thou hadst found favour with me. But, Harry, that ring of Echri's shall save thee, although my father and his soldiers dare to defy its sacred charms. So long as that ring shall circle round thy finger, death may not strike thee in violence, therefore guard it well for my sake as well as thine!'

"As life itself, for ever and for ever," I whispered in her ear. 'But, dear one, it seems that I have only brought pain and trouble on you, even caused your precious name to be shrouded in dishonour among the public throng—estranged your father from you. Now, after all you sacrifice for me, our happiness is turning but to wormwood and to gall.'

"And hadst it not been for me, thy comrades and thyself would now be free; for Kaosp tells me the King was in a pardoning humour until Perodii spoke. But the sands of the hour are nearly run, and it is time for thee to go. We must not imperil Kaosp by tarrying here. He risketh much for us.'

"As Volinë spoke, what this our parting really meant, burst upon me in all its awful nakedness, and a great sigh of agony escaped unbidden from my heart. The hour had sped, and we must part. In all human probability, we were to see each other no more! No more! I clasped her yet more tightly to me, and felt her lovely form trembling like a frightened bird's in my embrace. Her bosom heaved in sorrow, as I tenderly kissed her tears away, and smoothed her yellow tresses, which, like a web of spun gold, hung loose and careless over my arm. For a few brief moments thus together in silence, and then, as I kissed her once more, she broke gently from my embrace, and in sorrow walked slowly away, turning round as she did so, and sobbing said:

"Keep a stout heart, dear Harry. My prayers are said for thee; for I am all thine own. Remember Echri's ring, and fare thee well. Beloved—fare—thee—well!"

"She was gone! and I, with arms stretched out in entreaty towards her, stood desolate and alone in my sore despair! For several moments I stood as though turned to stone, calling her name in the empty garden, and repeating aloud those touching words of Byron's:

"Fare thee well, and if for ever,
Still for ever, fare thee well!"

But only the stars and the trees and the fountains heard me—she whom I addressed, was gone! Like some fair meteor she had rushed across my path, dazzled and attracted me during her fleeting stay beyond all power of resistance, and then as suddenly vanished from me, and left me in a chaos of misery and sorrow!

"May God in His mercy to me blot out from my memory the agony of this parting in the garden of Siccoth; for I can never know happiness again so long as its terrors haunt me,' I prayed aloud in my woe, with face turned upwards to the starlit sky.

"How I got back to the archway, and crept along the passage and up the steps to the sliding panel, I know not, for I went my way as one in a walking sleep, with all strength sapped from my trembling frame.

"Kaosp was awaiting my return in great anxiety, for the hour was already gone, and every moment he dreaded to hear the tramp of the guard coming to relieve him and his men.

"Keep silent, and follow me with haste,' he whispered, 'or too late I shall repent me of lending willing ears to a woman's supplications. By great good fortune the guard is late, or this night's work would be known to my ruin!"

"I am really sorry, Kaosp, that I have rewarded your good nature by jeopardizing your safety and your honour—but the hour has seemed so short!"

"Ah! 'tis always so. Lovers heed not time. But the hour with me hath seemed an age."

"We walked stealthily back again, not meeting a living soul; and I crept to my couch without waking one of my comrades. They all slept on in ignorance, and I resolved to keep my own counsel. The episode was too sacred and too painful to take anyone into my confidence; besides, no purpose would be gained, and I had nought to tell that would be of service in our dire necessity. Kaosp shook me by the hand before he departed, and a few minutes afterwards, as I lay awake in my misery, thinking of all that had taken place within the past hour, I heard the new guard arrive and station themselves in the corridor beside the outer door!"

It is unnecessary, for the purposes of this narrative, to record our doings during the three days of grace that were allowed us. We neither saw or heard anything of the King, Volinè, or Perodii. We were entirely shut off from all outside affairs, and we knew nothing of what was being done either in the palace or among the people of Edos. We were treated precisely the same as before our trial, with the exception of being allowed to walk in the garden of Siccoth. That privilege was denied, and we were kept close prisoners to our rooms.

Two things occurred, however, which call for special notice. The first was the withdrawal of Kaosp and his men; he and they being replaced by an entirely new set of guards. The reason we could not discover. We sorely missed our old friend and his cheerful ways; and Graham, at least, had some misgivings at his absence. Had Kaosp's breach of trust in aiding Volinè and himself to meet after the trial become known, and his treachery punished? We could not get any information from our new warders. Each one of them maintained a stolid silence, and never addressed a single word to either of us during those three dreadful days of suspense. The second thing worthy of mention was the fact that we were now watched day and night incessantly. There were always two guards with us, and every movement on our part was closely observed. But in spite of all this extra precaution we were never searched, and our little personal belongings remained untouched.

Wearily the days passed on, and we were filled with an agony of suspense, as our last few hours of life ebbed slowly yet surely away. Not one of us appeared fully to realise the awfulness of our impending fate, for each in secret was buoyed up with the hope that our doom by some means would be averted. We hoped and hoped as the time slipped on; yet nothing occurred to warrant even the remotest thought that we should be saved. As usual, the

Doctor was most cheerful; Temple and Sandy were becoming exceedingly cast down; Graham had secret faith in Volinè and her mystic ring, which he still wore upon his finger.

The fatal day dawned at last. But our guards exhibited precisely the same stolid demeanour, and breakfast was served to us as usual. We ate little, but drank deeply of a liquor somewhat resembling still hock, the effects of which were exceedingly stimulating and comforting. We had only had this "wine" at our noonday meals before, and we concluded that our captors had been kind enough to furnish us with this liquor to brace us for the coming ordeal at sunset. We little suspected that the "wine" was drugged, and had been given to us for a purpose!

Half an hour after the meal was over, each one of us felt a sickly stupor creeping over him, numbing his sense of feeling, and in subtle sureness robbing him of all use of his limbs. The early effects of the poison were by no means unpleasant. We were filled with a luxurious languor; a delicious feeling of rest, of freedom from anxiety came over us, but soon the poison had other effects, and we became speechless; the brain seemed a mass of molten fire; we appeared to be swelling into absolute giants; everything around us grew distorted, and every muscle seemed to become scorched and withered, until we sank into a complete state of coma!

From this moment we remembered no more until we were awoke by a cool, fresh wind blowing on our faces, and a hum and roar, like that from some excited multitude, dinning as distant thunder in our ears. We tried to rise, but in vain; for every limb was draped in brass chains, and we were bound and helpless in the hands of our remorseless enemies!

Graham and Sandy recovered quickly from the effects of the drug when once we regained consciousness, but we must have lain for many hours in a helpless state of stupor. We found ourselves in a tent, the entrance to which was folded back, but only the sky was visible, and this was hidden every few moments as the giant form of a soldier passed to and fro on guard outside.

"Curses on the refinement of their cruelty," said Graham, as he looked round at his helpless comrades, and felt the brass fetters on his own legs and wrists.

"Damn their cunning! Why could not they lead us out like men? Upon my soul, it's something to be proud o'! They must ha' feared us, or they wouldna' ha' done this, Mr. Graham," said Sandy, in rage.

Temple and the Doctor did not speak. The drug seemed to have blunted all their powers of perception, and they lay helpless and still, as in a waking dream.

"If we could only break these, Mr. Graham, we would at least die fighting, and show the incarnate devils that we dinna' fear death," said Sandy, as he tore savagely at his chains; but, strong man as he was, their polished links only clanged and jingled in mockery.

"It's no good, Sandy," Graham answered; "these brass chains were made to hold stronger men than you or I——"

"Men of Ramos, the sun is setting, and the hour approaches when ye must die," said an officer, as he pushed the tent-door still wider open and walked towards us, followed by half-a-dozen soldiers. "Troopers," he continued, "strike off the fetters from their feet and bring these prisoners forth."

Our feet and legs were soon set free, and we were bidden to rise. Graham and Sandy were on their feet directly; but when the Doctor and Temple tried to stand up they reeled like drunken men, and had to be assisted out of the tent by the guards.

One by one we passed through the doorway out into the open air. Were we still unconscious? Were we still under the influence of a subtle poison? What wondrous magic, what enchantment was this? Edos, the palace, the well-known gardens of Siccoth—all had changed, as in the twinkling of an eye to us, and we found ourselves transported to the midst of a savage wilderness. How we had come hither we knew not; whilst drugged and helpless and unconscious we had been borne to this terrible place to die.

We stood on a steep rugged hillside, some twenty yards or so from the summit. Below us was a vast multitude of people, congregated in the form of a horseshoe round the mountain; around us was a cordon of soldiers, whilst at the very top of the mountain we saw the *Sirius*, how or when conveyed thither we knew not. Escape seemed utterly hopeless, and for the first time we realized that we were really about to die.

The wild grandeur of that sunset scene can never fade from our memory. All round us were mountains whose rugged peaks were illuminated by the rays of the sinking sun, the snow gleaming on some of them like sheets of polished silver. A volcano, with a thin wreath of blue smoke curling gently skywards crowned the sides of the distant valley, and the ground all round us, and as far as we could see below us, was strewn with fantastic shaped boulders and masses of rock, but not a trace of vegetation could be seen amongst them. Everything was desolate in that vale of bitterness and death; hideous the doom that condemned this strange place to barrenness and ruin. The face of the mountain was scarred and furrowed as with a vast despair, and the grey ghostly plain below seemed full of a horrid phantasm. No streams of water trickled down the hillsides; not a living thing was nourished by the barren, fruitless soil! Beyond the summit, at a much higher elevation, hung a vast bank of gloomy vapour, like a bitter teardrop on the face of the desert wilderness, its surface gleaming in gold and frowning in grey as the lights and shadows played upon its constantly changing surface.

... THE SIRIUS ... BOLDLY OUTLINED AGAINST THE SKY.

As soon as we had all got out of the tent we were conducted up the mountain-side towards the *Sirius*, which stood boldly outlined against the sky at the summit. When we got to the top the scene was even more awful, enough to curdle the blood of the stoutest-hearted with horror. We stood upon the crag Remagaloth, a jutting rock which arched and overhung in awful grandeur a vast lake of seething molten fire! Five thousand feet below, in one clear terrible plunge, the cruel cliffs dipped down to this lake of flame; and on the brink of that rugged crag, jutting out like an index finger above the gulf, was the *Sirius*, looking as if the slightest touch would overbalance her, and hurl her downwards into the fiery depths.

The surface of this molten lake was remarkably still; here and there a tongue of flame shot upwards, and then sank again; here and there the seething mass heaved gently, as though simmering and swelling in sullen rage. The reflection lit up the surrounding rocks, and gleamed upon the armour and the faces of the troops, making them look like fiends in human guise.

What words can describe our feelings as we stood chained and helpless on the brink of Melag, awaiting our hideous doom! The sun already was half-hidden below the mountain-tops behind us in the distant west, and the plain of desolation below was fast cloaking its horrors in the gloom of night. Earth shone as a pale star in the clear sky, and our eyes looked out with yearning love across the realms of space towards her, our home! Alas, home no more! In a few more fleeting moments all would be over! We thought with horror of the death before us, of the actual time when the *Sirius*, after falling five thousand feet like a winged and helpless bird, would strike with a dull gurgling sound the molten lake below; and then of what we should experience in that one brief, dreadful moment between life and death, when the ocean of living fire should surge over us in its pitiless embrace.

We had little time for thought, however, for almost directly we reached the jutting crag the same commander stepped forward and said——

"Men of Ramos, it is here that by the King's commands ye are to die. It is his royal will that this strange carriage in which ye came to Gathma shall be consumed with ye; so that ye and your evil works may be entirely destroyed."

As he spoke a loud tumultuous shout of approbation rose from the assembled hosts below us, and then a silence as of death came over the expectant throng as they watched in breathless excitement the closing scene of this awful execution. Once more our feet were chained, so that we were utterly helpless.

Not one of us spoke as we were assisted up the ladder into the *Sirius*. As we entered one by one we noticed a score or more stalwart troopers standing round, evidently waiting for the signal to hurl us over into the lake as soon as all was prepared. Sandy and his dog were taken first, then Graham, then Temple, and last of all the Doctor. As Graham was going up the ladder, Perodii stepped forward. We had not noticed him before, but he had come to see the death of his rival, and to mock and triumph over him in his helpless agony.

"See, thou boasting fool, Volinè hath deserted thee in thy hour of need! She comes not to see thee enter eternal fire! Her shame is deeper than her love; and even her magic ring cannot help thee now! That silly, soul-saving Echri,

and his wondrous magic are impotent before a few brass chains and stalwart troopers!"

"Coward! Breathe not her dear name to me, and keep your blasphemy for those who may appreciate it. Were but my fetters loose, I would make carrion of your carcase; and I die breathing curses on your lying tongue," Graham answered with wonderful coolness.

"Begone! Leap thee into Hell, and take thy punishment for meddling with things that concerned thee not," Perodii continued, unable to conceal his mortification at his vain effort to rouse Graham into a display of open anger.

Graham was stung to madness by Perodii's bitter taunts, and as soon as he got inside the *Sirius* he tore at his chains like one possessed. The muscles of his arms swelled out like knotted ropes, and the veins on his hands seemed about to burst as he wrestled with the strong brass fetters. His strength seemed supernatural, and at last with a mighty wrench he snapped the links asunder, and with a cry of joy rushed down to the engine-room. Already we heard the signal being given; the *Sirius* was toppling over, but instead of falling, the motors sped round and we rose upwards towards the clouds, triumphant over our enemies. A terrible cry of rage and disappointment came from the spectators. In his excitement Graham forgot his manacled companions, and hurried out on to the balcony to taunt the baffled crowd below. As the *Sirius* slowly mounted through the air, a shout rose up from the cowed and frightened soldiers——

"It is Echri's magic ring that hath worked this marvel, and delivered these men of Ramos out of our hands. Woe, woe unto us for defying him!"

"We shall meet again, Perodii," shouted Graham at the top of his voice, "and when we do I'll make you answer to me for all the evil you have wrought."

The voices of the crowd were now only as a distant murmur, and soon after we were too far away to hear any sounds at all. Graham soon found tools and released us from our fetters.

"Thank God, for once again delivering us from peril," said Temple reverently.

"The ring, the ring you all despised and scoffed at, has saved us," said Graham; "for the hand which carried it found more than a giant's strength.

Call it superstition, if you will, but I solemnly swear that my unaided strength was not equal to those chains."

"The best thing to do," said the Doctor slowly, and with some impatience in his voice, for he was yet feeling dazed and weak, "is to settle where we are going. I am certain the *Sirius* cannot carry us three hundred miles."

"Let us put as much distance as possible between Edos and ourselves," Temple suggested.

"Very true, Temple, but unfortunately we know not in which direction Edos lies," the Doctor answered.

And so we sped on, we knew not whither, but keeping a sharp look-out. Our course was nearly due north, a point or so east. The country, so far as we could judge in the deepening gloom, was forbidding in appearance, and the reflection from the lake of molten fire shone on the heavens for a vast distance. We seemed to have left all fertile lands behind us, and were hastening into regions of desert barrenness.

Two hours after our escape from Remagaloth, our stock of electricity showed signs of becoming exhausted. We had not the wherewithal to generate more. We were now quite two hundred miles away to the north-eastward of the fire-lake, and here we were compelled to descend. We dropped gently down on what seemed to be a vast plain, barren of vegetation; and there, safe in the *Sirius*, we ate a hearty meal, enjoyed the luxury of a cigar, and went to sleep, all eager for the dawn to disclose to us the nature of the country we had entered.

CHAPTER XIV.

ACROSS THE DESERT CHADOS.

We awoke at dawn feeling like new men, scarcely being able to realise the fact that we were free! The events of yesterday still lingered in our minds, like the remnants of a more than usually vivid dream. That all was real and true we could not bring ourselves to believe, so awful and inhuman seemed

the doom we had so miraculously escaped. But the sun, as it rose in solemn splendour above the eastern edge of this strange world, soon dispelled our morbid thoughts and cheered us into activity. The view from the balcony of the *Sirius* was grand, though the country round us was sterile and desolate as the Valley of Death below Remagaloth, from which we had been delivered at yester e'en! But we had life and liberty; the future was once more before us, full of hopes and possibilities, and each one felt that the worst was over and brighter prospects were now before us.

We found everything in the *Sirius* precisely as we had left it. Evidently the people of Edos had shunned our carriage, and desired that we and all our belongings might be destroyed together. This was a fortunate circumstance for us, for had the *Sirius* been dismantled and pillaged we should have been in this wilderness without food. As soon as breakfast was over we consulted together as to what was best to be done.

"There is no help for it, my friends," said the Doctor; "the *Sirius* is wrecked, and we shall have to leave her to her fate. Alas! she can give us safety no longer, and we may stay in her at our peril. We may be sure a search will be made for us, and that very quickly. Our only course is to abandon her, taking with us as many absolute necessities as we can conveniently carry among us, and set off at once towards more fertile country. The future must take care of itself entirely, and we be guided further solely by circumstances."

"But, Doctor, is there no hope of patching her up for a little time longer?"

"None, Graham; our motors are worn out; our generating material exhausted. We should require all the resources of a civilised community to make good her defects and replenish her power."

"Then there is nothing for it but to do as you suggest, Doctor," said Temple; and Graham reluctantly acquiesced.

While the Doctor and Sandy selected such articles as we were going to take, Temple and Graham went outside to reconnoitre, and to decide as to the best route we should take.

There was little choice to be made. Radiating in every direction from where we stood, the wide desert extended in one vast scene of ruinous waste. We stood on a wide uneven rock- and sand-strewn plain, which reached to the

horizon on every side. Not a trace of vegetation could we detect sprouting from the bitter, ungenerous soil; not a stream or a pool cheered its wide expanse. All round the horizon were mountains of bare and forbidding aspect; some of them crested with what looked like snow; others volcanic, and belching smoke and fire. The route toward the north-east seemed the most feasible, for in that direction the mountains were not so high, and an apparent break in the rocky girdle suggested an easier passage over them.

"North-east it must be, Mr. Temple. We ought to reach the mountains by tomorrow afternoon, and get through yonder pass to the country beyond them by evening of the next day, at latest."

"I think so, too," said Temple. "And now that is decided, let me take the opportunity of our few moments alone together, sincerely to thank you for our deliverance from death yesterday. You have saved my life, Graham, and anything that I can do in return I shall be only too pleased. I have not cared to speak thus to you before the Doctor, as I know the subject is distasteful to him. Whenever a woman is concerned, no matter how remotely, all his good-humour and generosity vanish. He absolutely hates women, and all to do with them."

"Pray, Mr. Temple, do not thank me. I was but the agent of our deliverance, after all. Thank this wonderful priest, Echri, for it was he who saved us through Volinè's mystic ring. Why, or how, we know not; yet I am as sure of it as I am of my own existence. I cannot expect you and the rest to be so credulous as to believe in its virtues," he continued, looking at the ring and twirling it round his finger as he spoke, "but the feelings that came over me when I broke those fetters, yesternight, can never be expressed in words. Ask me not to attempt to describe them; for I desire to keep what I then felt a sacred secret."

"But talking of Volinè, Graham; I am really very sorry for you. It recalls my own young days when I wooed and won the charming girl who became my wife, but only to die with her infant son in twelve short fleeting months, and to leave me in lonely sorrow. I have not got over that trouble, Graham, and I never shall, twenty years old though it is."

"Then, Mr. Temple, you can slightly understand my infatuation, my sincere love for this girl of Gathma. Is she not worthy of all the love that man can

give? She is as good and as true as she is handsome. And yet, all now is over between us—all is over, and I shall see her no more!"

"But you must cheer up. Don't let the Doctor see your weakness, for it will only make unpleasantness amongst us. Things may come right yet. You know the old Earth-saying about all things coming to him who waits? Something tells me that even now we have not seen the last of Edos, or of the King of Gathma's daughter."

"That you may be a true prophet, then, is my one prayer. For I love Volinè, and without her my life is dreary and desolate as this desert around us."

"Well, Graham, we had better get back to the *Sirius* now. I daresay the Doctor is ready to start by this time; and if you take my advice you will let the subject of Volinè, and all that happened in Edos, form no part of our conversation. The Doctor has strange ideas—what man of genius has not?—and at present it is best to humour him, for we require all his undivided energies to bring us safely through our perils."

So conversing, Temple and Graham walked back towards the *Sirius*, where we found the Doctor and Sandy had arranged into four packs the various necessities he had selected from the stores.

"Well, friends, what is the result of your exploration?" said the Doctor, smiling, and looking up from one of the packages he was strapping together.

"Travelling will be slow, Doctor," answered Graham, "for the ground is covered with loose sand and rough broken rock. Our best course is north-east, towards the rent or defile in the mountains yonder. We should reach them by to-morrow afternoon."

"Then take a cup of this meat essence, and we will be off," said the Doctor. "I think we have got all that we shall require for immediate use. Water will be scarce, but I think we have a substitute. Now have a last look round, and satisfy yourselves that you are leaving nothing you may value specially behind."

At last we each shouldered our package, strapping it on our back like a knapsack, and with rifle in hand we turned from the *Sirius* and began our march. Tears dimmed the Doctor's eyes as he looked for the last time upon his cherished handiwork, every bolt and plate of which was dear to him;

and not one of us left the good carriage without feelings of regret, for it seemed as though we were turning our backs on home!

Hour after hour we trudged along, now sinking knee-deep in fine sand, then slipping and stumbling as we slowly picked our way across stony ground, the sun beating down upon us from a clear and rainless sky. After exerting ourselves to the very utmost, we found that we had not advanced more than twelve miles from the *Sirius* by mid-day; and owing to the extreme clearness of the heated atmosphere, this distance did not appear much more than six. We halted to rest under the shadow of a big mass of rock which lay embedded in the sand, and here we ate our food and each drank a cup of wine and water from his flask. Of pure water we had only one small cask, holding a gallon, which Sandy carried slung from his shoulder. This we reserved for any emergency, but we hoped to find a stream or pool before nightfall.

We allowed ourselves one hour's rest, then resumed our march, and continued struggling on till sunset. During the afternoon we crossed a stretch of better ground, and by the time we halted for the night, we seemed to have done at least half the distance that separated the *Sirius* from the mountains. We encamped in a rocky hollow. Tent or fire we had none: we could not carry the one, and no materials for the other were to be got in this wilderness. We ate our cold supper and then fell asleep, with nothing but the starry sky above us, and with the soft sand for our beds. It was a lovely night, warm and windless and still, so that we experienced little or no discomfort, and awoke refreshed, just as the rising sun was tipping the distant hills with gold. Not one drop of water, not the slightest sign of moisture had we discovered, and the night had been dry and dewless. Not a blade of vegetation, or a trace of any living thing, could yet be seen—all was desert and barren.

With no fire to warm or cook anything, our morning meal was not quite so savoury as it might have been, but we were hungry, and hungry men are rarely fastidious. Meat essence dissolved in a little water, with biscuits and a draught of watered wine, formed our repast, and as soon as it was done we picked up our belongings and made an early start. We were anxious to get as much ground covered as possible before the sun became so oppressively powerful; besides, death stared us in the face on every side in this terrible wilderness, and delay might prove fatal to us all.

Slowly, terribly slowly, mile after mile was passed, and the mountains before us began to show out in more detail. They were barren and sterile enough. Everything seemed withered and blasted, and the sun in fierce splendour travelled across the waterless heavens, and burnt into the bare rocks and sands, wasting his life-nourishing heat on a region of eternal desolation. By mid-day we were so fatigued that we sank down beside a big stone to rest our weary limbs and throbbing heads. Eat we could not; our mouths were dry and parched, and we craved for water.

There was but a quart of the precious fluid left—a quart of lukewarm, half-putrid water, between four thirsty men and a panting dog! Sandy begged hard for a drop for his dog, and he moistened poor Rover's mouth with a spoonful; but we ourselves tried to slake our awful thirst with a few of the Doctor's lozenges. They answered admirably; but their effect was only momentary, and by the time each little cake was sucked away we were as thirsty as before. The sun beat down upon us remorselessly, and to save ourselves from being scorched to death we scraped a hole under the shadow of the stone, and there, huddled together in the scanty shade, we lay waiting for the sun to sink lower in the west before we tried to drag our weary feet a little farther. For three hours we remained in this hole in the sand; then once more we started on, moistening our mouths from our nearly empty flasks, and munching a biscuit as we went.

Towards night the temperature became much lower, and we were able to get along a little faster; but every mile that we went we found our burdens becoming heavier. Yet we struggled on; nor did we seek a camping-place until we reached the lower slopes of the mountains. Still all was desolation; closer scrutiny only confirmed the opinions formed by a more distant view, for the hills were as sterile and barren as the plain we had crossed.

"Never mind, my friends," said the Doctor, "we have crossed the worst part. Here, amid the mountains, we are sure of more shade, and shall most probably find water, if not on these slopes, surely on the other side."

"Well, Doctor, if we don't find water soon, it will be all over with us," remarked Temple. "I myself don't feel equal to another day like this has been."

"None of us know the compass of our strength, or what we can do, until spurred on by the goads of necessity, Temple," the Doctor answered.

We selected a sheltered nook among the rocks, each smoothing the sand into the semblance of a couch, and there we used the remainder of the water to make our essence, and then stretching our stiff and weary limbs, soon fell asleep.

Not one of us awoke again until the next day was far advanced. The sun was four hours high towards the zenith ere we roused from our slumber. The long sleep had done us good; our heads were easier; our thirst not so intense. We drank the remainder of our wine and water, ate a few biscuits, and then prepared for our onward march. The rocky pass between two rugged mountains lay straight before us, and in single file we went our way. At first the precipitous sides of the mountains nearly met overhead, and the path was little more than a gloomy fissure; but this soon widened out as we ascended, and we eventually found ourselves in a broad valley, with an uninterrupted view for miles.

Our great exertions in walking over the rock-strewn ground soon began to create acute thirst. We had no fluid now of any kind, and only a dozen lozenges were left. These we shared, three to each; and very soon the cravings for moisture triumphed and they were gone. We had nothing whatever now to assuage thirst! We must find water, or die!

Times without number we consulted together as to the propriety of throwing away our arms and ammunition; but still we continued to carry them, first in one hand, then in the other. Then one or the other of us said he could go no farther, and begged the rest to leave him to die in peace. But we cheered and rallied him whose hopes of deliverance were ebbing, as best we could, and still toiled on. Upwards! onwards! filled with all the torments of a raging thirst, we toiled, our feet heavy as though shod with lead; but still no sign of life—the same desolate wilderness, the same hot sun, the same bare rocks and stony way, continuing on and on apparently to eternity! All that livelong day we struggled on beneath a scorching sun. Towards evening we were startled by a shout from Sandy:

"The water! Doctor, the shining water! See, there! There! below ye on the left."

We looked where Sandy pointed, and there—could we trust our eyes? or was it but the fancy of a scorched and sun-disordered brain?—there, about a mile away, was a beautiful pool below the hillside, its shimmering waters

glistening like silver in the setting sun! We literally danced for joy, and, nerved to new strength by the sight of the welcome waters, we ran helter-skelter over the rocks and stones towards them. When two hundred yards away we threw down our rifles, and slipped out of the straps that held our burdens, and each raced as for his life to be the first to revel in the feast!

Graham, being by far the strongest, reached the brink first; but instead of kneeling down to quench his thirst, he threw himself to the ground with a piteous groan of despair, saying:

"We are lost! my comrades; we are lost! Unless we can cool our burning tongues with mercury!"

Alas! Graham's words were only too true, for the lake, which must have covered some hundreds of acres of ground, was one thick, fluid mass of quicksilver! We sat down by this costly, yet horrid pool, too overcome with bitter disappointment, and with the exertion of hastening thither, to speak; and not one of us stirred until the sun had set and night approached.

"Doctor," exclaimed Temple at last, in a weak and weary voice, "we can go no further; we had best remain here and die."

But Doctor Hermann made no answer. He was gazing into the lake at our feet in a half-conscious manner, muttering incoherently to himself about "majestic phenomenon" and "wonderful sight," and then he sank back unconscious! The scene now became intensely horrible. Temple sat with pale hollow cheeks, and sunken eyes, his chin resting upon his knees; Sandy was struggling with Graham to reach the lake, swearing he would have water if he killed him in reaching it. But poor Sandy was weak as a child, and Graham in very kindness hurled him to the ground, where he lay like one dead. The only man with any control over himself, or with any strength, was Graham, and he stood amongst his fallen companions, gaunt and haggard, with tears of sympathy for them trickling down his wan, wasted cheeks, and white face turned upwards to the sky.

"Oh, God!" he cried, in words that rattled hoarsely in his parched and burning throat—"Oh, God! give us water, or be merciful and let us quickly die. Oh, Echri!" he panted, "servant of God, if your power admits, hear the voice of him who wears your sacred ring, crying for help in the wilderness, and send him succour. Help!—me—and them—oh, God!—Echri—ring—

Volinè;" but the last words became but rattling, meaningless sounds, and he too was overcome with faintness and thirst, and sank down among the rest to die!

A few minutes later, Temple alone remained conscious; but he felt too weak to move, and he sat there in his agony, watching the bright merciless stars come forth one by one, and the distant yellow ball of Earth rise steadily above the mountains, until a drowsiness overcame him, and he mercifully fell into a troubled sleep.

How long he slumbered we shall never know, but he woke trembling with cold, roused from his sleep by the chilly blast that was howling and shrieking round him. The heavens were of an inky blackness, save at irregular intervals, when the blue lightning lit up the banks of cloud for a fleeting moment. The cold wind, evidently charged with moisture, had brought new life upon its wings for Temple, and he felt refreshed. He was still too weak to move, and sat shivering in astonished silence, viewing the progress of the storm. Peal after peal of thunder shook the ground beneath him: flash after flash of lightning glanced along the lake of mercury, and illumined its smooth waveless surface like a mirror. Then a few big heavy drops of rain spattered on the rocks, one of them striking him full on his forehead. A minute or so later, preceded by a warning roar, the tempest broke in all its fury. The rain beat down on the parched ground, wetting him and his companions to the skin, collecting into pools, and flowing in tiny rills and torrents between the rocks, and forming channels across the firmer beds of sand.

The water revived Temple like doses of some magic elixir, and he crawled to the nearest pool and drank his fill of this sweet, refreshing nectar from the sky! Then amidst the tempest strife, and by the lightning's light, he dragged his cold and aching body towards his fallen comrades, his cap full of water, and beginning with Graham, who was lying face downwards, he gently parted his dry cracked lips asunder, and poured a few drops between his teeth. The effect was instantaneous, and he showed signs of returning consciousness; by bathing his forehead, he was soon able to speak.

"Thank you, Mr. Temple," he faintly murmured, "I shall be better now. Whoever expected rain in such a region! But leave me, and lend the poor Doctor some assistance. I am afraid he is in a bad way."

The rain had served Sandy, too, in a remarkable way, and we heard him groping in the darkness, and drinking from his hands, which he filled from one of the numerous pools around us. In half an hour all of us could stand except the Doctor; he was alive, but unable to move or speak. Then the storm ceased, the sky cleared, and a yellow light over the east heralded the sun. Daylight revealed the heaviness of the storm. We were surrounded by pools of sparkling rain-water, resting in the crevices of the rocks, and the mountain sides were furrowed with crystal streams, whose volume was fast becoming less as the sands absorbed them. Sandy, by Graham's direction, crawled off to search for the water-cask and the packs we had thrown away the previous evening. The cask we broke up, and with the wood we made a small fire. By careful management we contrived to heat sufficient water to make half-a-gallon of the meat essence, and a cup of this soon put new life into the Doctor. Poor Rover was almost dead, and lay helpless where he had crouched down by Sandy's side, hours before, and it took all his master's care to bring him round.

By the time we had drunk our soup the sun had risen, and his generous rays—the rays we were but so ready to curse yesterday—soon dried our dripping garments, and warmed our bodies back to more vigorous life. We also dried and oiled our firearms, and packed our knapsacks afresh. But we were all too weak and exhausted to march, and we decided to stay and rest ourselves for a few hours. We had food and water in abundance, and if we could only find some fuel we should want little more. We left the side of the lake, and took up our quarters under the lee of a huge mass of rock, and here we stayed until noon.

Although feeling weak, we were then determined to try and push on once more. Could we only get out of these desert regions, and enter a more fertile country, all might yet be well. Then we could rest to our heart's desire, and recruit our wasted strength. Feebly we started, tottering under our loads, but thankful to God that our lives had been spared once more, and that the pangs of a burning thirst were gone. Truly all things seemed working in our favour; for had the rain fallen twelve hours later, not one of us would have survived, and our bones would now be bleaching in the sun on that desert waste!

The ground became more even as we crawled along, and by creeping steadily forward we covered nearly twenty miles before sunset. Then the

country began to improve, and the distant hills appeared covered with forests to the snow-line. Grasses and weeds peeped here and there among the stones, and a mile further on we saw a few stunted bushes, something like a clump of gorse, on the hillside. Eagerly, and with new-born strength, we now pushed on, striving every nerve to reach some sort of cover before darkness made us halt for the night.

We were not disappointed, and before the short twilight had faded, we found ourselves on the borders of a dense scrub, studded here and there with small trees. Here we camped close to a pool of rain-water, and made a glorious fire of dead branches, with which we cooked our evening meal. Then, stretching our weary limbs on beds of leaves, we rested for the night in comparative comfort and luxury.

We were up early. Thanks to splendid constitutions, the effects of our sufferings in the desert were passing rapidly away, although our pale and haggard faces continued to reflect our recent hardships for many days. The easiest route still led upwards, and after two hours' walking through a region rich with mineral wealth, we came to the borders of a forest on the crest of the hill, and looked down upon a wide and fruitful plain, covered with woods and fields and clusters of trees. Three miles below us was a large city—evidently a great manufacturing centre, for there were furnaces and tall chimney-shafts belching smoke and flame, and we could even hear the distant hum and roar of busy industry! The change from desert, barren wilderness, to fat and fruitful land was startlingly sudden, and for many moments we stood on the crest of the hill, looking at the scene below us in silent amazement! Whilst we were discussing the appearance of this smoke-beleaguered city, and wondering to ourselves what industries its people were engaged in, we were alarmed by cries of terror from a thicket a little way to the left, and almost directly afterwards a man rushed out towards us, pursued by a strange-looking beast, something like a wild boar, only with long-twisted horns growing from its forehead.

Comprehending in a moment the peril the poor fellow was in, Graham without more ado pointed his rifle at the beast and fired, cleverly bringing it down dead. The hunter seemed paralysed with terror at the report of the rifle and its effects, and stood looking at us in amazement.

"We are friends," said the Doctor, with hands held out towards him. "Come without fear and give us greeting. You are safe."

Hearing his own language spoken, the man advanced, saying as he did so:

"Strangers, my heart is full of gratitude for the service ye have rendered. Command me to your bidding, and I obey. I am from Pamax, yonder. My name is Kios—and yours?"

"We are strangers to your country and your world; we come from the star which you call Ramos, which we call Earth; and we come as brothers, in friendship and in peace," answered the Doctor in an assuring voice.

"Are ye, then, the men of Ramos, with whose evil fame all Gathma rings? The men of Ramos who escaped death at the crag Remagaloth? Are ye the slayers of Osa? If so be ye are, I know your story as well as any man in Edos, for we listened to each word of your trial and sentence here in Pamax."

"The same are we; but what know you of our captivity there? Have you any tidings from Edos?" queried Graham, who ill-concealed his impatience to hear any possible news of his beloved.

"Men of Ramos, I can tell ye much; but ye look faint and weary. Follow me, and rest your tired limbs, and I will tell ye all I know."

So saying, the good-natured hunter (for such we judged him to be) turned and beckoned us to follow him, throwing the huge dead beast across his mighty shoulders as he went. He led the way to a camp far in the thicket, where a wood fire was roasting some animal before a cosy tent.

"Enter, men of Ramos; enter, and share a poor man's hospitality."

Gladly we did so, and after taking off our knapsacks, we seated ourselves on some soft skins and listened to his story.

"First, I would ask ye how ye came hither. Edos is many days' journey hence for they who needs must travel by stealth or on foot; Remagaloth is yet further. I heard that ye escaped into the sky in a carriage of cunning workmanship. Came ye hence in that?"

"You speak quite truly, Kios," said Graham; "we escaped in the carriage that bore us from Earth to Gathma; but it conveyed us to a desert region which

for days we had to cross on foot, nearly perishing of heat and thirst on the way."

"The barren ground of which ye speak is the desert Chados, and I marvel much to learn that ye have crossed it and yet do live! Ye are now in the woods called Theloth, the sole right and privilege of hunting therein being conferred on me by the King. I supply the palace at Edos with wild meat and herbs, and I came from the city but yesterday."

"Then the distance cannot, surely, be so far," exclaimed Temple.

"We travel quickly in Gathma," Kios answered, "and I know full well ye could not have come by the same means as I——"

"So you left Edos so recently? Then do you know aught of——?" said Graham in eagerness.

But Kios, with upraised finger, said, "Interrupt me not. I will tell ye all I know, but I must speak in mine own way.

"The news of your miraculous escape from death," continued Kios, "is on every tongue, both in Edos and throughout civilised Gathma; and, moreover, it is said that Echri with his wondrous arts did save ye, for one of ye did wear a sacred ring of his upon your finger. Ah! that is the same—all men of Edos know it well," said Kios, as Graham held out his hand on which the curious talisman glittered. "The King and his ministers are wrath enough; but there are those who say his royal anger is not so bitter as it seemeth, and that Volinè, his daughter, hath softened his heart toward ye. Yet, in this, I only repeat the gossip of the streets of Edos, and know not its truth. A prince, by name Perodii, fans the King's smouldering wrath by taunts, and what, methinks, are probably falsehoods concerning ye. No man in all Edos, save the King, is so powerful as he, nor is there a bigger blackguard within its walls. Be warned against him, for his soul is full of evil, and he seeks your ruin. At his instigation, troops are searching the country through to find ye; and if ye be taken captive once more, no mercy will be shown ye if Perodii can prevent it. I hate this Perodii with a deadly bitter hatred, for he ruined my only child! Curse him!"

"Know you aught of Volinè, the King's daughter; or of Kaosp, a worthy commander of the troops in Edos?" asked Graham anxiously.

"Of Volinë I have no tidings; of Kaosp I know nought but ill. He lies in prison, thrown there, some say, for treason to the King; yet others have it that Perodii's lying tongue hath forged his fetters."

"We are exceedingly grateful for the news you have told us," said the Doctor warmly, "and your tidings will prove a great service to us. But we would ask you for further information about the city below us—Pamax, I think you call it. Is it safe for us to venture therein?"

"No; ye go there at peril of your liberty and lives. Know ye not that Pamax doth great trade with Edos; the King's troops are even there now in quest of ye. Pamax is a city of rough working-people, where dirt and squalour are as plentiful as gold and splendour in Edos. The people that dwell in Pamax are cunning workers in metals; the hills around us are honeycombed with their mines. Electric ways radiate from this city in all directions, to convey its merchandise to every part of Gathma. It is a wondrous city, and its men are clever artificers; yet they are low of mind, and would, in their stupid ignorance, hand ye over to the guards at once. But four days' journey hence is the bright and noble city of Helmeth, full of scientific and highly-cultured people, a great centre of knowledge, and a lofty seat of learning. Thither bend your steps; for those therein may welcome ye and plead your cause with the King. Tarry with me here for a day or so, as my guests. Revive your wasted strength, and rest your wearied bodies with me. I promise ye safety in the woods of Theloth, and will send ye on your way to Helmeth with light and hopeful hearts."

We consulted together for a moment, and then unanimously decided to accept the kind invitation Kios had so generously offered us. We needed rest, we sought safety; and here we could obtain both, for a few days at least. We had already unbounded confidence in this open-hearted hunter, and felt that our safety was doubly assured through his bitter hatred of Perodii.

CHAPTER XV.

RIVALS MEET AGAIN.

For three days we stayed with Kios and enjoyed his hospitality. He literally nursed us back to health and strength; making us savoury, nourishing dishes with a hunter's cunning, and giving us a preparation of medicinal herbs, which acted as a powerful tonic on our nerves, and braced us exceedingly. He gave up his bed to the Doctor, and in countless ways covered us with kindness. The day before we left his camp, we prevailed upon him to leave us, and go down the hills into Pamax to gain tidings of the soldiers who were in search of us. Whilst he was away we cleaned our firearms, repacked our knapsacks, and made all ready for starting at dawn on the following day.

Kios returned towards sunset; but eager as we were to learn his tidings, we would not question him until he had eaten; nor did he evince any desire to communicate them before.

"Now, good Kios, we would hear your news," said the Doctor, as we drew round the camp fire and lit our cigars.

"It is not altogether good, as I had hoped," he began. "The people can talk of nothing else but the men of Ramos, meaning yourselves. Their excitement hath increased; for some traders, who had journeyed to the lake of Kimeth, near which ye have told me ye camped, returned to Pamax yesternight, bringing with them scraps of strange food and other refuse ye must have left behind. The troops have started thither at dawn this morning; and what is worse, that villain Perodii is at their head. He will never rest until ye are all once more in his power, for he bears ye strange and deadly hatred."

"But, Kios,——" began the Doctor.

"Nay, hear me out, men of Ramos, for I have but few more words to say. It is fortunate for ye that the troops have gone on this fool's errand; for they may search far and wide up there, and the time they waste ye will profit by. Yet, when they return to Pamax, as return they surely will, Perodii's mood will not be pleasant; and ye may be assured that the journey to the borders of Chados will not tend to cool his wrath against ye. Men of Ramos, ye must not linger here; I cannot answer for your safety longer. These woods will be searched, and it may be at daybreak. Ye must start for Helmeth tonight—nay, at once."

"But we are in ignorance of the way thither, and may lose ourselves in the darkness," said Temple.

"Trouble not yourselves; for I will guide ye a few hours' journey hence, and put ye in the path that leads thereto."

"I am afraid, worthy Kios, we shall never be able to repay you," said the Doctor.

"Ye saved my life; it is but well that I should seek to save yours in return. Besides, I aim Perodii a blow, through ye—and it is always sweet to strike one's enemies. Know ye, I was rich and noble once, with rank and dignity almost as high as he. Through his knavery and wickedness, I am degraded to the calling of a hunter to the palace, banished from my home in Edos, and owe what little I now possess—even my life itself—to the clemency of the King. Some day the truth may prevail, and I be restored to my rights. Had Perodii honour enough left to speak, he could accomplish this in few words; yet he remains silent; and I suffer, because I resented the great wrong he did me. But we waste time in needless words. Get ye ready, and let us hasten hence; for the path is heavy, and the way is long."

We reluctantly left our comfortable quarters, and started off with Kios through the darkness. The night was calm and beautifully fine—just one of those delicious evenings that make the tropics of Earth so sweet, when the broiling heat of the day is spent. Kios led us by a circuitous route down the wooded hillside; and we passed so near to Pamax, that the roar of its machinery sounded clearly in the night, and the glow from its thousands of furnaces shone against the sky like a mighty conflagration.

"The men of Pamax work late," remarked Temple, with a manufacturer's instinct, and thinking of his own noisy looms at home on Earth.

"The wheels of their machinery are never still," answered Kios. "The worker's lot is hard, but they are a cheerful community, if their greed of gain is great."

We soon passed Pamax, with its noise and fire, and reached the calm, quiet country again. At last the forest was left behind us, and we walked for an hour across a wide prairie, on which grew herbs of singular odour. Then we followed the banks of a wide river, and after passing through a dark and dangerous swampy jungle—something like the forest of reeds in which we first descended—Kios stopped and said:

"Men of Ramos, here I must leave ye. The night will be nearly spent ere I get back to the woods of Theloth, and there are those who must not see me return. Look ye at yonder group of stars," pointing, as he spoke, to a constellation something like Ursa Major, the Great Bear, in our own heavens. "Mark ye them well; keep them straight before ye; and in two hours' march ye will reach the sea. Strike north along the coast a short day's journey, until ye come to a rocky creek. Follow the stream that falls therein, skirting the base of a spent volcano; and in three days' more easy travelling, ye will sight the great observatory of Helmath, standing on a high hill on your right hand. Behind that hill is the city itself. Advance ye with caution; and hold no converse with the men of Gathma until ye reach Helmath; or swift and certain ruin will overtake ye. Now haste away, and fare ye well."

Without waiting to hear our words of thanks for all his kindness, Kios waved his hand to us in farewell, and walked away into the gloom. We travelled slower without his guidance, for the way was rough; and sometimes clouds obscured the stars, which were our beacon light, and we had oft to wait until they had drifted by. Instead, therefore, of reaching the coast in two hours, we were nearly six; and the day was breaking as the grey waters of the Gathma sea spread far and wide before us. We were both tired and hungry; and so amongst the rocks on the beach we made a fire, and had our breakfast. Then we sat and rested for two hours before beginning our march along the coast.

After crossing some four miles of level sand, we reached a dense forest, which extended from the margin of the water inland beyond the range of our vision. Here the curious vegetation was so dense that the sun failed to penetrate the canopy of foliage; but the ground was bare of brushwood, and walking was easy and pleasant. Some curious trees, shaped like a mighty fungus, or an open umbrella, excited our wonder. They bore no leaves, but threw out a thick, unbroken canopy, of the colour and texture of an aloe plant, which curved downwards nearly to the ground; and above this, from the centre of the stem, shot a spike of crimson flowers, a yard or more in length. Each tree formed an admirable tent; and many of them seemed to be of vast age; the canopy being furrowed as with the growth of centuries, the edges torn into dry and withered ribbons, and the stems of enormous girth. At first we really took them to be the habitations of human beings or beasts;

and it was not until we had examined them closely that we ascertained they were really trees.

As we went farther into the forest these curious trees increased in number and in size; indeed, in some places they covered the ground so thickly, that it was difficult to walk amongst them; and we found it best and quickest to make a detour. In passing one of these groves of vegetable umbrellas, we were startled by a perfect tumult of chattering cries, and scores of strange beings hurried out from under them and surrounded us, skipping and hopping about, running to and fro like fiends in the dusky light of the forest. Had we not seen these singular beings with our own eyes, we should never have believed in their existence. They were fashioned much like ourselves from the feet to the shoulders, the arms, however, being proportionately much shorter—but there all outward resemblance ceased. Neck they had none, the shoulders gradually tapering away to the head, which was free from hair, and the face was intermediate in expression between that of a man, and the higher or Simian race of beasts. Their bodies were entirely naked, and of a chalky-brown colour, and they averaged perhaps five feet in height. So fierce and threatening did these curious creatures become that we fired our rifles off to frighten them, which had the desired effect, and they fled in chattering terror, grinning and grimacing into the trees, and we saw them no more. Whether they were gifted with greater than brute intelligence we know not; we were too startled and alarmed to make a closer acquaintance with them. Dr. Hermann himself was visibly disconcerted; and the rest of us were glad when they vanished from our sight, Sandy especially so—perhaps he dreaded the Doctor sending him in quest of one of these curious creatures. Even our dog refused to go near them, and lay down trembling with fright.

SCORES OF STRANGE BEASTS HURRIED OUT FROM
UNDER THEM.

It seemed incredible that such a race of animals could exist, so near to so mighty and populous a town as Pamax; but we were in a world of surprises, and things that appeared unnatural to us, were rational enough, no doubt, to the dwellers on the land of Mars.

All day we passed through this wonderful forest, now catching a glimpse of broad daylight as the trees grew less closely together, then entering a world of shadows and steamy gloom as the canopy became denser once more. We saw trees that were nothing but bare poles, tapering to a point far up in the sky, without branch or leaf, except a little green cup at the summit; others were draped in curiously-curved foliage; others, yet again, decked in noble, fan-shaped leaves a dozen feet across. Some put us in mind of the earthly tropics; but the great majority were entirely new, both in growth and form. The vegetable wonders around us made us forget our fatigue, and even our hunger. We never once thought to halt and rest throughout the livelong day; and we continued walking on and on through the forest until we reached the creek which Kios had told us we should find at the end of our day's journey.

It was a wild, lonely spot, enclosed with tall cliffs on either side, and perhaps half a mile across. The forest continued on the other side at the top of the rocks, as it ceased on this. We had little trouble in finding a suitable camping-place by the side of a tiny stream which tumbled over the cliffs in a shower of spray into the creek below, and furnished us with fresh water, that of the sea being salt and bitter to the taste. Here we formed a rude hut of branches, made our fire, and cooked some of the dried meat that Kios had insisted we should take when we left his forest-home the previous evening. To-night we decided that one of us should keep watch while the others slept, in case of our retreat being discovered by enemies. But the night passed uneventfully away, nothing occurring to disturb our slumbers or to break our peace.

We were moving early, and off on our way by sunrise. For the first hour or so we followed the creek through the depths of the forest; but when we reached the river the aspect of the country changed considerably. It was now an undulating park-like land, with groves of scarlet-foliaged trees.

Far away on the horizon loomed the towering heights of the exhausted volcano, round whose base was the path we had to follow. The scenery was very beautiful, but somehow we had not the heart to admire it, for we felt like fugitives flying to a castle of refuge, through a land teeming with unknown perils and hidden enemies. We left the river, as the banks were too steep and uneven to follow, and gradually ascended the lower spurs of the mountain, that being by far the easiest route. By noon we halted under the towering crest of the dead volcano. The sides were steep and rocky, though

covered with many kinds of vegetation, notably a large tree with leaves and flowers like a rhododendron. Here a deep hollow had become a small lake, fringed with curious rushes, over whose placid waters a large troop of white, legless birds, similar to those we saw before, were disporting themselves.

Here we made a fire, and cooked some food. As we were quietly eating our meal, we were startled by an exclamation from Graham.

"Look! look!" he cried in an excited tone. "The troops! the troops from Edos! We are discovered, surrounded!"

The peril of our position was only too true. Stealthily our pursuers had spread themselves in a wide semicircle from the river, extending their flanks round either side of the mountain; and, though still nearly a mile away, they were closing upon us with frightful haste.

"Leave all but the firearms and ammunition, and follow me," shouted the Doctor, leading the way up the hillside amongst the dense brushwood. Our movement was noticed at once by the approaching soldiers, and with a lusty shout they came on in hot pursuit. But the way was rough and steep, and we had the advantage of being much higher up the mountain slope than they. For quite two miles we struggled on, without losing ground or gaining it, until we reached a part of the mountain-side which was strewn with huge boulders of pumice. Here we lost sight of our pursuers, although we could hear their shouts and trumpet-calls below us, and sank down to rest a moment and get our breath. We had not tarried here for more than half a minute, when Sandy's practised eye caught sight of a hole in the ground, twenty paces lower down the hill. We went to examine it, and found that it was a crevice in the side of the volcano, just large enough at the entrance to squeeze our bodies through, but soon becoming much larger inside.

"Quick!" said the Doctor, "help me to roll this block of pumice to the entrance. We can hide in this hole; at any rate, it is a chance—our only chance. We will place the stone so that, once inside, we can roll it over the opening, and by this means conceal the hole from view, should the soldiers happen to pass over the spot."

The huge mass of pumice was exceedingly light, and we found no difficulty in doing what the Doctor had suggested. One after the other we scrambled

into the hillside crevice, and then Graham, he being the strongest, managed to pull the stone over us, and we were immediately in darkness. Now, for the first time, we missed poor Rover; in our anxiety and excitement we had not noticed him near us for some time; nor did we ever see the faithful old dog again!

Here for half an hour we remained motionless, huddled together, and not daring to speak in voices higher than a whisper. We heard shout after shout from the troopers, and signal after signal from their loud-mouthed trumpets, and we knew our enemies were baffled, for we whom they sought so eagerly had utterly vanished! We heard them clambering over the boulders and dislodging the smaller stones as they wandered hither and thither round the place where we were concealed: and once a big warrior, panting for breath, actually came and leaned against the block of pumice that concealed our hiding-place, and then went his way! At last, all became still near at hand; we could hear our enemies in the distance, but the sound they made grew fainter and fainter, and then ceased altogether. They were gone, and for the present, at least, we were saved!

Meantime we had not been idle. As soon as we dared move without the possibility of the soldiers hearing us, we began to explore our refuge. The rift extended downwards and inwards towards the centre of the mountain, but the jagged rocks and the darkness made our progress most perilous, and at last we had to give up in despair. We struck a few wax-vestas Graham chanced to have in one of his pockets, but their feeble flame only served to render the surrounding darkness more hideous and profound. There was nothing for it but to return to the entrance, and there we waited and waited all the afternoon until sunset, fearful to go out until the night should cloak our movements from the view of any enemies still lurking near. As the short twilight was coming to an end, the Doctor said in a low tone:

"One of us must go back to the camp by the lake, for our knapsacks. We must have food, if by any possible good fortune these troops have left our things undisturbed. The rest must stay here; for I think we could not find safer quarters for a day or so, until our enemies have grown weary of the search, and depart to try elsewhere. I am ready——"

"No, Doctor," broke in Graham. "I will not hear of what you were about to propose. I volunteer the task of going back myself. You are far from strong

yet, and the fatigue is too much for you."

"But I am willing to go," said Temple.

"Let me go, Doctor! I can be back in no time, I am more used to the hills than any o' ye," pleaded Sandy.

"Enough, comrades; the task, after all, is a trivial one. You remain here; I will go," Graham answered; and pushing the block aside as he spoke, he scrambled out into the evening gloom, and we heard his cautious footsteps sounding fainter and fainter as he went his way.

He picked a path down the steep hillside, and struggled through the thickets, every now and then stopping to listen. In half an hour he reached the lake; but, owing to the darkness, he had mistaken the path and gone nearly a mile to the east of the spot where our camp had been. Perhaps it was fortunate that he did so; for across the water he saw the blazing fires of a great encampment, and dusky figures passing to and fro before them. So the troops of Edos had not given up the search so readily; and Perodii, evidently, was determined on revenge. Cautiously Graham made a detour, and reached the big rock where we had eaten our last meal; and there to his joy he found our knapsacks by the side of the blackened ashes of the fire. Strong man as he was, he did not feel able to carry the four heavy packages. He therefore hid two under a heap of pumice stones, and trudged off back up the hill with the rest. He experienced great difficulty in getting back again, and even more in finding the block of stone that concealed our retreat. Indeed, it is doubtful if he ever would have found it at all, had we not heard him stumbling about the stones, and guided him to the cave by our signal whistles.

We were glad Graham had got back safely, and to see that he had brought so much of our belongings; but the news that he had seen the camp-fires of our enemies sank like cold despair into our hearts. We had a bitterly relentless foe to deal with, and our situation seemed growing more and more hopeless.

"I am very glad you brought my knapsack, Graham," said the Doctor, "as it contains my electric lamp. We will now go further into the cave, as it is important that we should know the extent of our resources when the hour of need comes."

By the light from wax tapers, burnt one after the other, we got the package undone, and soon had the lamp in working order. Its brilliant rays lit-up the cavity so well that we could see many yards before us. The Doctor led the way, lamp in hand, and following him, we climbed down deeper and deeper, and further and further, into the very bowels of the dead volcano. The cavern now began to reach an enormous size, and our light was powerless to pierce the great blackness around us, comparatively speaking, for any distance. At first the lamp illuminated the rugged walls of this ancient furnace, and the rocks, in every conceivable fantastic shape, looked grim and ghostly in the blue electric light; but as we went on and on these jagged cliffs, moulded by the molten fires of long-passed ages, gradually receded from the penetrating light, until at last the rough ground beneath us was all that was visible, and the vast immeasurable dome of the extinct crater loomed in dark weird mystery around us, our lamp but as a feeble star within its profound unknown depths. We must have travelled nearly a mile into the mountain, when we were surprised beyond measure to see the starry vault of heaven through a vast rent in the top of the cavern, thousands of feet above our heads. The crater, the entire mountain, was hollow, and the hole in the shell above us had been the vent for its now long-ago burnt-out fire! We were actually in the very core of a volcano. We proceeded but a few more steps, when the rays from our lamp revealed a vast yawning chasm before us, the light reflecting on a gulf of blackness, and not being powerful enough to illumine the furthestmost edge of the pit. We shuddered as we looked at the awful abyss, and pictured to ourselves our ghastly fate if we had by some fatality walked over its terrible edge. An immense block of stone, that Graham and Sandy rolled down the steep declivity which led to the actual chasm, pitched into the blackness, and we heard it thundering down into the dizzy depths, first striking on one side, and then on the other, as it rebounded in its awful leaps like a mere pebble, the sounds echoing and re-echoing through the hollow dome around us. Then the blows sounded fainter and fainter to our ears, and finally died completely away, as if the boulder had leaped into another vaulted cavern still lower down, or been ground to dust by the force of its fall, and we heard no more!

Here under the very crest of the mountain, amongst the very roots of this rugged volcano, we lay down to rest; but not one of us could sleep. The grandeur of the surroundings kept us awake, even though we had put out our lamp, and the only ray of light in the pitchy darkness was the opening

above us to the sky. All night we lay here watching the scintillating stars, like fiery gems, until one by one they became wan and indistinct with the coming dawn, and gradually the space around us was illumined as with a twilight brightness. The sun had risen, and the outer world was bathed in warmth; yet only a sickly reflection of the day penetrated into our magnificently grand, if cold and dismal refuge!

Anon the sun in his course across the sky shone down the mouth of the crater, and the light became stronger. We seated ourselves in the circle of his rays, and here we ate our cheerless meal—the remainder of the flesh we had had from Kios, and a few biscuits. Fortunately, our water supply was ample; the precious liquid dropped incessantly from far up in the rugged heights of the hollow mountain's roof; it trickled along the ground, and accumulated in little pools among the pumice stones at our feet. As we ate our meal, and tried to warm our chilled bodies in the faint sunshine, a great mass of rock came hurtling down from the very summit, and leaped with an awful rushing sound into the chasm, and for long we heard its terrific progress into the uttermost depths of the volcano. We looked up in terror and sprang to our feet, expecting each moment to be our last, and that the mountain itself was going to collapse and bury us like moles beneath its tottering ruins!

But even a worse fate than that threatened us, for boldly outlined against the sky, with helmets glinting in the sun, peering down into the gloomy depths were several of the troops from Edos, in the very act of hurling another piece of rock upon us. We started back in horror, and hurried out of the focus of that death-dealing aperture, burying ourselves from sight in the surrounding gloom.

"So our hiding-place is discovered, and we may expect no mercy from the bloodhounds," said Graham.

"We will fight for liberty this time," rejoined the Doctor, in a cool and resolute voice. "Fight, and die fighting," he continued, "rather than fall into the power of those merciless, cold-blooded people of Edos again."

Temple and Sandy were equally determined to fight to the last, and we began to prepare ourselves for the coming fray. We again turned on our electric lamp, and retreated into the darkest depths of the cavern in search of some spot where we might advantageously fight our foes. We discovered

a small mound of broken rocks on the floor of the mountain, and on the summit of this we built up a rough rampart, behind which we might find some shelter when firing. Then, by the light of the lamp, we carefully examined our rifles and revolvers, and made ready our ammunition. We agreed that Graham and Sandy should fire, they being the best shots, and that the Doctor and Temple should load and hand the weapons. If we came to close quarters, each was to use his own revolver as best he could.

Before we had finished all our preparations, the great mountain vault began to echo with the steps of advancing troops. Clearly they knew of this wondrous cavern, and must have been aware of other and easier ways of entrance than the one we had chanced to discover. They were searching every nook and corner of the mountain as they came, and we could now form some idea of the vastness of the cavern by the length of the advancing line of troops. What astonished us most was their method of illuminating their path through the darkness. As seen from the distance of a mile, the movements of the coming troops were marked by a line of little fire-balls, irregularly dancing and bobbing to and fro; and as the soldiers came nearer we saw that each one had what appeared to be an incandescent lamp attached to his left ankle, which lit up the ground before him for a few yards! We held our breath in our great excitement, and curiously watched the foe. Then Sandy and Graham each took their trusty rifles and knelt behind the rough rampart, ready to fire the moment a good opportunity occurred. It was no use waiting until the troops advanced, because discovery was certain; their line of coming searchers were bound to cross the hill on which we were entrenched!

Our hiding-place was still undiscovered, and the troops were not more than two hundred yards away. We watched the line of lights break into two and circle round the yawning gulf; we saw a few troopers advance into the subdued light below the crater's mouth, and then disappear again into the darkness. Then Graham covered one of the dusky forms, and after taking careful aim, pulled the trigger and missed! The line was unbroken. A second afterwards, Sandy's piece went off with no better luck, the light being too uncertain for accurate aim. The awful echoes that our exploding rifles raised are beyond the powers of language to describe them. The vast vault seemed to be cracking in twain, and the reverberations appeared never going to subside. For a moment the troops were filled with panic; but we heard

voices as of commanders cheering and encouraging their faltering men, and a moment after we were literally blinded by a vivid flood of brilliant light which gleamed out from behind us. Dazzled and blinded though we were, we saw at once that we were surrounded by enemies, another detachment having surprised us from the rear. We were now as exposed to view as if we had been in the open air, under the blazing sun of noonday, and before one of us could recover from his astonishment and fire a shot in defence, our position was stormed, our rifles and revolvers wrenched from our hands, and we were helpless as babes in the power of our enemies.

What the light really was, whence it came, or how it was produced, we knew not, but it continued burning until we and our captors reached the open air. The wild, savage scene of grandeur, revealed when the hollow mountain was made to disclose its hidden splendour by the penetrating light, can never fade from our memory. Though captives, and bowed down with hopeless despair, we were compelled to look, nay, even to admire! The misery of our position was forgotten in the glory of that cave, whose appearance bore eloquent and silent testimony to the stupendous forces of volcanic action. The brilliant light lit up even the very highest parts of the lofty mountain dome, showing hollows, and jagged points, and enormous icicle-shaped masses of gold and silver, and other richly-coloured but, to us, unknown metals, which had formed there as the molten interior of the volcano had suddenly cooled in rest. Some of the half-burnt rocks scintillated with unconsumable crystals; others were ground smooth as marble by the troubled action of a seething sea; and great masses formed of a dozen different metals were to be seen here and there, wedged in between the ruin of rocks. So rugged and loose was the roof in some places, that it looked as if the very echoes of our footsteps would dislodge acres of boulders and send them tumbling down in mad confusion. But we were marched as quickly as possible out of the mountain, and, in spite of our cruel fate, in our hearts we were thankful to leave this terrible chasm behind us, and once more to find ourselves under the canopy of heaven, in the full and blessed light of day.

We were immediately manacled, and conducted to the camp by the lake, where, in a spacious tent, Perodii sat in state. A gleam of intense hatred passed over his dark and savagely handsome face as we were marshalled into his presence. All Graham's courageous spirit seemed to return as he

looked once more upon his rival and his enemy, and he returned Perodii's glances with a look of withering and defiant scorn.

"So, man of Ramos, with all thy cunning and with all thy magic arts thou hast fallen once more into my power," said Perodii in a sarcastic voice, addressing Graham alone, and seeming not to notice the rest of us at all. 'We shall meet again,' thou saidst at Remagaloth, and we have done so. And now thou shalt bitterly repent thy insolent behaviour, and to ME shalt thou cry aloud in thy woe for mercy. Thou shalt beg for death, yet shalt not die; thou shalt crave a speedy doom, yet shalt linger on and on in burning pain; but I will laugh at thy agony and scoff at thy prayers, thou low-born knave, thou seed of evil, who hath sought to steal the favours of the woman I desired."

"You speak the words of a coward! Strike off these cursed chains, I say, you lying scoundrel, and let fair combat decide between us. I fear no braggart such as you, who can only heap insults upon a fettered and a helpless man. Strike off these chains, I say, and then——"

"Hold thy peace! or I will have thy noisy tongue cut out," Perodii answered, stung by Graham's bitter words. "Back to Edos shalt thou go; and the lake of Melag shall be a couch of flowers compared with the bed of thorny agony on which thou now shalt slowly die. Perodii hates thee: and—take heed of what thou sayest—hates thee for thy cursed interference with the woman he would have favoured, and might have wed!"

"Wife! Wife! Volinè your wife! Know that she despises you as much as she loves and favours me, and long has she known your designs of evil upon at least one maiden's innocence. You, a scoundrel such as you, whose name is but another word for villainy throughout all Edos, take Volinè to wife!——"

"Take heed of what thou sayest, or thy death shall be made more terrible than the one I have already planned for thee," said Perodii, starting to his feet in rage, and half drawing the heavy knife which hung sheathed from his girdle.

"My words are true, as you will know," continued Graham, his voice getting louder as he went on. "Volinè is mine! Coward, do you hear me?—is MINE! Behold this ring—her ring—upon my finger, a pledge and token of her love, and a talisman to preserve its wearer from a violent death!"—and

as he spoke he held out his fettered hand, in triumph, to show his treasured gift.

"Then, when she weds thee, she shall have a corpse for her groom. Ha! Ha! Methinks Volinè, much as thou sayest she loves thee, will shun thee in death! Death is but a sorry mate upon a bridal couch!"

"Your threats are but empty words. My comrades' lives and my own are in the King's keeping. He speaks, and we may die; he says the word, and we go free. Already Echri's displeasure has been shown by our miraculous escape from Remagaloth. The King—yea, even the King—will not tempt his holy wrath a second time!"

"For little I would strip this ring from off thy hand."

"You dare not! Know you not that he who seeks to take it by force, or by stealth, is cursed? And braver men than you would hesitate before risking their souls' damnation!" said Graham calmly.

"Faugh! I want not thy paltry bauble. Old Echri is but a woman's comforter, and turns their pretty heads with his ghostly nonsense."

"So long as I wear it, Perodii, it is beyond your power to harm me, try as you will——"

"Enough! I forget myself in holding argument with such as thee," retorted Perodii, who then, addressing the guards standing round us, said:

"Take this boasting fool from my presence, or by my eternal soul I may repent me my hatred, and by slaying him at once, cheat myself of the pleasure of witnessing his lingering agony."

"Perodii, the boasting is all with you——"

Graham's sentence was never finished, for he was hurried from the tent at once, and we quickly followed, surrounded by guards. Graham was manacled heavier than the rest of us, stooping under the weight of his brazen fetters, and was confined by himself in the watchful keeping of a double guard. That night we were taken some distance across country, perhaps thirty miles, until we reached a large building standing by itself on an open plain. In this was a deep shaft which we descended by a winding stair; and there at the bottom we found waiting for us a curious carriage which passed through a tunnel or tube, fitting tightly as a piston-rod in a

cylinder. This was worked either by some system of pneumatics or by electric currents, we could not say which, as our departure was so hurried. In two hours, as near as we could judge, travelling through this tube at a speed which put us in mind of the *Sirius*, we reached another and similar building, and, ascending a spiral stair, came to the surface. To our utter astonishment we had reached Edos, and were marched through the silent, deserted streets in the dead of night, back to our old prison in the King of Gathma's Palace!

CHAPTER XVI.

VOLINÈ.

Heavily chained and without food we were left in our old quarters until morning, not even the benefit of a light being vouchsafed to us. For this harsh treatment we had only Perodii to thank; indeed, it was highly improbable that the King had been apprised of our return, as we arrived at so late an hour. We passed the remainder of the night in miserable suspense, listening to the regular tramp of the guards outside, and saying little to each other.

"I hope, Graham, you now see the folly of your foolish intrigue with this woman. Had it not been for her we should never have incurred the anger and the hatred of this Prince Perodii; the King would have overlooked our killing Osa, and we should now be free," said the Doctor, with more irritation in his voice than we had ever heard before.

"Come, come, Doctor," answered Temple, "it's no use reproaching Graham; and this scoundrel of a Prince Perodii may yet go a little too far."

"But how can that help us? How can his downfall shake off our fetters? How can his evil fortune bring our release from captivity, or save us from death?" continued the Doctor, with a dogged determination to stick to his opinions on women in general.

"I'll back a woman's wit to find a way," Temple went on. "Volinè's dislike for this Perodii, and her partiality for Graham, will act as irresistible

incentives to triumph over the man she despises, and save the other whom she loves."

"We have not had much evidence to confirm what you say, Temple," said the Doctor, as obstinately as ever.

"True," answered Temple; "but you cannot suppose that this girl has remained idle. Depend upon it, her royal father has had to put up with a good deal of coaxing and entreaty on behalf of her lover. She will be sure to take advantage of our escape from Remagaloth, and make the most of her time, unless she is very different from the girls of Earth. Perodii's absence from Edos, too, favours her efforts, and she will have had a clear field. Then there is this Echri——"

"Pray draw the line at the supernatural. This ring affair is not worth serious words—a lot of humbugging duplicity, shielded by religion. No! you will never convince me, Temple. As I said before, so I say again, women are the root of all mischief; and it is a thousand pities this Volinè ever became mixed up in our affairs."

"Well, well, Doctor, we won't argue further, it only makes unpleasantness."

All through this controversy Graham never uttered a word. He sat still in the darkest corner of the room, and only the occasional jingle of his brass fetters told us that he was awake. Secretly he enjoyed this conversation about his dear one. It was untold joy to him to be back again under the very roof that sheltered her, to be so close to her; and the hope of seeing her again gave him strength, and brightened the dark hours of his captivity. He never lost confidence in the beautiful girl who had made him happy by giving him her love; and he knew that he and his companions would neither be forgotten nor forsaken in their need. He would not provoke discord in their little band by argument with his good and worthy friend, Doctor Hermann, on the only topic on which they were bound to disagree. He preferred to sit in silence through the night, with glad thoughts of Volinè for his company. He had escaped what looked like certain death, he was back near the woman who was all-in-all to him; the very garden in which they had met and tasted the secrets of love was but outside the prison window; the dark hopeless future, which had appeared but a stormy plain of wild despair, stretching away, away unto death, seemed already tinged with the dawn of happiness! He knew Volinè's ring had already delivered him twice

from great peril; and he felt, whatever danger might betide, the secret of salvation therefrom circled round his finger a sacred charm against death. That he could impart a little of this confidence in the virtues of his treasure to his comrades was his constant wish—not for his own sake, but for theirs. Yet all that he could say had been already said. The Doctor continued to pooh-pooh its efficacy; Temple was wont to smile and listen, half incredulous, yet impressed considerably by his earnestness. Each, however, required more palpable proof than that already given. "They forget," Graham continued to muse, as he lay listening to the Doctor and Temple talking, "that they are in a new world, beyond all earthly influence; and that the power of this holy Echri is mysterious and unnatural, only because it is new and strange to us. Were it rendered familiar to us by earthly custom and every-day experience, we should look upon it as a most natural thing. We must be prepared for all kinds of surprises here. If a great and holy man of this world possesses a power which is invested solely in God in our own, why should we marvel?"

As he sat musing thus the ring upon his finger suddenly glowed with great heat, and made him cry out in agony.

"Why, Graham, what is the matter?" said all three of his companions together.

"Nothing; it was a sudden spasm. I must have been dreaming. I am all right, I assure you," he answered, resolving to conceal the actual cause of his transient pain. "It seems like some manifestation of Echri's," he mused. "Well, I believe in his power, and have faith in his ring. I cannot help myself, I am compelled to do so." Then, speaking aloud, he continued:

"I hope you are not very greatly inconvenienced by these cursed fetters, my friends. The night is nearly spent, and I hope daylight will bring release."

"Mr. Graham, ha' ye no chance o' breakin awa'?" said Sandy. "These chains are uncommon heavy and tiresome."

"None this time, Sandy—I don't feel up to it; besides, they are stronger than they were before. Be patient till the morning, and then we shall see what turns up. Something good, I hope, for all our sakes."

Beyond a word or two of enquiry, first from one and then from another, as to how each was bearing up in misfortune, the remainder of the night was

passed in silence. Sometimes we dozed, and woke again with a start of alarm, wondering where we were; then we lay and listened to the guards pacing to and fro outside our door, or the noise of the distant fountains in the garden of Siccoth. The time passed slowly enough, and by the dawn we felt terribly cramped and sore, owing to our being compelled to remain almost in one position the livelong night.

The sun had been up several hours before our prison door was opened, and food brought to us. Perodii came with the guards, and was again most insulting in his language.

"Let loose these dogs of Ramos for a little season, until they have eaten," he commenced, addressing the guards standing at the half-open door. Then turning to us, he exclaimed:

"Perodii hopes ye have all passed a pleasant night; they sleep safely who repose in chains. Now up and to your victuals; but methinks ye will not find them such dainty fare as when the traitor Kaosp provided them. By my soul, we will have no more of such nonsense! Prisoners ye are; and as prisoners shall ye be treated, so long as Perodii hath the charge of ye. And hark ye, no more shall that wanton wench, Volinè, or her gifts and favours, be admitted here! Guards, heed well my words; that man shall die who admits that forn _____"

"Perodii! how darest thou utter such words concerning me, the daughter of thy King?" said Volinè, and she pushed the trembling guards aside and walked into the room, her cheeks scarlet with burning indignation, her eyes aflame with anger, and her hands clenched tightly to control her passion.

"What doest thou here, Volinè?" exclaimed Perodii, starting violently, and evidently ill at ease, but preserving with a mighty effort his usual air of bravado. "Meddle not with my affairs, or, by the living God, I will acquaint the King with thy brazen interference."

"What do I here? That is no business of thine. I come to set these prisoners free, and to conduct them to my father's presence, not as his captives but as his guests! Strike off those bonds and chains this instant, or the King's just wrath shall overtake thee. Guards! in the King's name Volinè commands ye! Strike off——"

"Stay!" shouted Perodii in a voice of rage, and pointing to the door. "Volinè, this is no place for thee! Get thee hence to thy apartment, and there wait thy father's pleasure."

"Braggart, hold thy peace! Volinè is no child, to be chid by thee. Thou hast enough to answer for! Go! The daughter of thy King hath bidden thee go!"

"And what if I refuse? These guards are my servants, and await my orders."

"Thy servants! Say the King's, thy master! Now guards, advance, and do my bidding——"

"Let a soldier stir, and he shall die!" shrieked Perodii, beside himself with passion.

"We obey thee, Volinè, even as we obey the King," said their captain, leading forward his men, and in a moment our fetters were struck off and we were free. Perodii, without another word, walked away, his face livid with rage and hatred.

"That mon bears us na guid-will, Mr. Graham," muttered Sandy, as we watched the discomfited prince hurry away.

Our lives had been full of eventful surprises, from the moment that we had descended upon the surface of this strange world, and this last unexpected change in our fortunes seemed one of the most wonderful of all. As yet, Volinè had not addressed a single syllable to any one of us; but a smile of ineffable sweetness stole over her handsome face, and blushes like as the tints of an opening rose glowed all unbidden on her cheeks as she glanced at Graham for an instant, and met the look of admiration and pleasure with which he was lovingly regarding her—her, his dear one, from whom he had been ruthlessly torn asunder and had now rejoined.

"Good Himos, thyself and thy comrades may now depart," said Volinè, addressing the captain of the guard. "I will myself conduct these men of Ramos to my father's presence. Thou hast nought to fear from thy disobedience of Perodii. From this hour must thou cease to take commands from him, until such time as it may be the King's, thy master's, pleasure to order otherwise."

Bowing low, Himos gave the word to his troops, who marched away, led by him, from our prison-chamber along the corridor, but in an opposite

direction to that taken by Perodii. Volinè then advanced towards us with hands held out in welcome, and smiling sweetly said, in a voice from time to time trembling with emotion:

"Men of Ramos, no words that I can speak can say the sorrow that I feel for all the indignities and hardships ye have suffered since entering our royal city, Edos. My soul doth grieve within me at your unjust treatment from the hands of the King, my father; but his mind hath been poisoned and biassed against ye by him who brought ye here in chains, and sought your ruin, to gratify his own feelings of revenge. Since ye were so miraculously delivered from death at the crag Remagaloth, the King hath doubted the wisdom of his judgment on ye, and ye would at least have been free to go your way unmolested, had not Perodii prevailed upon the King to be allowed to take ye captives, to bring ye here again, and then to carry out the awful sentence of the Supreme Court himself! So far hath he been favoured, but his villainy is now unmasked; wiser counsel hath prevailed with the King. In bestowing upon ye, O distinguished and learned strangers from Ramos, his royal pardon, he offers ye his hospitality and protection, so long as ye may make this our world your home. But come now with me to his royal presence, and hear words of welcome and of freedom from his own lips. He waiteth to break his morning bread with ye.

"Stay thee: no thanks are asked or needed," continued Volinè, with upraised finger, as Temple began to speak, "for methinks it is I that have brought much trouble on ye. Besides, ye must be full of weariness and hunger, and it is not fitting or seemly that I should keep ye longer here." And as she spoke Volinè placed a tiny whistle, wrought in fine gold and set with gems, between her lips, and blew three times, short and shrill, thereon. In a few moments two court-marshals, dressed in quaint and costly garb, and with long white wands tipped with crescents of crystal, appeared, together with four of Volinè's female attendants, and stood in respectful silence by the doorway, bowing low as the King's fair daughter passed out, beckoning us to follow her.

"We hear from this Volinè only a few fragments of the reason for this change of opinion in our favour. She has left much more untold," whispered the Doctor to Temple, as they walked along side by side behind the marshals.

"True, Doctor," answered Temple in an undertone, "but I have no doubt that this royal maid has been pleading our cause with her old father, and that her strong attachment to Graham has lent eloquence to her oratory. The complete story of our pardon is reserved for his lucky ear alone."

"Say unlucky—most unlucky, Temple; for that woman's toils are creeping round him, and too late he will feel them hampering his ambition and retarding his progress."

"Doctor, I must really give you up as an incurable. Your ideas on women are out of all focus. Still, you must admit that a woman has rescued us from a terrible position——"

"Into which she alone plunged us. No, no, Temple. We shall never agree upon it—never!" and he relapsed into silence for the rest of the way.

We walked along corridor after corridor, through lofty halls, and up and down wide staircases crammed full of curious and costly gems of art, until it seemed as though the colossal palace was an endless maze of enchantment and voluptuous grandeur. At the foot of the last staircase Volinè and her maidens passed away through a lofty archway on the right, waving us a smiling farewell as she went, and we continued to follow the two marshals alone.

At the top of this last flight of stairs we reached another archway, hung with soft and heavy draperies, on either side of which stood a guard, so still and inanimate that he looked carved out of the stone itself. As we crossed the twenty paces or so of the landing, these sphinx-like soldiers, with a common impulse, flung the curtains wide apart, and we passed through into a magnificent banquet-chamber. The scene before us dazzled us with its splendour. We had thought to meet the King alone, perhaps with his daughter; but, instead, we saw him sitting at the head of a table, round which a hundred male guests were also seated, to whom a sumptuous feast was evidently about to be served. Five vacant seats, two on one, and three on the other side of the King, were empty, and to these, all travel-stained and grimy from the fight in the cave, we were conducted.

"Men of Ramos, we meet more happily than we parted. Welcome to our morning feast. Eat and refresh yourselves, and having done so we may then speak together," said the King, bowing and smiling graciously.

We each kept silence, but acknowledged the old King's cordial greeting with a respectful bow. Then the meal commenced, and was continued in solemn silence, course after course, until the last dishes had been removed, and huge bowls of wine-like liquid had been placed upon the table. Now the attendants withdrew, and shortly afterwards, from some hidden chamber, strains of sweet ravishing music poured in subtle cadence, and women's voices were heard singing a dreamy madrigal. Then came a solo in a woman's voice, more entrancingly beautiful than all the rest, rising and falling in matchless compass—a song that had for its theme the birth and trials and triumph of Love. Was this last sweet, hidden singer Volinè? And did she sing the story of her own tender passion? One of us at least was certain that the voice he heard was that of his beloved, and the words that wandered through the banquet-hall, like a hymn from Paradise, were addressed to him. Stirred to his soul's depth's, he listened, entranced, with throbbing pulses, to the message that was sung to him by a woman who was fashioned fairer than the cunningest conception of earthly man could picture!

At last the music ceased, the singer's voice was hushed, and amidst a death-like silence, which held the assembled guests in thrall, the King addressed us:

"Strangers from the star-world Ramos, having now broken your fast, it is my duty, here in the presence of my faithful Ministers of State, to explain to ye the reason of your welcome here as free men and honoured guests. All the terrible indictment against ye, with the exception of the killing of Osa, hath been proved to be false! I am satisfied that my daughter's honour and fair fame are as untarnished now as before ye came to Edos, and that a noble of our Court, by name Perodii, hath lied. The High Priest, Echri, hath also spoken favourably of ye, and your cause hath been ably pleaded by the wise men that dwell in our good city Helmath. My philosophers are learned in the science of the heavens, and they have said that the wondrous tale ye tell bears stamp of truth, and none of sorcery. That being so, we grant our royal pardon for the slaying of our subject Osa, believing that, as ye have already said, he brought his fate upon himself, and in expressing our sorrow for the great misery and hardships we have caused ye, we welcome ye as friends and brothers, and bid you remain in Edos as our guests so long as ye may have the wish. We regret we did not heed the words of the men of

Helmuth sooner, but Perodii's cunning made us ignore their counsel—and nought can kindle a father's wrath so readily, or feed its flame so well and warp his judgment, as the dishonour of his child. Perodii's guilt was only proved to me at yesternight; hence his treatment of ye. He now is deep in our displeasure, and his seat at our royal board is empty. Ye need fear him no more. Our heralds shall proclaim your pardon, and your entrance into royal favour, throughout all Edos, and then may ye wander in safety at your will."

"My comrades and myself rejoice heartily at the words you have spoken, O King of Gathma," said the Doctor. "Let peace and unity prevail between us, so that we may labour for the common weal of the children of your world and of ours. Glorious possibilities are before us; and that the intercourse between the peoples of two sister-planets, when once fairly established, may bring forth nothing but good, I feel sure will be echoed as heartily by your majesty and your people as by my companions and myself. We thank you, King of Gathma, for your clemency, and for the friendly sentiments you have just expressed, and will do our best ever to merit your friendship, your protection, and your hospitality!"

The Doctor's words were received with a salvo of applause from the brilliant gathering around us, and shortly afterwards the King left his seat, saying as he retired, followed by his Court, that he would meet us again in a few hours, after the business of State was over.

As soon as the King and his ministers had gone, servants arrived and conducted us to a suite of luxuriously fitted baths, where we made ourselves more presentable. Fortunately, each had donned an entirely new outfit before we deserted the *Sirius*, so that our task was by no means a difficult one. We were discussing our altered fortunes, after completing our toilet, when a marshal entered and, walking up to Graham, said with a low bow:

"Art thou Harry Graham?"

"I am; what is your pleasure?" he answered.

"Then Volinè would see thee. Follow me, and I will show thee to my mistress."

"Go and enjoy your well-deserved happiness," said Temple, in English; but the Doctor muttered something by no means complimentary to Volinè.

Graham was too full of joy to feel angry with his old and eccentric friend, and thanking Temple for his good wishes, turned and followed his conductor. Once more he must furnish this portion of our narrative himself:

"Leaving the saloon of baths, I followed my stately guide along a wide corridor, on either side of which was ranged statuary of priceless value, until we came to the wide staircase up which we had passed on our way to the banquet-chamber. Through an archway at the foot of this, I knew the way led to Volinè's apartments. At the bottom of this spacious stairway we met two of Volinè's maids, and here the marshal bowed and left me. These maidens then stepped forward, and each taking one of my hands, they bade me come with them, and so I was led into Volinè's presence.

"I found my darling in a magnificent chamber, where every luxury that art and ingenuity could devise assisted in making the whole harmonious and splendid. She was reclining on a low couch, draped with rich dark furs of silky softness, her flossy hair falling all free and unrestrained around her bust and shoulders, one shapely arm resting along the back of the couch, the other pillowing her lovely head. What incarnation of female beauty! was my single thought as I beheld her there in all her splendour; and for a moment I stood upon the threshold of her room, spell-bound between my maiden guides, dazzled and bewildered by the vision of perfectness before me. With a smile for which any man would cheerfully have sold his soul, she rose into a sitting posture, saying:

"Cyni, thou and thy sister may now leave."

"Neither of us spoke nor moved further until the two maids had gone, leaving me standing as in a dream, watching the sweet picture before me. Then Volinè rose to her feet, and with smiles and blushes lending an added charm to her countenance, came towards me, murmuring my name! The spell was broken; and oblivious to aught else, I ran forward and clasped her in my arms again.

"Oh, Volinè, Volinè! my darling; this is rapture indeed. How good of you to send for me thus!"

"Happy do I feel to have thee with me again," she answered, as her head sank nestling on my breast.

"We kissed each other's lips, and together we drank the cup of our joy to the dregs in one long, intoxicating draught, without a single drop of bitterness to taint its sweetness.

"But why dwell on the ecstasy of our embrace and of our meeting, after so much terrible sorrow? I led her unresistingly to the couch she had so lately left, arranged the fallen furs around her, and sat me down by her side. There, with one arm around her waist, and with my eyes feasting upon the beauty of her face and form, we conversed of all that had befallen us since last we talked together and parted in the garden Siccoth, on that dreadful night before Remagaloth. We talked those lovers' trifles, so sweet and apt when spoken, yet so cold and passionless and uninteresting when read by others unconcerned.

"Then Volinè told me of all that had happened on the night we parted, as we thought for ever. How all her efforts were in vain; how she had visited Echri and been comforted in her despair; how he had promised to intercede with the King. How he came too late; and how she spent the time that we were at Remagaloth praying fervently for our salvation. She told me of her joy when the news of our wondrous escape was brought to Edos; of Echri's visit to the King; and of how the high and mighty priest had exerted his power, and delivered us from an unrighteous doom!

"Daily since then, dear Harry,' she told me amidst sobs and smiles, 'have I pleaded thy cause with my father; beseeching him to spare thee and thy companions; to discredit Perodii's words, and to lend ear to the utterances of the great and good Echri, and the men of Helmath. I besought him to let ye go your way in peace, and not to cherish feelings of revenge and hatred unworthy of a mighty king. But all I could say availed me nothing definite. He felt keenly the disgrace and humiliation in the Hall of Justice, and his heart was still hardened towards ye, although I could perceive his mind was wavering, until driven to desperation I told my father the naked truth.'

"And what may that truth have been, darling?' I whispered, seeing her hesitate, with heart beating fast within me, and with the long-cherished hope that she had told the King of her love for me, and that royal favour had smiled upon my suit.

"Dost thou press me to answer, Harry?"

"'Indeed I do, my bonny one.'

"'But, mayhap, my words will cause thee pain!'

"'Not more than the suspense and anxiety I now suffer, until I hear them, sweet one,' I answered, with faltering hope, dreading, yet eager to hear her reply.

"'Then hearken to my words, and interrupt me not until I have told thee all. I doubt me not that thou hast remembrance of Perodii's conduct in Siccoth, and of the lying words he then did speak. From that night, until the day of thy trial and sentence, he used his knowledge of our stolen interview as a power of evil and annoyance against me. His threats to make my honour the common gossip of the streets of Edos bound my tongue to silence, for we women of Gathma dread to have our fame tossed to and fro upon the breath of scandal. And so he forced his unwelcome attentions upon me. I bore them, Harry, for thy sake; for he gave me solemn assurance that my meeting with thee should be told to no man, and that he would seek to save thee!'

'Darling! by the——'

"'Nay, interrupt me not, Harry,' she continued, placing a finger on my lips. 'Thou knowest how he broke faith with me, and lied before my father and a hundred thousand dwellers of Edos, and what woe his words have wrought. He lied because his passion found no favour in my sight, and because the King seemed in clement mood towards ye; and well dost thou know the evil of his words. I told thee of my father's wrath, and how he heard me without relenting, when last I met thee in the garden. After thy trial and sentence, Perodii sought by threats to make me yield unto his wish, and mate with him, but rather would I spill mine own blood than be his wife. He even dared to attack me yet a second time, on the night of thy escape from Remagaloth, and by cunning artifice entered my chamber, where I prayed for thee! Cyni, by great good fortune, chanced to be with me——'

"'By the living God, Volinè, Perodii shall answer to me for this,' I said, in a voice that echoed the anger and hatred burning in my soul.

"'Hush! and hear me on. I have but little else to tell thee. Seeing that he had been witnessed by Cyni he sped away, telling me that he was starting from Edos that night to take thee prisoner again, and carry out himself the sentence that had been pronounced upon thee. I held my peace, hoping that

some evil might overtake this Perodii in his search, and praying that his quest might be vain; until I heard from a hunter noble, by name Kios, that ye had struggled valiantly near Helmeth, yet had been overcome, and were being carried back to Edos. Then I told my father all, and proved my words by good Cyni's aid. Great was his wrath at the manner in which Perodii had duped him, and quickly did he take steps to protect and befriend ye, as ye have already seen.'

""But why not have told your father all this long ago, darling?"

""My father hath many cares, and much business of State to do, and I did not like to add to his troubles.'

""But this Perodii; what punishment will be meted out to him? Surely, he merits death for so insulting the daughter of his King.'

""Harry, our laws are not thy laws; our customs in Gathma are not like those in Ramos—Earth, as it is called by thee. Know thee, that even the King hath no power to put to death a noble of Perodii's rank. He can but depose him from Court——'

""But Kios, whom we met near the city of Pamax, told us that for some offence he had been condemned to die, and only saved his life through the clemency of the King.'

""Ah! I also heard yesterday from worthy Kios of your stay with him in the woods of Theloth, and wish him well. But Kios was not of such noble rank as Perodii, who in station is next to the King.'

""That shall not prevent his reckoning with me, Volinë. The day shall yet come when I will make him confess as publicly that his words were lies, as when he spoke them in your father's Judgment Hall.'

""Heed him not, O Harry; let him go his own evil way. Cross not his path a second time, or he may do thee harm, and I——'

""Should what, dear one?" I asked as I kissed her forehead.

""Should never cease to grieve for thee; she answered, nestling closer to me, and gazing into my face with her splendid eyes.

""But I have no fear of such a coward as he; and by the customs of the Earth I long have left, I swear he shall answer for his added insults on you.'

"Harry, Harry, dost thou not care for me enough to obey me? Thou dost! Then let Perodii rest in the deep disgrace into which he hath already fallen. By the customs of Edos, methinks no greater punishment could be given him. And now thou must leave me.'

"But when may I see you again, darling? To-night? Yes, say to-night, and in the garden Siccoth, by the arbour where you first met me.'

"Well, thou hast my promise. Now haste thee to thy comrades, for the hour hath arrived when my maids do come to me.'

"May the hour soon come, my darling, when we shall never have to part again,' I said to her, unable longer to control my feelings.

"What meanest thou?'

"I will tell you, my precious one, in Siccoth's arbour, where, at sunset, I shall wait in weariness until you come,' I answered, as I kissed her again and again, before tearing myself away from her white, encircling arms.

"Once more three blasts were blown by Volinè upon that golden whistle, and almost immediately Cyni and her sister entered, and conducted me to the foot of the staircase, where I found the marshal waiting to escort me back to my companions.

"I found them in one of the smaller rooms of the Palace, happy enough, and full of what they had been doing during the morning that I had spent with Volinè. Temple had been amusing himself in wandering from room to room of this wonderful Palace, passing his time in admiring the costly and beautiful works which adorned its interior; all of them new and strange, and like nothing to be found in the palaces of Earth. The Doctor and Sandy had walked abroad into the streets and squares of Edos, and were full of the curious scenes and customs they had witnessed, and the strange types of architecture they had seen. Everywhere they had been treated with respect, although much curiosity was excited by their appearance and movements."

"I was just telling Temple that Edos would scarcely suit a man of his commercial instincts," remarked the Doctor to Graham as he entered the room. The Doctor had quite recovered his good temper, and the walk abroad had put him in the best of spirits. "What do you think of a city where there are no shops, nor marts of business? Edos is a centre of luxury—a dwelling-place of the noble and those of high degree. None of its

inhabitants toil or trade therein. It is an ideal city; smokeless, noiseless—a repository for the best and brightest results of the brain and genius of a world, and a gathering-place for its cultured people," continued the Doctor, led away by his enthusiasm. "I want a hundred hands, Graham, to chronicle all I have seen. My one regret is that my life will not be long enough to do justice to this glorious world, or to describe its endless wonders."

And so the afternoon slipped away in pleasant, entertaining chat, varied by a light meal, which was served to us *al fresco* by two of the Palace servants. In the early evening the Doctor, Temple, and Graham dined with the King—another sumptuous feast, at which the old monarch made himself especially agreeable, and never seemed to tire of hearing us recount our journey across the heavens, and tell of the world we had left. Curiously enough, no ladies were numbered among the guests; but this and the morning feast, we learned afterwards, were State banquets, at which it is not etiquette for females to appear. Graham—unknown, of course, to all the rest—chafed exceedingly under the long and almost endless interrogations of the King; for he thought of the tryst he had to keep with Volinè. Already the sun was sinking low in the western sky; and he was all impatience to hasten away. At last the meal was finished, and the brilliant gathering of nobles and ministers rose from the table, and separated into groups to carry on a friendly conversation. In the confusion Graham managed to slip away unobserved, but took Temple into his confidence before doing so, who promised to make excuses for him, if his absence chanced to be noticed by the King.

"I left the banquet-hall just as the King and the Doctor were eagerly engaged in a discussion upon the civilised forms of government on Earth, slipping out unperceived, and hurrying along the corridor towards the staircase that led down to a lower corridor, to which I knew there was an entrance to the garden of Siccoth-trees. I was just about to open this door, stooping down to examine the fastening thereof, when the hated voice of my rival, Perodii, hissed into my ear the following words:

"'Spawn of evil, we meet again! How often more art thou going to cross my path and live? Beware, or by my eternal soul I will slay thee even here.'

"'Prince Perodii, I desire to have no further intercourse with you, and I waste precious time in answering your vulgar words.'

"So, so; that wanton wench, Volinè, waits thee. My curse upon her for meddling——'

"Perodii never finished his sentence, for without thinking of the consequences of my act, and forgetting in my passion what I had promised Volinè, I gave the Prince a stunning blow full in the face with my clenched hand, and sent him reeling to the ground.

"Take that; and may it teach you better manners,' I said, as I delivered the blow straight from my shoulder. 'And, hark you,' I continued, as he lay half-stunned upon the mosaic floor, 'if you ever dare to speak one more insulting word in my hearing, about the woman I love, may your worthless blood be upon your own head, for I will slay you as I would a brute beast.'

"The Prince by this time had recovered his feet, and stood mad with pain and rage, half blinded by the blow I had dealt him, and unsheathing the long knife that dangled in a jewelled scabbard from his waist. What the end would have been it is difficult to conjecture, but at that moment our good friend Himos came along with a posse of troops, at sight of whom Perodii sheathed his weapon and walked away, saying as he did so:

"The hour of my revenge is yet again delayed; but I will wait, aye, wait for centuries yet to come, if need be, and wipe out all thy insults in thy blood.'

"Nodding to Himos, I sped through the doorway into the garden, and hurried along between the rows of curious shrubs and flowers towards the arbour where Volinè had promised to meet me. Already the sun was dipping behind the distant hills, and I feared that my darling might have come, and not finding me there, had gone away again.

"The arbour was empty, and just as I saw it on that fateful night that seemed already sunless ages gone. I sat me down on the seat where we had embraced; then I walked to and fro along the path that her dear feet had trod, scarcely able to control my impatience as the day fell slowly into night and Volinè came not. Had harm befallen her? Then terrible thoughts of Perodii's mad vengeance floated through my brain, and I cursed myself for not killing him outright, and thus preventing him from working her evil. At last my ear caught footsteps sounding on the pathway, clearer and clearer in the still evening air. Then she for whom I waited came from out of the

shadows towards me, and in another moment my sorrow was changed to joy as I folded her in my arms.

"I fear I have kept thee waiting, but a disturbance in the Palace has caused me delay. Perodii hath lodged complaint against thee for striking him without cause, and my father is annoyed and angry that such a vulgar fray should have taken place under his roof. Perodii now hath no business within our royal house, and my father refused to hear more of his words. Harry, why didst thou not keep thy promise to me, and leave this man alone?"

"Volinè, he is a coward and a liar. He alone is in the wrong, and thrust himself upon me as I came hither. He insulted you, and I struck him to the ground in my passion; but I am sorry now, for I have offended you. But pardon and forgive me, dear one, and let nothing come to mar our happiness. I will see the King anon, and tell him the simple truth. Come! kiss me, and make me happy again."

"Thou dost not deserve it, Harry; but there—" and as she kissed me she continued, "And now heed my wishes better in future, or my forgiveness will be more slowly given, I promise thee."

"And so this little cloud above our happiness drifted away, and we enjoyed all the sweets of each other's company to the full. I was determined now, to-night, to ask Volinè to be my wife. In spite of our differences of race, and inequality of rank and station, I resolved to tell her of my passion, and to hear my fate.

"Volinè," I whispered, as I drew her gently and yet closer to me—"Volinè, do you not know that I love you more passionately than ever mortal man has loved before? Do you not know that you have brought brightness into my life, and have taken that place in my heart which only one woman can ever fill?"

"But wilt thou always love me so?"

"Always, darling; always—until the race of my life is run, and all power of loving is stayed by the hand of death. Here, in this arbour, I swear it. By my home world yonder, and all that I hold dear thereon—see you, glimmering as a star above the tree-crests in the southern sky—I pledge to love and to worship you, Volinè, so long as I have life to love, and breath to speak it. Volinè, you are all in all to me; my first love and my last. Without you, life

is but another name for pain; with you, bright and radiant joy for ever. I am yours, and you are mine. Volinè, be my wife. Crown my happiness to-night by saying "Yes."

"Stay, Harry; thy last words have brought a strange and unknown pain to my heart, and revealed the misery that is now before me whichever way I answer thee. Harry, the sweets of wifedom with thee are a joy which I may never hope to reach. There is one barrier that must ever stand between us, which maketh impossible a union between a son of thy world and a daughter of mine. It hath been so ordained, and therefore we cannot alter it to meet our will. This barrier of which I speak is the span of life. Here, as thou knowest there are old men amongst us who have seen five hundred summers whiten into winter. Four hundred years are the men of Gathma's usual span, even as thou hast told me but seventy are the limit of the men of Earth and thine. I am but five and twenty summers—comparatively in childhood, yet—and for fifty summers more I shall enjoy the sweets of youth. Thou art in the middle of thy tiny course, and in a few more years will reach the close of thy allotted span. Think then of my time of endless widowhood, sadly mourning for thee; yearning for the love I tasted, only to lose. Were I to wife with thee, my short happiness would ever be clouded by its early end! It must not, cannot be!"

"Volinè, your words blot out all brightness from my heart, which now feels turned to stone. All now is dismal woe again—woe without a ray of hope, and there is naught but death before me to free me from my pain. Without you I cannot, will not, live, for life would be but a living death of dark despair. Is there no hope for me? No hope, Volinè dearest? Am I but to review this promised land of happiness from afar off, only to turn my face away from its green pastures for ever? Ah, no, it is too horrible!"

"My poor Harry, it is as hard for me as for thee; for I love thee as a woman only loves when she doth love, that is with all her soul. No hope can lighten our darkness or leaven our sorrow. Yet, stay! There is one way—one only; but, alas! it is all too terrible—too terrible to speak.' And here she burst into a passionate fit of sobbing, and clung tightly to me, stricken down with grief.

"I soothed her as best I could, and dried her hot tears with my own parched lips, sighs of agony meanwhile breaking unbidden from my own heart, and

big beads of sweat rolling off my forehead like drops of molten pain.

"'Speak, my darling, speak unto me,' I implored. 'Give words unto your thoughts, and let me know and share them. Volinè, speak? or my heart will burst with its heavy weight of woe.'

"Then, mingled with her sobs and moans of anguish, she spoke to me thus:

"'Harry, thou canst purchase happiness, but the price thou wilt have to pay is as costly as it is terrible! I have heard that Holy Echri hath the power of prolonging life, of endowing mortal man with forces that rejuvenate. The ordeal is awful. It is one of fire! To him who would so prolong or purchase life, the penalty is that he shall suffer all the horrors of death by fire. I know not the secrets of the mystic rite; but I will question Echri on the morrow. Doth it not seem unholy? And yet; and—yet—love—is—sweet——'

"'Volinè, your words bring new hope to my heart. If Echri possesses this wondrous power, then will I prove my love for you in his fires. His furnace shall but burn the dross of my love away, but refine it into a yet purer passion!'

"'Oh, Harry; how brave and how noble thou art! Thy calmness gives me confidence. If thou hast will and courage to pass through this fire for me, then surely shalt thou be rewarded by calling me thine own—that is, provided my father hath no obstacle to urge against our union. But, brave one, the hour is already late, and we must return. Meet me here to-morrow even, at setting sun, and I will bring thee news from Echri. Until then, adieu.'

"'Courage, courage, Volinè, my darling. All shall yet be well,' I whispered to her, as we walked along the garden-paths towards the Palace; and then planting kiss after kiss upon her willing, desire-athirsted lips, and snowy brow, I released her from my arms, and she went away.

"Love runs no smoother here, in Gathma, than on Earth, I mused, as I walked along the brilliantly-lighted corridors, thinking over the events of the past hour. A great and indefinable awe seemed creeping through every fibre of my body, as I thought and thought over the ghastly pledge I had just given, tempted by the vision of beauty in my arms. Did I regret my hasty, passionate vow? I now asked myself in cooler moments. No, no, a thousand times no, I mentally answered my own question; for if the way to my own happiness lies through fire, through fire I am thoroughly prepared to go."

[Here in the original MS. follows a long account of a scientific nature, which, though of the greatest importance to philosophers, might not be of sufficient interest to the general reading public. I have therefore deemed it expedient to omit this portion of the narrative, and keep as closely as possible to the fortunes of Harry and Volinè.—ED.]

CHAPTER XVII.

AT THE TEMPLE ON THE HILL VEROSI.

"Already my comrades had retired to rest, and I did not see any of them until the morrow. Each one of us had now a separate chamber, fitted up with every convenience and every luxury; and after I had lightly supped a Martial showed me to my own apartment. Sleep I could not. The couch was soft; the surroundings all that might woo sleep for any man; but my eyes refused to close in slumber. Hour after hour I lay there awake, busy with thoughts of the woman I was about to espouse, and of the awful conditions under which our union was to be made. All night I tossed in feverish

excitement, until the sickly light of the yellow dawn crept between the window draperies. Then I rose and dressed, and threw wide the casement, to let the refreshing morning air cool my burning temples. My tongue was dry and parched, and the cruel grip of a deadly fever seemed to have seized me. Then a terrible dread came over me that I was becoming mad. Was I still on Earth, and my visit to this strange world, and all that had befallen me thereon, but the wild delusion of a madman's dream? I would seek out Doctor Hermann, if all was an absolute reality, tell him my symptoms, and let him prescribe some remedy.

"Early as it was, I left my room and sought the Doctor's; for to stay there any longer I felt to be impossible.

"'Good morning, Doctor——'

"'Why, Graham,' said he, in a voice mingled with alarm and sympathy, rising from his couch as he spoke—'why, whatever ails you?'

"'That is just what I came here to know, Doctor. I feel all to pieces; generally out of sorts; and thought you might have some simple remedy at hand to brace me up a bit.'

"'Simple remedy! Why, man, you look half dead. Come, let me have a look at you. Your pulse! Ah! I thought so. You are exciting yourself too much over something or other. You don't want medicine. Absolute rest is all I can prescribe. Have you been to bed at all? You have! Then go back to bed again, man——'

"'But, Doctor, I cannot sleep, try as I will. All night I have not closed my eyes.'

"'Then swallow a couple of those,' answered the Doctor, taking two tiny, silver-coated pills from a phial in his pocket-case as he spoke. 'Twelve hours' sleep should put you to rights. And just one word of advice, Graham—don't worry yourself so much, whatever may be the cause, or you will be downright ill. There, be off to bed again, and I will look in later on.'

"I took the pills, and went back to my bed; but it seemed hours and hours before the opiate acted, and I sank into a deep and dreamless slumber. The sun was low down in the western sky before I woke again; but the fever had left me, and I felt refreshed. By my bedside I found various meats, and a tall, slender flagon of 'wine'; but far more welcome to my opening eyes was

a small nosegay of flowers, with a scroll of paper fastened to them, on which was written the two magic words 'Ra Volinè'—From Volinè! Heaven guard her from all evil!

"I dressed in haste, eating as I did so, for the hour appointed for my meeting with her was nigh, and my heart was filled with anxiety for the news that she might bring. But ere I had time to leave my chamber a servant came, leaving a message from my darling, saying that she would see me in her apartments. At the foot of the stairway Cyni and her sister waited my coming, and conducted me into the same room I had entered before.

"Volinè was waiting for me, and as the two handmaidens bowed and left, she came quickly to my side, a frightened, anxious look clouding her peerless face.

"'What is the matter, dear one?' I asked, as I saw her troubled look, although I guessed the cause.

"'Thy sickness hath grieved me sorely, dear. Art thou better now?'

"'The sight of you makes illness flee. But my malady is more of the spirit than the body. Darling, I cannot sleep for thoughts of you. That is all my ailment. And now let me thank you and kiss you for the pretty flowers. See; I wear them near my heart, and prize them much. But why do I see you here?'

"'For two reasons. First, thou art not well enough to risk the chilly air of evening; and second, I have prevailed upon Echri to meet thee here at a later hour. Already have I seen him when he came to Edos this morning, as is his daily custom, and by great good fortune persuaded him to grant my prayer. Oh! Harry, Harry, canst thou bear this pain for me?'

"'Dear one, my word is given, and I am ready, even now, to-night, to pass through this mystic ceremony, if it but hastens the day of our happiness. Have you yet made known our secret to the King?'

"'Alas! no; for I fear his refusal. But methinks I hadst better tell him before Echri comes. He may ask if my father hath given his consent to our betrothal, and even refuse his aid if such hath not been given.'

"'Then, darling, tell your father of our love to-night,' and I took her in my arms as I spoke, and kissed her upturned face in boundless pride.

"As thou sayest, so will I do. Yea, even now shall the King hear of my love for thee, and my desire to be thy wife.'

"So speaking, Volinè withdrew herself from my arms, and placing the whistle to her lips, called her faithful Cyni into the room.

"Is thy royal master engaged with business of State? Learn, and tell me.'

"His Majesty, O mistress, is in the Hall of Song.'

"Alone?'

"Even so, O mistress.'

"Ah, then, conduct me to his presence, good Cyni, for I would speak to him there'; and waving her hand to me Volinè departed, leaving me to wait by myself whilst the question of our happiness was decided.

"Slowly the moments slipped away—one hour passed, another had nearly sped, and yet Volinè came not. My heart was filled with forebodings of evil. Dread had seized upon my soul, and so agitated did I begin to feel as the time wore on, that I trembled like an aspen, and my legs became unable to bear me. Once more I passed through untold agonies of suspense, until at last I heard Volinè's voice outside, bidding Cyni leave her.

"The look of triumph on her face as she entered told me her story before she could speak, yet her flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes bore silent witness that the interview with the King, her father, had been by no means an unexciting one.

"My darling, I read your secret on your radiant face. Now all is well, and I may justly claim you as my own.'

"Thou sayest truly. My father hath said that I may wed thee; he hath consented to our troth, and, Harry, I could cry with joy. But wilt thou always love me as thou lovest me now? Art thou really sure? for I can tell thee, men of Gathma are often known to tire of their wives.'

"Then they cannot be one quarter so charmingly fascinating as you are, darling.'

"Ah, flatterer, thou seemest to know the way to a woman's heart. Who hath taught thee her weakness?'

"None of your sex, certainly, my sweet one, unless maybe I inherit it from those who have had more experience. But, Volinè, why stay so long away? Was your father at all inclined to withhold his sanction?"

"He was; for although succession to the crown of Gathma never runs through female descendants, it was his wish that I should wed a noble of our own race. He hath prejudice against thee, for thou art not of this world; besides, he also urged thy short span of life.'

"But that is easily overcome, darling,' I urged.

"Not so easily as thou thinkest; but I am not going to brood on that terror to-night—at least, not yet. I spoke of Echri's power, and of thy own determination, and that bringeth me to what I hadst forgotten in my joy. My father at last consented to my wish; but he made it the condition that thou shouldst pass through this ordeal of fire. He sayeth that if thou hast the courage to face this awful trial, which will make thee more of Gathma than of Ramos, then, and then only, art thou worthy of being mate for me.'

"With you for my reward, dearest Volinè, I would not hesitate to suffer the pangs of death a hundred times. I win your love in this ordeal——"

"Nay, Harry, thou hast won it long ago.'

"May heaven bless you for those precious words,' I answered, as I kissed her flushed cheeks, and drew her head gently down upon my shoulder.

"A low knocking at the door broke the spell of our delicious pleasure, and we heard Cyni, who had evidently been instructed to watch, saying:

"Hearken, O mistress; Echri the Priest cometh.'

"Then conduct him thither, Cyni, with thy fleetest steps,' Volinè answered, seating herself on a couch and smoothing her ruffled hair.

"In a few moments this famous Priest arrived, and I was not a little astonished to see with what reverence he was received. But his calm, saintly, dignified bearing seemed imperatively to demand respect, even obeisance. Never before had I seen so aged a being, or one whose full-ripe years of life were borne with so much vigour and manliness. He came into Volinè's room with a firm and upright step, his long hair and beard, which reached below his breast, white with the winters of centuries, setting off a singularly handsome and intelligent face. Bareheaded, clad in a long loose

black garment, tightened with a scarlet sash round his waist, and with a scroll of what looked like parchment in one hand, and a long, richly ornamented staff in the other, he advanced towards Volinè saying:—

"God's blessing rest upon thee and thine, Volinè, daughter of our well-loved King.'

"I thank thee, Holy Father, for thy kindly benediction, and also for showing me such favour in coming hither at so late an hour.'

"Nay, nay, child. I am ever ready to comfort any sorrow, and assist distress. I come to talk of thy troubles, and, by God's good grace, relieve them.'

"But thou art weary, good Father, and may not yet have supped. Wilt thou not eat before thou hast converse with us?'

"God ever gives me strength unto the measure of my labours, child; and my humble fare awaits me in my mountain-home, as soon as the works of the day be done. This stranger here is the man of Ramos, who was delivered from thy father's misplaced wrath at Remagaloth?'

"The same, O Father. See! thy sacred ring is even now upon his finger, thy talisman from evil.'

"And now, most reverend Echri, I would offer you my gratitude, as well as that of my companions, for your timely and marvellous aid in the hour of our darkest need, both there and in the Chados deserts, when we were perishing of thirst,' I said, advancing to where the old priest stood, and bowing to him respectfully.

"I ever seek to help all who put their faith in God, and blindly trust themselves to His Omnipotence. But thou hast come a long journey, my son, from a world whose ways I know not save by their revelation to me in a vision. Therein was declared unto me that ye do worship God, but in a different manner from us of Gathma. Therein, too, was declared unto me that, all in God's good time, the peoples of the worlds that roll across the sky in majesty and splendour, those balls that speak of His creative wisdom in their throbbing lights by night, shall be knit together in one grand brotherhood of God! This vision teacheth me that in thee and thy companions I see the shadowed prophecy beginning its fulfilment. Ye have conquered Space by your cunning arts, and the planets now no longer keep them to themselves. So will God gather those scattered worlds together and

hold all His people united! And now Volinè tells me that the passion ye call Love hath taken root between ye, and that already thou hast asked her to wife. Thou art but an agent of God in this wondrous thing, and being so, it is my holy duty to help thee yet again, in prolonging thy days, so that they shall equal hers. I hear that thou art willing to go through the holy rite that will endow thee with a longer span?"

"'Even so,' I answered, overwhelmed by the solemn words the old priest had uttered.

"'But hast thou weighed well thine inclination? The ordeal that thou must pass is one of Fire. Know ye that Fire is Life, and Life is Fire? By passing Fire ye enter Life. But even so must Death be conquered first!'

"'Holy Father, I wait with growing impatience to so prolong my days, having all faith in your wondrous power to help me,' I answered with a trembling voice, awed beyond description by the subtle influence this old priest already had over me.

"'Then, at noon upon the morrow, come thou to the Temple on the hill Verosi, and there will I help thee to thy wish. Volinè will show thee thither; and let your coming and your going be in secret, and be done by stealth.'

"'Come hither, Volinè, for I would give my blessing to ye both before I go'—and the old priest, taller by a head and shoulders than I, stood up, and with one hand placed on Volinè's head, and the other on my own, he breathed a silent prayer for us.

"'And now, my children, I must get me gone. The nightly services of our Holy House upon the hill await my ministration, and methinks ye both do tire of an old man's company.'

"'We thank thee much for thy good offices, Holy Echri; and will keep faith with thee to-morrow. Fare-thee-well.'

"Then taking up his staff, and his scroll of holy writings, the old priest, with a smile in which no human passions mingled, slowly went his way.

"'Now, Harry, thou shalt sup with me to-night, as a mark of royal favour,' said Volinè with a smile, 'and then must thou go and rest, and fortify thyself for the morrow.'

"So saying, she led me into another and a smaller room adjoining, where Cyni and her sister Irolne waited to serve us with food. Our meal over, I bade Volinè adieu until the morrow, she promising to meet me at our old tryst in the garden of Siccoth-trees, an hour before noon, whence we might journey together to the gold-domed Temple on the distant hill of Verosi.

"And so the morrow is to be the most eventful day of all my eventful life,' I mused, as I sat in my chamber looking out upon the Palace grounds, now appearing in all the subtle beauty a tropical night alone can lend. There I sat for an hour or more, deeply pondering over the morrow's mysteries. 'Where and what shall I, Harry Graham, be at the close of that all-fateful day?' My home, my Earth, shone like a steady-burning brilliant in the green-blue southern sky; in a few hours more, and all the ties that bind me thereto will be burnt away—destroyed by fire! Slowly, as I mused, her beautiful point of light sank lower and lower, and finally she dropped behind the garden-trees, and I bade her adieu—farewell, for with earthly eyes I should see her no more. One pang of regret, and one only, shot through my heart quicker than the lightning flash, and was gone; and then I cursed my weakness, for it seemed like a breach of loyalty to Her!

"All night I slept but little, and right glad was I to see the distant mountains, through my eastern window, tipped with ruddy day. I rose up from my couch and, early as it was, summoned Herio, the servant who had been charged with the duty of attending to my personal needs.

"At what hour do my comrades take their morning meal, Herio?" I asked as he entered.

"Two hours from the present, sire.'

"Then you will find me, if they make enquiry, in the garden below. I go there to breathe the morning air, and to refresh myself.'

"Truly, this garden was a wondrous place—filled with strange flowers and plants and trees, many of the latter festooned together by creepers which dropped in mid-air blooms of rare beauty and fragrance. It was graced with statuary, and with fountains which, by hidden means, dispelled a subtle perfume in their spray as the winds caught it and wafted it across the groves. Here I wandered, striving to compose myself and steady my nerves for the coming trial. Besides, I had no desire at present to betray myself,

and to let my comrades know the step I was contemplating. When all was over, then might I tell them my secrets, but, until then, I deemed it best to keep my own counsel.

"The time slipped quickly away, and Herio came to summon me to eat. Already my companions were at table, waiting for me. "Why, Graham, wherever on Earth—no, on Mars—do you hide yourself?" said Temple, as I entered the room. 'Where did you conceal yourself last evening? We knew that you were a-bed all day, for the Doctor came from time to time and saw you as you slept, but at night you utterly vanished.'

"I thought I told you explicitly to keep quiet, Graham, and here you are gadding about the moment you awake, casting all my cautions to the winds.'

"Now, Doctor—and you, too, Temple—as to where I spent the evening, I did so with Volinè, at her invitation, and I assure you I was well taken care of——'

"Really; I don't doubt it! What a lucky fellow you are! And when is the fatal day to be?" said Temple carelessly, and with a merry laugh, determined to have his say for once, in spite of the Doctor's presence, yet little dreaming of the awful signification his last lightly-spoken words had for me.

"I'm real glad to see you in such spirits, Mr. Temple, after all we have gone through lately,' I answered, trying to turn our conversation to subjects less personal and painful to me. 'What are your plans for the future, Doctor? Have you seen anything more of the King?'

"Well, Graham,' said the Doctor, evidently as pleased as myself to see the conversation taking a more practical turn, for an argument of any feminine subject was his one abomination. 'Well, Temple and I had a long consultation with the King yesterday; and we are about to hold a grand scientific Congress here in Edos, to which all the leading philosophers are to be invited, and then we are going to discuss I don't know how many important subjects. The King is quite enthusiastic, especially on one great project we are contemplating, namely, the establishment of regular communication between Earth and here. I have, also, a bit of news for you. I heard yesterday from our old friend Kios that that rascal, that villain Perodii, had destroyed the poor *Sirius*—wrecked her completely!'

"Doctor, you don't mean that?"

"But I do; and if I were a younger man, I would thrash him soundly for his mischief."

"Ah, Doctor," I answered, "Perodii is having his day, but retribution may be coming swiftly."

"Has come, but too late for me. The King has banished him from here."

"A worse fate than that awaits him, or I am no prophet," I added, in a tone of hatred.

"But your plans, Doctor?"

"We are going to make exhaustive collections of the fauna and the flora of this planet. Temple is going to investigate its commercial resources, visiting all the great centres of industry, acquiring information useful to the manufacturers of Earth, and at the same time imparting whatever knowledge he may possess that is likely to be welcome here. You, Graham, might do worse than go with Temple—an engineer would be a useful companion. Ah, Graham, we have years of work before us—years. Here, in my glory of triumph, I positively pity the poor scientists of Earth, turning over and over their few theories and time-worn specimens, each with little better to do than to spend his life and efforts in seeking to overturn the views of his contemporaries on this question and on that. It is almost an event, nowadays, in the scientific world at home, for any real good new species to be discovered; and yet here a world, an entire world, crammed full of new and curious forms, lies before me!"

"You see, the Doctor has not been idle," said Temple.

"Indeed he has not," I answered, "and all you tell me interests me exceedingly." At any other time I should have felt enchanted whilst listening to dear old Doctor Hermann's plans and projects, but this morning I heard all that was said like one in a dream. I was heartily glad when the Doctor took Temple off to hear of a wonderful account of some monster insect, whose habitat was in a valley near Edos."

"I suppose you are engaged for the day, Graham?" said Temple, slyly, as the two walked away.

"I am going to write up some of my notes, and may then join you,' I answered evasively. Already it wanted but an hour to the time I had promised Volinè to meet her, so long had we lingered at table.

"With ever increasing excitement, with nerves becoming strung unto their tightest tension, I passed that hour away, and then betook myself to the harbour where Volinè was to join me. There, to my great astonishment, I found one of her maids—Irolne, sister of Cyni—awaiting my coming with a message from her mistress, saying that I was to go with this maiden, who would conduct me to a distant part of the Palace grounds, where Volinè already waited. Along secluded paths, and twice for some considerable way underground, through wild and wondrous grottoes we went, until at last we came unto steps which seemed to lead into a large and lofty building, entirely underground. At the bottom of this stairway stood Volinè, with Cyni. We were in a round chamber, from which radiated in all directions large pipes or tunnels, similar to the one through which we were brought by Perodii captives to Edos. In the centre was a luxuriously-fitted car, by the side of which stood two marshals in royal uniform.

"Smiling sweetly to me, Volinè stepped forward and said to these attendants:

"'We would visit Echri's Temple on the hill Verosi. Place us thither with speed,' and, beckoning to me, she entered the brilliantly-lighted car, and I followed her and sat down by her side. Then the car was turned round perhaps a quarter of a circle, and began to move forward into one of the pipes, and in an instant we were gliding onwards with ever-increasing speed. My arm stole round Volinè's waist as we travelled on, and, kissing her, I said:

"'You see, dear one, I am still as anxious to go through this ordeal of fire as I was when I left you last night.'

"'I knew thou wouldst not fail, dear Harry; but already my heart falters within me. Even now there is time for thee to repent thy words.'

"'And lose you? Never, darling! I see happiness before me, happiness with you; and though the path that leads thereto is rough and terrible, the reward will all the sweeter be.'

"We had no time for much further converse, as in a few minutes of time we slowed, and at last came to a stop in another building, similar in all respects to the one we had left.

"Instantly four venerable, white-haired Priests approached, and with some invocation which I did not understand, assisted us to alight, and, in a tone of great respect, asked us to follow them. We walked up a sloping path in silence, and then found ourselves in a beautiful grove of trees, from which, perhaps a quarter of a mile distant, towered the three mighty domes of burnished metal we had seen from the air, when approaching Edos in the *Sirius*.

"Escorted by our priestly guides, we wended our way between the trees, until we reached the lofty arched entrance to the Temple. Passing under this we came into a kind of courtyard, after crossing which we went through another and a smaller way, and here Holy Echri stood waiting to receive us. He was dressed much more imposingly, in a crimson robe, with a long rod of what looked like fine gold in his left hand, and a scroll of parchments, bound and suspended by a curiously-wrought chain of the same metal, in his right.

"'Welcome to our Holy House, O daughter of the King, and man of Ramos! Welcome to the Temple of God. Thy faith is strong within thee, my son. Have no fear, and follow me without dismay, for heaven shall lend thee strength equal to thy weakness.'

"Then, turning round, he led the way into a gorgeous sanctuary under one of the smaller domes. To say that I was astonished at the magnificence around me, conveys but a faint idea of my actual feelings. It was a Temple of gems and costly fabrics, enough to excite the envy of a Solomon, and fill his soul with despair. There were altars and curious structures whose uses were unknown to me, wrought in solid gold and garnished with jewels; there were rows and rows of venerable Priests ranged in close array round each altar, some bearing pots of incense slung by chains of gold, others with rods of gold, others yet again with curious lamps that burnt so brilliantly that the eye could not look upon them without becoming almost blind to all other objects. Then there was a sumptuous throne, encircled round about with a low trellis-work of gold, and behind that a lofty gallery, also filled with Priests. As we entered a dirge-like chant was sung to strains of music,

where and how played I know not, which vibrated through our very souls in its harmonious beauty. Coming to a pause before the trellis-work, Echri bade Volinè and myself stand there together, and then, escorted by two aged Priests, he went and sat him down thereon. Then the music and the singing ceased, and a great silence fell upon the assembled throng, all eyes being fixed upon the throne, and we who stood before it. Volinè clung to me, and I could feel that ever and anon she trembled violently. All were apparently waiting now for Echri to act. Soon he did so, by addressing me:

"Man of Ramos, the hour hath now arrived when, if thy faith or thy courage hath not failed thee, thou mayest, by the ordinance of Eternal Fire, obtain a greater span of years for thy decaying body. If thou hast the nerve within thee to let this living Fire embrace thee, then shalt thou become possessed of that for which thy heart hath craved.'

"Then, addressing Volinè, he continued:

"And hast thou, Volinè, daughter of Gathma's mighty King, sought and got thy royal Father's free consent to take this man of Ramos for thy husband? If so be thou hast, speak!'

"In truth, most Holy Echri, the King hath said that this shall be, and I assure thee this man of Ramos, standing by my side, goes through thy sacred ceremony with the King's full knowledge and approval unto that end,' Volinè answered, in a voice choked with the emotion that was fast overcoming her.

"Enough! Now let us, therefore, enter upon our solemn duty.'

"And as he finished speaking, the multitude of Priests formed themselves into procession; the incense-throwers swung their cups to and fro, the lamp-bearers hoisted their lights on high, and the singers in the gallery commenced their solemn anthems. When they had finished singing, the grand procession began its imposing movement to the distant strains of some wind-instrument of great power and loud tone, on which twelve priestly artistes played, with marvellous precision, a march of soul-stirring beauty, though sad and tenderly plaintive in its cadence. At the end of this long company of marching Priests came Volinè, Echri, and myself; and so we wended our way around the spacious Hall and under an archway, into a larger building which was beneath the mightiest of the three brazen domes.

"This larger Temple was fitted up even more gorgeously than the one we had left; and right in the centre thereof was a High Altar, at the front of which flowed a constant stream of molten fire, smokeless and silent, yet so brilliant that it lighted up the vast dome into its uttermost recesses with a noonday brightness. The heat, as we passed within fifty paces of this wondrous fire-stream, was great, and beads of perspiration formed themselves on my face; but these were more the result of the great and awful excitement that filled my brain, than the glow of heat that radiated from this living furnace. As we passed, Echri said:

"Behold, my son, Fire that hath never ceased to burn since Gathma sprang from chaos! It is the primordial force that hath sustained and nourished Life from the beginning of all things! yea, the blood that courses through the veins and arteries of worlds. It floweth here by a dark and rocky way beneath the ground, from the mountain of fire ye, perhaps, have noted some distance from Edos.'

"I nodded, for I was absolutely too awe-stricken to speak, and the old Priest continued:

"Note thee well its living, brilliant beauty, for it is the enemy thou hast to conquer, or rather the friend that will help thee to thy heart's desire.'

"I shuddered as I listened to his awful words, yet somehow I felt no fear, no regret, no dread, only an overwhelming sense of reverence and wonder.

"Then, taking Volinè and myself by the hand, he walked between us, and led us to the foot of another throne, and, walking up the seven steps of solid gold, sat him down thereon. The procession of Priests continued walking on with slow and stately step, keeping time to the music that had now become louder, more triumphant in its melody, until, to the closing bars of this wondrous solo, they ranged themselves in one wide circle round the throne on which Echri sat, and the High Altar before which flowed the stream of Fire.

"Amidst death-like silence four Priests advanced, two carrying chains of gold, and two with some kind of vestments; and these they placed on a low table near, and then stood behind us, still and silent as the rest. Volinè clasped my hand in terror, but she seemed too frightened to speak, and tears were coursing down her white lovely face!

"My son, our holy Priests shall pray that God mayest give thee strength unto the measure of thy woe. Meantime, these men will take thee and prepare thee for thy fiery trial.'

"As soon as these words were finished, the four Priests stepped forward and bade me follow them. They took me across the wide floor of the Temple into a smaller chamber; and there I was divested of my garments, and draped in a priestly robe. Then the chains were fastened around my wrists, and I was given a draught of some sweet and volatile liquid from a goblet of crystal, before being conducted back to Echri's throne. Volinè was sobbing loudly; but I felt brave, endowed with a new-found strength, and stood calmly waiting for the end to come.

"Dost thou still desire to proceed through this ordeal, man of Ramos?" said Echri, in a solemn tone. 'Hath thou still the inclination to wed this gracious lady, the daughter of our King, by such means as have already been explained to thee?'

"I am ready,' I answered in a firm, unfaltering voice, with my arms extended towards him, draped in their manacles of gold. 'Fuse us in your Fire, O Holy Priest! Weld our souls together upon the altar-anvil of your strange mysterious faith! Make our two loving hearts but one! I am ready to brave your fiery ordeal, e'en pass through the glowing furnace of your wondrous creed, to reach my wedded bliss.'

"Here Volinè, by a great effort, composed herself to speak, and turning round, she looked at me in a tender, supplicating way, saying:

"Oh, Harry! Harry! My love for thee is strong, yet my poor heart falters before Echri's sacred furnace. Alas! Alas! my courage fails me! My dear one, my brave one, I am not worthy of such love as thine. Leave me. Return unto thine own people. Spare thyself this agony of Fire. Return, I bid thee, and be safe.'

"Nay, Volinè, speak not so! for your words wound me worse than that fire I now yearn to pass through to reach the full measure of my joy. Courage, darling, courage! as beseems a daughter of your noble, peerless race! I wait but Echri's word to enter yon Shrine of Fire. He will unite our hearts together; for all things to him seem possible,' I answered, bowing reverently before the throne on which Echri sat unmoved at Volinè's sorrow, solemn

and still as though carved in marble, patiently waiting to complete what I deemed the spiritual portion of our strange betrothal.

"Oh! Holy Echri, this thing must not be. His pain is my pain; and if he will not spare himself, then must thou spare him,' Volinè said, in a voice piteous to hear; and her words went each like a keen-edged dagger into my heart. Turning to me, she continued:

"Harry, thou shalt not go! Yea, I will even wed thee as thou art. Come back to me, for my heart is breaking. Come back to me; come back and comfort my dreadful sorrow. Oh! why did I tell thee of this terrible thing! oh! why did I tempt thee! Why, oh why did I counsel thee to this! Why send thee to such a doom of agony for ME—thee, whom I love better than my own life!"

"But even as Volinè spoke I was led away by the attendant Priests, feeling powerless to help the woman I loved, and growing more determined to consummate the dread doom before me.

"They led me unto the fiery stream, and there, as Echri rose and raised his voice in some unknown tongue, the floor gave way beneath me and I sank in an oblique direction into a small pit which seemed to me to be under, or in the very course of, the fiery stream! Then all became dark, and I could hear, as afar off, the singing of the Priests, their heaven-wrought music, and the piteous appeals of she whom I loved! Shortly the agony of my awful situation entered into my soul; yet all was hopeless now; hopeless! A living death by Fire approached me! I tried to cry out, but my voice was dumb; 'Volinè,' the one word I could say, became but a hideous rattle in my burning throat; and as my eyes strove in vain to penetrate the ghastly gloom of this dread chamber, the blackness around me seemed to fall away, and a volume of white-hot fire approached! Scorched and burnt by the sudden heat, all the agony of death entered into my soul in that one awful moment of time, my brain seemed to burst asunder with pain, and all became an instant blank!

"How long this lasted I know not; but in what seemed to me the twinkling of an eye I awoke, and found myself in the same small chamber where the Priests had robed and chained me. Echri stood near, and the same Priests were arranging my old garments ready for use. The melted gold of my manacles still hung in guttered streams from my wrists; my robe was burned to tinder; yet, otherwise, not one trace of fire marked my body, and

even the downy hair upon my arms was soft and unsinged! The sacred ring upon my finger had also passed through the fire unscathed! At all this I marvelled greatly, and pondered in amazement. I felt myself, and yet I knew instinctively I was not. What had actually befallen me I had not a single remembrance; all was blotted out by that stream of raging fire. How this wonderful transformation had been accomplished I never learned. It was the jealously-kept secret of Echri and his brother-Priests.

"My son, thou hast acted as only a brave man couldst. Begarbst thyself, and hasten to the comfort of her whom thou lovest. She needs thy care.'

"I walked by Echri's side back into the Temple and as I entered, a song of my triumph over death was raised in my honour, and strains of sweet music rolled through the mighty dome like a paean of praise. I ran forward in my new-found joy, and Volinè, sobbing and weeping bitterly, fell senseless into my arms!

"Joy doth not kill, my son. Let her tears flow freely, for they will bear away her sorrow; and her faintness is but caused by her pleasure at seeing thee.'

"Slowly we brought my poor darling back to life, and then she and I wended our way from this tabernacle of fiery mystery into the place where we might start back to Edos again. In my great concern for Volinè, I forgot even to thank Echri, or to speak to any living soul but her. All my thoughts were centered in Volinè, and the moment that we were at last alone in the carriage I took her in my arms, and we rained passionate kisses upon each other's lips.

"Oh, Harry, how I love thee! Verily hast thou won me at the Shrine of Death.'

"The joy that fills these fleeting moments is a full recompense for aught that I have suffered, darling. And now you must try and be your own dear self. I want to see the roses in your cheeks again, and the happy careless smile upon your lips once more. Come, darling, cheer up now! All is over, and we have the long and radiant future before us.'

"Wilt thou always be so good and kind and loving as thou art just now? Oh, Harry, I shall worship thee if thou art ever so.'

"For ever, my dear one! For I love you—love you better now, Volinè, than I ever have before. And, darling, I have now a request to ask.'

"Anything that I can grant thee thou canst have for asking. Do with me as thou wilt."

"Then, dear one, when may I look for the consummation of my happiness? When shall our nuptials be? When will you name your bridal day, so that I may make you my own for evermore?"

"Oh, Harry, thy words almost frighten me! How impatient thou hast become! In how many months must I say—?"

"How—many—months—" I repeated in despair. 'Nay, surely you will not be so cruel! Promise me in one month—even in less.'

"If my father so wishes, then will I favour thee," she answered, hiding her blushing cheeks upon my breast. 'Now, wilt that content thee?'

"By this time we had reached the Palace grounds in Edos again; and upon leaving the car we found Volinë's two handmaidens waiting for their mistress. There I left her in their charge, and sought the Palace by another way, alone."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FIGHT FOR VOLINÈ.

The shades of night were beginning to fall as I crossed the garden of Siccoth-trees, which was a fortunate circumstance for me, as I desired to see no one, least of all any of my companions, until my nerves felt steadier, for now they seemed shattered by the trying, terrible strain which they had undergone within the past few hours. By still further good fortune I gained the Palace unobserved, except by the guard at the gates, and a solitary Martial whom I met in one of the corridors near my own room.

"I flung myself upon my couch and tried to think. But my thoughts were broken and confused. All that had taken place seemed as a dream. First one incident and then another of the weird ceremony flashed through my brain, and vanished; and then all returned together as swiftly, yet in disordered sequence, until I dropped into a troubled sleep.

"For twelve hours I lay thus, only awaking in the morning to find my servant Herio bending over me, saying in a voice which sounded as though it were miles away:

"Sire! rouse thee; for the King would see thee. Even now he awaiteth thy coming.'

"Why, Herio, what is the hour? How long have I slept? Has anyone been here?—the Doctor?—Mr. Temple?"

"The tenth hour of the new day soundeth, sire. But one soul hath entered thy chamber, and he whom thou callest "Doctor." He watched by thee as thou slept, until midnight, and glanced at thee again at sunrise for a moment.'

"Quickly eating a light breakfast, and feeling more refreshed and stronger than I had done for many days, I followed Herio to the apartment in which the King was awaiting me. Volinè, looking pale and wan, was seated on the dais on her father's right hand; whilst below him, much to my surprise and embarrassment, were Temple and the Doctor. Behind them, a hundred or more of the highest Ministers of State sat in silence. Blushes stole over Volinè's lovely face as she smiled on me in welcome. Temple and the Doctor, gazing all the time in rapt astonishment, bade me a hearty good-morning; and the King, in his kindest manner, told me to come and seat myself at his left hand.

"Already, man of Ramos, have I heard the full story of thy dauntless courage, yesterday, on the hill Verosi. Our beloved daughter Volinè tells me of thy fortitude in meeting, wrestling with, and overcoming Death by Fire. Right nobly hath thou done all that was required of thee, and thy reward shalt be that for which thy heart hath long desired, for now do I give thee my daughter to wife.'

"Here the old King stood up, and taking Volinè's hand and mine, placed them in each other, saying:—

"In doing this thing I feel that the hand of wisdom hath guided me to a just atonement, and a wise repentance of my sin in seeking thy life and thy companions' lives without full cause. Already hath Echri told me my folly, and of his wondrous vision, in which was declared to him that with thy advent in Gathma God's promise to unite His scattered Universe was being

fulfilled. Thou art no more man of Ramos only; man of Gathma, too, hath thou become; and may thy lengthened span of life be used in binding these two sister-worlds in yet closer unity. I have but few more words to say. Thou hast an enemy in Edos, by name Perodii. Long hath he sought thy ruin, by divers means; yea, even at the cost of Volinè's honour. That the lies he spoke concerning her were bred of jealousy of thee I now know, and his banishment from our royal presence is but a just punishment for his sin. But Perodii is of a noble race, which hath many privileges I may not take away. One of these is that, being thy rival to the hand of my daughter, he hath the right to meet thee in single combat to decide the issue between ye. He hath claimed that right, and, moreover, he hath proclaimed throughout Edos that to-morrow thou shalt do him battle or be slain by him as a coward. I ask thy answer to this challenge?"

"That I will meet him whenever he may choose; for few things would give me greater pleasure, O King of Gathma, than to satisfy the hatred that long has lain between us,' I answered, still holding Volinè's hand in mine.

"All shall be as thou sayest,' said the King, who, turning to his ministers, continued: 'Let Perodii hear these things at once, and let all be set in readiness for the morrow.'

"And then the old King turned to leave the chamber, which was a signal for the assembled ministers to disperse unto their duties, bidding the Doctor accompany him to discuss still further the projects which they had in view. I led Volinè away towards her own apartments, and as we walked along she said:

"Harry, thou hast grieved me sorely in respect to this meeting with Perodii. Have I not already counselled thee to leave him alone?"

"And be branded as a coward, darling! Would you care to hear your lover's name bandied about Edos as another name for cowardice? Volinè, have no fears for me, as I have none for myself.'

"But Perodii is cunning in the use of arms.'

"Trouble not yourself, darling; for, with YOU as the issue between us, there lives no man in all wide Gathma that should overcome me. Besides, Perodii's insults on you can only be answered for in this manner. Before

Edos he once has lied; before Edos shall he declare himself a speaker of lies.'

"As thou wilt, Harry; but my heart will be heavy and comfortless until this fray is over.'

"And now, my darling, have you spoken to your father about our wedding-day?'

"I have; and he sayeth that it may be chosen by myself.'

"Then if I overcome Perodii in fair and open combat on the morrow, will you come unto me? Volinè, let the morrow be our bridal day. Nay, urge no obstacles, my dear one. Say "Yes," and give me new strength for the fray.'

"I will tell thee to-night, when thou meetest me in the arbour of Siccoth. Now hurry thee away, for there is much that I would do before the sun hath risen on the morrow.'

"On my way back I met Temple, and he was profuse in his congratulations on my happiness.

"Why, Graham, the events of the past four and twenty hours seem like a dream—even in this strange city of enchantment and wondrous surprises. Now come along and have a chat. Surely the beautiful Volinè can spare you for one hour in which you may talk with your friends! To tell the truth, I feel almost afraid of you now, if all that I have heard is true.'

"Well, Mr. Temple, and what may you have heard?' I asked, as we strolled out of the Palace together, and sat ourselves down under the cool shade of a broad-leafed shrub.

"We have heard so much that, really, I scarcely know where to begin in describing it. Briefly, it is this. That yesterday afternoon Volinè and yourself went into that three-domed Temple on the hill we saw from the *Sirius*, and that there you went through some fiendish art of sorcery, which has professed to endow you with a longer span of life. After what happened at Remagaloth, I must confess I felt a certain amount of faith in this Priest Echri's power; but that he can prolong your days, even to the extent of one, I do not believe——"

"I think you would, Mr. Temple, had you seen and experienced as much as I have. Religious ordinances in this world are, as one might expect them to

be, vastly different from any now on Earth. Here in Gathma, there are Holy Men who appear to be direct agents of a Supreme Being, and through them Almighty will is manifest. After all, there is nothing so very remarkable about this; for even in our world, during the days of the Patriarchs, very similar conditions prevailed. It must be more than human sorcery or trickery that can send a man through a stream of molten fire unscathed, unsinged, as I went yesterday, although I suffered in one brief awful moment all the pain of death in that dread majestic element. Whether I live to be seventy, or ten times seventy, time alone can prove; but I have every faith in Echri's power. I can understand your scepticism; but let the solemn assurances of one who has seen his potency, and felt his power, change your opinion. How this wonder was worked, how my body escaped annihilation, or if destroyed how another so similar in all respects, that I cannot find one tittle of difference myself, was created, is as much a mystery to me as to you, as that fair Temple yonder guards its secrets well.'

"But what good have you really done yourself, Graham, in this thing, provided all be true?"

"Increased my span of life at least tenfold, and won the hand of as fair a woman as was ever conceived!"

"And sold your soul to evil, I fear."

"Then I am content to abide by my bargain, although no thought of such a compact has ever suggested itself to me. But what is the Doctor's opinion?"

"That you must be mad—mad, and blind with love; and that he has never seen such a rapid change in a man as has taken place in you since you met Volinè. All interest in your old pursuits seems gone; all feelings of companionship for us are slipping away. I suppose it is ever so. I was the same myself in the long ago—when a mistress comes to reign in our heart, verily in the early days of her power she rules supreme! I don't think the dear old boy will ever quite forgive you. He has curious ideas on women; besides, he always insists that all the evil that has befallen us in Edos was caused by her."

"I am afraid 't were useless to deny the soft impeachment, Mr. Temple; but, after all, Volinè—who, you yourself must own, is peerless amongst her sex—and I have had little time together, and more than our share of trials and

troubles during our courtship. Wait until I enter the noble army of Benedicts. All being well, I expect my commission therein to-morrow, and then you will again find me heart and soul with you in all your plans. For if I overcome this scamp Perodii—and a greater scoundrel never drew air—I hope to wed Volinè before the day has passed. Fancy Perodii challenging me! It is the last trump-card in the trick of his revenge and hatred; but I think I hold the ace of his suit.'

'''Then you really mean to fight?''

'''I should rather think I do. I am not quite a fool with the cutlass, or with the pistol either; and I picked up a few wrinkles in the use of the dagger when I was engineering some waterworks in Spain, which may now be of service to me. And if personal prowess alone is to decide between us, well I will show this braggart, strong as he is, how a Yorkshireman in good 'fettle' can 'wrestle,' as we say in that fair county of broad acres and honest hospitality.'

'''Well, I wish you every success, Graham, my boy; every success, and every happiness; and no one in all Edos will see you lead Volinè to the altar—that is, if an altar forms a necessary article of the marriage ceremony in this strange world—with more genuine pleasure than I shall. I feel that indirectly, and through you, I owe my life to this girl, in spite of all that the Doctor may say to the contrary; and that being so, I wish her every happiness too. Besides, this match appears to find great favour with the King.'

'''Ah, for that I have to thank Echri. It appears that he has had a vision in which it was declared that the peoples on the family of planets that circle round the Sun are to be united; and that we having established communication between Earth and Mars, are fulfilling this sacred manifestation. This the King has only lately learned from Echri, and it has done more than anything else to place us high in royal favour, and to win consent to my union with Volinè.'

'''Well, now, about this fight to-morrow. Have you no idea of the weapons, conditions of combat, and so on?''

'''None; nor do I want any. But if you should chance to drop on Sandy Campbell, tell him that I would see him. I should like him near me to-morrow, just as a sort of henchman like—you understand?''

"I won't fail to send him if I get the chance, but the Doctor keeps him more than busy. Only this very morning he packed him off somewhere or other in search of some insect which, he tells me, is curiously allied to a beetle of Earth.'

"Gracious! Poor old Sandy! I have half a mind to pity him in his search for that illustrious bug.'

"Chatting together thus, the morning slipped quickly and pleasantly away, until we were summoned to our mid-day meal. Neither the King nor Volinè was present; and the Doctor, as well, was too absorbed in his studies to make his appearance. I spent the afternoon posting up my journals, from which this portion of our narrative has been written; and in the evening I went unto our trysting-place, there to wait my loved one's coming.

"Verily the quiet, dreamy beauty of the night in this tropic region of Mars is beyond all power of description. The atmosphere is balmier than in the torrid zone of Earth, by reason of the greater remoteness of the sun; and the absence of all those insect-pests that make life there unendurable, especially during hours of darkness. Such nights inspire Love! Such an atmosphere makes the tender, sacred passion glow with an intensity unknown in higher and cooler latitudes. The air breathes it; the night-birds sing it; the fountains, in their rising and falling cadence, echo it from grove to grove; the moons and stars, scintillating in their ether sea of blue, excite it; even the very flowers distil it in their ravishing perfume! Ah! 't is a wondrous thing, this universal Love! A legacy of God, immutable, unchanging through the unrecorded ages on every sphere where man doth dwell. Best described as a passion of the night; as its subtle influence is strongest under a starlit sky; for doth it not droop and languish under the fierce light and blazing heat of day, requiring softer illuminants and balmier air to flourish in all its beautiful intensity! No other feeling evolved by the human mind can compare in tenderness or beauty with that of first love. He who has not known that incomparable joy-sorrow, knows not what it is to live; for of all the feelings that animate the human breast it is at once the most tender, the most pure, full of innocence, yet heavy with primordial sin, selfish, yet generous; passionate, yet without lust; divine, yet human!

"But here my reverie in Siccoth's harbour was broken by the foot-falls of Volinè, and in a few moments she was by my side.

"Ah, Harry, dear; so thou art communing with thyself, or maybe with the stars. Dost thou still cherish love for that Mother Earth, shining so witchingly fair above thee, or for anyone that doth dwell thereon? A woman?"

"Nay, nay, my darling,' I answered, drawing her gently to my breast, and planting a kiss on her lips as I spoke, 'I have no thoughts away from you. You are the nucleus of them all, their one inspiration. I was musing to myself on Love—ah! Volinè, even on first love; the tender passion you, and you alone, have inspired within me. And I mused on the exceeding beauty of this wondrous thing, and of its universality; until your footsteps broke the thread of my reverie, and swept away the one sorrow-cloud that tinged my bliss and transformed it into perfect joy.'

"And what may this one cloud of sorrow be?"

"To be separated from you, even for one hour—one moment. My heart is yearning for the time when we may part no more—when I may proudly call you mine; MINE for ever!"

"But is there no one who beckoneth to thee from that star-world yonder; no memory of one fairer in thy sight than I?"

"Ah, darling,' I sighed, 'have I not told you that, until I saw you, I knew not Love; and that the women of my native Earth cannot compare with you in grace and beauty? I have but a single thought for all those teeming millions of humanity that people yon shining star, and that one is for the old father, who parted from me with his blessing when I left its surface years ago.'

"And I may never see him! Dost thou know Harry, I have great curiosity to visit thy native world. All would seem so wondrous strange to me.'

"And perhaps the day may yet come when I shall take my darling yonder; for I hear from my companions that great things are being planned, and that your royal father takes a deep interest in them. But now tell me, dear one, if to-morrow I may take you to myself for ever? Is the morn to bring your bridal day?"

"Ah, thy words have stirred sad thoughts within my heart. To-morrow thou hast promised to fight Perodii.'

"And when the fight is over?——"

"'Why, then, if all—be—well,' she sighed, 'thou mayest have thy wish; for then will I become thy wife,' and she hid her blushing face, and stole yet closer into my arms.

"'Your words, dear one, make me feel happier than I can say,' and for a few moments neither of us spoke; and only the loud, fast beating of our own hearts broke the silence surrounding us.

"'Now, Harry, I must leave thee. I would see my father before the evening hath passed.'

"'Then, when I see your dear face again, I may leave you no more. You will not be present at this fray to-morrow?'

"'No, dear Harry, I could not. But I will pray for thee; and when all is over, and thou art victorious—as I trust thou mayest be—then will I come to bring thee thy reward. Now, fare thee well; and may all good fortune attend thee on the morrow,' and trying bravely to conceal her agitation and her tears, Volinè walked with me through the silver, sheeny moonlight unto the Palace; where, with a last, sweet kiss, she left me, and went her way.

"The night was a restless, sleepless one for me; and right gladly I welcomed the first streaks of what was to prove one of the most eventful days of my life. I was up with the sun, and the first person I saw was Himos; and from him I learned particulars of the coming duel. We were to fight with a peculiar kind of short, broad sword, in a large arena, where combats of this description were wont to be decided. The hour for the fray was ten; and the King had signified his intention of being present, and acting as umpire between us. Then came Sandy—his face absolutely beaming with delight at the prospect of a little fighting; and with a due sense of his importance on acting as my second.

"'By bonnie Prince Charlie's memory, Mr. Graham, this is real guid news. I hear that ye are aboot to ha' a tussel with Peerodii. De'il tak' him, when ye ha' done wi' him, Mr. Graham, for the muckle harm he has warked for us; and they do say that we are going to ha' a weddin', too. Weel, weel, Sandy Cam'bell will step ye a Highland reel, if he do it without the pipes an' a' that; an' good luck to ye an' your winsome bride, say I; for she is a bra' fine girl, and enough to turn the heads of a' who clap their een on her.'

"Thanks for all your good wishes, Sandy; and should we triumph over this rascal, you shall dance at my wedding to-night."

"Should we triumph, Mr. Graham. De'il a doot about it. He's na fightin' sort."

"Well, Sandy, we shall soon know, now, whether there is any real grit in him or not. But have you heard anything from the Doctor about this business?" I asked, just out of curiosity.

"Indeed, an' I have. The Doctor is powerful annoyed; and I heard him tell Mr. Temple, only last night, that this affair bears out what he has insisted on a' the time, that ye are daft—love daft; and it was no guid sayin' anything to ye, for ye were bound to gang ye're ain gait."

"Poor old boy! Well, I hope he is in better temper to-day; for we must have him at the wedding—that is, all being well. And now, Sandy, my boy, hasten away and learn what you can of the arrangements made for the fight. I am growing impatient to get it over, one way or the other."

"Right ye are, Mr. Graham. Sandy Cam'bell will do the best he can, for ye ha been a guid friend to me."

"And so saying, the blunt, yet honest Scot, took himself off in the highest spirits, rejoicing that for one day, at least, he would be free from the task of hunting for the Doctor's 'specimens' to engage in duties more congenial to his tastes.

"I studiously avoided contact with either the Doctor or Temple, taking breakfast in my own room, from which I did not stir until summoned by the King's Marshals to accompany them to the arena. I felt in little mood to talk until this fight was over. Just before their arrival, I was agreeably surprised by a visit from Irolne, who brought me a single white flower from her mistress, with the following message:

"Wear this for Volinè's sake. She loves thee, and prays for him she loves."

"The arena was situated in a remote part of the Palace grounds, entirely strange to me. We could have travelled there by one of those wonderful 'tubes,' but I preferred to go on foot, thinking that the walk in the morning air might do me good. This duel between Perodii and myself had made a great sensation, not only in Edos, but in all the cities for many leagues

around, and, early as was the hour, a vast concourse had assembled—all of noble birth, or high in station—to witness the fight. This colossal arena was open to the sky, although round the sides a kind of awning had been erected over the spectators, who must have numbered quite two hundred thousand strong. In the centre was a table on which half-a-dozen short swords were placed, and here I saw Sandy carefully examining and testing the blades. Already the King was seated, and by his side were Temple, the Doctor, and a few of the highest Ministers. I stood with Himos at the entrance to the arena, concealed from the gaze of the spectators, waiting for the proceedings to begin; but of my antagonist I had not yet caught a glimpse. Then Sandy came and helped me to prepare myself for the fight. This I did by taking off hat, coat, and vest, and with shirt-sleeves rolled up above my elbows, a scarlet sash bound tightly round my waist, I soon felt ready, even eager, for the fray.

"We had not long to wait. First came twenty heralds into the arena, and having sounded a mighty blast upon their instruments, a Marshal stepped forward, and then a great silence fell as he prepared to speak.

"In a clear, ringing voice, which, owing to some marvellous system of acoustics, must have been heard to the uttermost parts of this grand enclosure, he said:

"'Man of Ramos, His Highness Prince Perodii being thy rival to the hand of our gracious mistress Volinè, the King's daughter, hath called upon thee to fight with him, so that this issue between ye may be fairly tried by courage, strength, and the use of swords.'

"Here, followed by faithful Sandy, I walked into the centre of the arena, bowing to the King, amidst a loud murmur of excitement and curiosity from the surrounding throng.

"Then followed another deafening blast from the twenty heralds, and once again the Marshal spoke:

"'Prince Perodii, this man of Ramos, thy rival to the hand of Volinè, our mistress, hath answered unto thy challenge, and standeth ready, so that this issue between ye may be fairly tried by courage, strength, and the use of swords.'

"Then once more amid murmurs of excitement, mingled not a little with applause from those who evidently were friends of my rival, Perodii, stripped to the waist, walked proudly and confidently forward from another entrance towards me, stopping half-a-dozen paces from where I stood. Each looked fiercely at the other, yet neither spoke. Again a terrible silence fell as the King rose up and said:

"Rivals for my beloved daughter's favour, ye have met to fight, so that the bitter enmity between ye may be closed. May God decide which is the better man by giving him strength to overcome the other. Let truth and honour and courage, triumph over lies and shame and cowardice. Take ye each a weapon, and let my sitting down be the signal for ye to begin.'

"Then we each stepped forward and took a sword; beautifully finished weapons, about two feet in length and two inches in breadth, dagger pointed, and keen as razors on their innermost edge.

"Each with his gleaming naked sword clasped in his right hand then faced the other, and after a moment's pause, Perodii spoke:

"So, at last, the hour of my vengeance hath come; and here by my right of birth and station may I slay thee, and sweep thee from my path. Look to it, for thy moments now are numbered.'

"I wait for you, Perodii, and may Heaven defend the right.'

"Keep thy holy words for thine own comfort, thou boasting, short-lived fool; but methinks I will cut still shorter thy puny span with this,' and as he spoke he held aloft the glittering blade.

"You speak that of which you know nothing, Perodii. My span of life is now as long as yours; for know you not that I have passed through holy rites that have endowed me with a fuller measure of years? But we waste time in profitless talk. Come, put up your sword, and defend yourself——'

"Hold! I see Echri's ring upon thy finger. Come, fight fairly. Take off that cursed relic. We want none of Echri's magic here.'

"Coward! then you fear its virtues now! Well, I have no wish to take advantage of you. Here, Sandy, hold this ring, and take care of it well. I would not lose it for a world'; and so saying, I slipped the precious talisman from my finger, and turned to give it to Sandy.

"That moment nearly proved fatal to me; for, without warning, Perodii rushed forward and made a terrible thrust at my unguarded body. But Sandy was too quick for him, and putting out his foot, he threw the Prince headlong.

"'Na, na, Mr. Perodii, none o' that here. Ye've got to fight fair and square, and not tak' a mon unawares.'

"'Coward!' I shouted. 'Get up and defend yourself, or my indignation may prompt me to slay you where you are.'

"But Perodii, without another word, jumped to his feet again and attacked me with fury. Our swords flashed like silver in the sunlight as we parried each other's blows and thrusts, Perodii trying his best to strike me, I acting on the defensive, having decided to bide my time until the first frenzy of his attack was spent. Not a sound was heard save the clashing of swords, and our deep-drawn breaths. Then Perodii, in one of his mad onslaughts, slipped and nearly fell, but recovered himself before I had time to drive in a blow; yet a thrilling sigh of excitement burst from the crowd, who thought that all was over. Again we drew back, panting for breath, and burning with desire to slay each other. Again with eyes sparkling in anger we closed, and once more the flashing, clanging swords sang the song of our hatred. Perodii was skilled in the use of his weapon, and fought hard, but I think his courage was only the outcome of his deadly hate, which had worked him up into an uncontrollable rage. At last I clumsily gave him his chance, and was too late completely to parry one of his fierce strokes. His blade glanced off my own, and inflicted a deep, stinging cut in my arm. Amidst my pain I heard cries of concern from the Doctor and Temple, as each jumped to their feet; but the King sat calmly looking on. Then we drew back and stood panting until Sandy had deftly and quickly bound up my wound, saying:

"'Gang in again, Mr. Graham, he's getting spent; besides, your wound will stiffen if ye do not keep your arm at wark.'

"Again we closed; and stung to desperation by my smarting wound, and thoughts of her who lonely and sadly was praying for me, and whose blood-stained flower still clung, ragged and drooping, to my heart, I fought and fought like one possessed, driving my antagonist back inch by inch, step by step, and forcing him to defend himself rather than to attack me. At last my opportunity came, and, with a rapid twisting stroke, I wrenched his blade

from his hand and sent it spinning and gleaming into the air, amid a roar of excitement from the onlookers. But before I could recover myself he closed with me, and then began a wild, terrible struggle for life. Soon we rolled to the ground together, and first one and then the other was uppermost and had a transient advantage. Then we got on to our feet again, struggling one against the other, swaying now to this side, now to that, until I clasped him round the waist, and summoning all my strength for one mighty effort, I bent him nearly double as I would a reed, and hurled him limp and helpless over my head! Quick as lightning I ran and seized my sword, and before Perodii could recover or attempt to rise, my foot was planted on his breast, and my notched and gleaming sword held high over his throat.

"'God,' I cried, 'has given you into my power; and now will I justly avenge all the insults you have heaped on me and mine, and wipe out the wrongs you have done the woman I love!'

"Here Volinè entered, and sat down by her father's side, pale and trembling, and with tears starting down her lovely cheeks.

"'Mercy, as thou hopest for the same,' Perodii whined in fear, now thoroughly cowed, and all the fight and courage knocked out of him by that last, terrible fall.

"'Mercy! What mercy would you have shown me were I in your place? However, if mercy you really crave, buy your miserable, worthless life by answering what I ask of you,' I shouted, withdrawing my foot and letting him rise. 'Now, say that you lied when you conspired against Kios, and worked his disgrace and banishment to Pamax.'

"'What know ye of Kios?'

"'Speak the words that clear his name, or die,' I thundered.

"'Then, in this, I admit that I swore falsely, and conspired to ruin an—innocent—man.'

"'Further; you know full well the rest.'

"'And that I did this thing to save myself from his just wrath, having ruined his only child,' he continued, amidst a growing storm of indignation.

"'Now will we speak of Volinè; she whom you have so foully wronged and slandered. Say that you lied in the Hall of Judgment, and to the King. Say

that Volinè's honour is as untarnished as the mountain snow.'

"'Never!' he hissed. 'Thou hast humbled me enough. Curse thee!'

"'I am not here to parley. Say this. By the great God, you shall say it on your bended knees, or my sword shall sheath itself in your heart,' I shouted, waxing wroth as I thought of my darling's undeserved disgrace from the mouth of this scoundrel.

"'My words were lies,' he hissed rather than spoke, as he sank upon, his knees, forced thereto at the point of my naked sword; and a look of malignant hatred stole over his face, as he glared at me with his bloodshot, glittering eyes in impotent rage, like some wild-beast helpless in the hunter's toils.

"'Now take yourself away, and never again molest me or mine, or dare to meddle with affairs that do not concern you. I stay me from wetting my hands in blood upon this, my wedding morn—Volinè's nuptial day shall not be one of bloodshed, but stainless and happy as my bonny bride herself. Now, get you gone while the spirit of my mercy lingers—go, and dare not to cross my path again,' and, amidst shouts of derision and anger, the vanquished Prince left the arena, and we saw him no more.

"Then the heralds stepped forward again, and blew another blast; and the Marshal commanded silence for the King to speak. He rose from his daughter's side, looking supremely pleased and gratified, and said:

"'Man of Ramos, thou hast fought fairly and valiantly, and shown mercy to a vanquished foe, which doth thee great honour. Thou hast answered thy rival's challenge as only a brave man couldst; and now most freely do I give thee my daughter to wife. She shall dower thee ten thousand times more handsomely than any woman of the star-world, Ramos, thou hast lately left.'

"'And her husband shall not be penniless, for I hereby promise him the sum of fifty thousand pounds sterling, as soon as communication is again established between Gathma and Earth, and he may be able to present my cheque for that amount,' said Temple, jumping to his feet in excitement.

"'There are riches here enough for both; but still I admire the spirit that hath prompted thee to make that remark,' the King answered, smiling. 'Now let the day that dawned on strife and battle set on love and peace, for my daughter tells me she hath set the remainder thereof apart for a bridal feast.'

"Then a great, loud shout went up from the assembled throng, and the heralds played a song of victory upon their brazen instruments, as I stood blood-stained and ragged from the fray before the King, the observed of every eye.

"Oh, King! I crave one more act of royal grace. Let worthy Kios, disgraced and wronged without cause, find place again in royal favour; and I would also ask that brave and gallant Kaosp, a captain in your guard, be freed from captivity and restored to place. Both these men owe their downfall to the cunning and the knavery of Perodii.'

""Tis but justice what thou hast asked, and it shall be done.'

"Then, bowing low to the King and Volinè, I withdrew to put myself in better array. Temple also came, and was congratulating me heartily on my victory, when the Doctor made his appearance.

""Well, Graham,' he began, holding out his hand, 'it did my old heart good to see how you thrashed that villain. So the poor *Sirius* is avenged; for this public disgrace to such a man as Perodii is a terrible punishment. Well done, my friend! But let us see your injury. Ah! merely a flesh wound; deep, but not dangerous, and will soon heal.'

""But, Doctor, I thought I was too deep in your disfavour ever to win any expressions of approval from you again,' I retorted.

""There, there, Graham, let all differences of opinion be put aside to-day. I am apt to speak hastily; and old men, with life behind them, are often too prone to judge the actions of younger men by their own experience. I withdraw all I have said, and wish, yes, heartily wish, her and you every happiness. I have too lively a recollection of your great assistance to my project, both on Earth and during our journey hither, to grudge you the happiness you have tried so hard to win, and on which it is evident your heart is fixed. Although my sentiments regarding women in general may never alter, I shall certainly make an exception in favour of the wondrous fair lady who is so soon to become your wife. But mind, Graham, this is the only exception I ever made during my life's experience of the sex that is as frail as it is fair.'

""Well and rightly spoken, Doctor,' broke in Temple. 'To-day, of all others, is a most opportune one to express such opinions. As you say, we owe a good deal to Graham; and I am sure we all wish him joy and continued happiness.'

""I thank you, Doctor, and you, too, Mr. Temple, for your kindly words, especially for those that relate to the girl I am about to wed. Now, I am sure you will excuse me; for my place is by her side, after the hours of suspense she has suffered, since she knew of this fight with Perodii. We shall meet again, I hope, a little later on, when, perhaps, I may have the happiness of being supported at the coming ceremony by two such old and trusty friends.'

"'That you may,' answered the Doctor and Temple together, as I hastened to Volinè, eager to rejoin my darling, and to soothe her fears away."

CHAPTER XIX.

WEDDED!

"'My brave one; my brave one; art thou hurt?' were Volinè's first words of greeting as we met in her prettily-arranged private room, adjoining the arena where the King had sat to see the fight, and where I had been conducted to her presence by the ever-faithful Irolne.

"'No, darling, 't is but a scratch,' I answered, as we kissed and nestled into each other's arms. 'Volinè, no cloud may dim the lustre of our happiness now. Surely, bride and groom ne'er had a future so bright and fair as ours! We leave the long dark vale of sorrow behind us, and stand at last upon the threshold of our perfect bliss.'

"'Harry, I cannot tell thee my happiness; made all the sweeter, methinks, by the anguish my soul hath suffered since last we met. But how proud I am of thee now thou hast vanquished Perodii, and before all Edos freed my name from evil gossip; I would sooner thee have done this thing than even my father.'

"'Ah, Volinè, I thought of you when the fight waxed hottest, and that thought gave new strength to my arm when weakening by desperate effort. But all is over, and all is well. Now, dear one, tell me of to-day—when is our bridal feast to be?'

"'Echri and his fellow-Priests have already reached the Palace, and all is in readiness to commence at setting of the sun; for that is the hour we people of Edos assign unto this ceremony. But, Harry, what a strange, strange wooing mine hath been, coloured more with sorrow than with gladness; and even the early hours of my wedding-day have not been free from strife.'

"'All has been as you say. But now perfect peace shall be my darling's portion, and I will devote myself to smoothing her path across life's stormy

way. My arms shall ever be her refuge in sorrow, and her resting place in joy.'

"Always?"

"Until life is done; for I love you with a passion that death can only destroy.'

"Oh, Harry, it is sweet to be loved like this. Do all the men of Ramos love like thee? Methinks there are plenty of maidens in Edos who would choose them a mate from thy world, rather than mine, if such be so.'

"Well, darling, that there is love on Earth as sweet, and pure, and true as ours I will not deny; but there is love that turns to bitterness and hatred. There are men who betray, deceive, and wrong in the sacred name of Love; there are men who make vows of affection and constancy, only to break them.'

"Ah! it is even so in Gathma, and many the maid of Edos that hath rued her marriage-vows before she hath well become a wife.'

"Does my Volinè doubt me—does a single misgiving haunt her heart, now that she has given that heart to me?"

"Not one; not one! My faith in thee is boundless. I have no thought that thou may'st not share. Now let us return. Already the assembly hath dispersed, and the day draws on. Besides, thou must feel faint and weary, after thy fight.'

"Never weary in your precious company, darling,' I answered, as we rose and left the room. We strolled across the beautiful grounds together, Volinè resting confidently on my arm; and, as we walked along, our happiness seemed too great to be true, for not a single care pursued us.

"Let us pass by Siccoth's harbour yet once again as lovers, Harry—the place where we parted when sorrow overwhelmed us, and hope lay dead.'

"Ah! Volinè, prospects are brighter now, indeed. See! the dear old place is just the same—to me the sweetest spot in all wide Gathma; for here our vows of love were pledged!"

"And as I spoke, the Palace bells rang out a loud and merry peal, like an omen of good fortune to us.

"List thee, Harry! My bridal bells! How strange that they should commence whilst we are here! Oh! how their gladsome peals thrill through and through my soul! My wedding day! So soon! Harry, do all the men and women of thy world marry so quickly after betrothal as we?"

"Not all, my darling, not all. Some tarry months, years; and some even so long that they do not wed at all. But if any man could love as I love, or had such a beautiful being for the object of his affections, the time would be no longer than with us—especially when Fate smiles so sweetly upon my suit as now," I answered, kissing her upturned face.

"Indeed, thou art a consummate flatterer! And yet doth it not seem unmaidenly for me to yield so quickly and so readily to thy words of love?"

"Ah! no, dear one, I prize you all the more for not delaying my happiness. Besides, it seems years and years since we first met, so much having happened in the interval between then and now."

"Methinks thou hast made good use of thy time, if it hath been short!" she answered, with an artless, bewitching smile.

"But, Volinè, what is it that has drawn you to me? Surely there are men in Gathma, in Edos, more handsome than I, who would sell their souls for your smiles and favour?"

"Thou knowest a woman little. It is not a handsome face altogether that draws or fascinates her heart; but open, winning ways, sympathies, and devoted love—love that her instincts tell her is true and unselfish; these be the things that gain her favour," she answered, as we passed on towards the Palace, where we parted until such time as the nuptial ceremonies commenced.

"Never before did time pass away so slowly as those few hours that intervened between noon and sunset on this my wedding-day. Each moment was flighted with lead, each hour seemed ages to me who impatiently waited their course to run. All day long the Palace bells, at intervals, rang out glad bridal tidings, and those of Edos echoed back the stirring music. The city was *en fête* to-day. The only daughter of Gathma's King was beloved of the people, and each man and woman of Edos, dames and nobles of high degree, strove hard to make her bridal day replete with joy and happiness. The Palace swarmed with guests. From near and far they made

its stately halls their rendez-vous or perfumes and fabrics of priceless worth—tributes of respect and love to the daughter of their King. Then troop after troop of soldiers entered the Palace gates, many dressed in uniforms and with accoutrements entirely unknown to me—garrisons from far-off places, summoned to do honour at the coming ceremony and feast."

[1] At last the sun proclaimed the advent of evening, from the cloudless west, as he sank toward the mountain crests. All interest now was centred within the magnificent Hall of Ceremonies, a vast and lofty chamber in the western wing of the Palace. Here a great throng of guests had assembled to witness the brilliant nuptials. No word of ours can hope to describe the overwhelming splendours of that wondrous Hall, as the last rays of the setting sun streamed through the gorgeously-coloured windows, upon what was literally one blaze of sparkling jewels. Not a guest was there who did not scintillate with precious stones, cunningly arranged to harmonise with their rich and many-coloured raiment. Then the delicate light-blue draperies, that hung in graceful folds round the entrances, contrasted well with the slender pillars of gold that shot upwards, fashioned like tree-trunks, to support the roof. In niches round the walls were arranged groups of statuary, all carved in the famous flesh-tinted marble, and on the walls themselves were paintings of fair women and handsome men, of strange landscapes, of fruits and flowers, of beasts and winged creatures—all drawn with marvellous skill and exceeding beauty. Nearly one quarter of this mighty Hall was still empty of people. The guests, who must have numbered nearly a hundred thousand, were all seated; the reserved space at the end of the Hall was for those engaged in the nuptial ceremony.

As the sun finally sank behind the mountains, casting the draperies of night o'er Edos, the great Hall suddenly became illumined with brilliant light, and almost simultaneously a score of heralds marched in and blew a lusty blast upon their trumpets of gold. At once a great silence of expectation seized the gay and laughing guests, and, amidst hushed excitement, all eyes were turned towards the grand entrance at the end of the Hall. Shortly the enormous curtains were drawn aside, and we could see the wide corridor behind them lined on either side with Royal troops. Then regiment after regiment of soldiers came along, with colours flying and bands playing triumphant music, each man taking up his allotted station with marvellous precision, until the entire space set apart for the coming ceremony was lined

with treble rows of troops, whose armour and trappings shone like silver and gold in the brilliant light.

Scarcely had the soldiers taken up their position, when a long procession of Virgins, a thousand strong, all clad in pure white raiment, carrying flowers and branches of some tree emblematical of Peace, came along, walking fourteen abreast. Nothing could exceed the loveliness of this maiden throng, as they assembled in a grand galaxy of beauty in front of the troops. Following the virgins came a hundred Priests, dressed in black robes and scarlet sashes, bearing incense and their long golden rods of office. After these came Holy Echri, attended by four of his sacred brothers; then a high Minister of State, bearing a cushion, on which were rolls of parchment, seals, and a sword of gold; and then again another hundred Priests, clad in purple robes and yellow sashes. Then came all the High Ministers of State, and representatives of various cities round Edos, accompanied by their attendants and guards of honour. Following these entered Doctor Hermann and Sandy, escorted by a posse of guards attached to the Palace, under the command of our old friend Kaosp, reinstated to rank but a few hours before.

Directly after them came another band of music, playing a march of exceeding beauty, heralding the approach of the bridegroom-elect, supported by Temple. Graham's appearance sent a thrill of excitement through the spectators, and many the fair lady in that brilliant throng that envied Volinè her good fortune in mating with him. He looked in the very prime of health and spirits, happy in the full pride of his handsome manhood; and a mighty cheer broke simultaneously from a hundred thousand people, who remembered his undying courage at Remagaloth, and his matchless gallantry on the morning of that very day in deadly conflict with Perodii.

The excitement caused by Graham's arrival had scarcely lulled when the band of Court musicians entered, playing a triumphal air, followed by seventy heralds and the body-guard of Royalty. After these came twenty-five Princesses of Edos, the number being symbolical of the age of the bride, each strewing flowers as they walked towards the altar, where Echri and his four attendant Priests stood waiting. Then excitement and enthusiasm reached their highest pitch as the dear old white-haired King of Gathma appeared, with Volinè, his daughter, the bride-elect, leaning upon his left arm, followed by her handmaidens and another company of Royal

troops. As the King and his daughter entered, every one of that dense, joyous throng rose to their feet, and deafening shouts of loyalty and welcome seemed as though they would rend the Hall asunder.

The grandeur and brilliancy of the scene, now that the matchless pageant was complete, beggar all description—the sparkling jewels, the flashing arms and armour, the solemn-visaged Priests, the hosts of white-decked virgins, the flower bearers, the musicians, the soldiers in their many-hued uniforms, the white-bearded Ministers of State, the handsome men and lovely women, the endless officials and attendants—all assisting in making one gorgeous picture, one scene of indescribable beauty, in which the fair and blushing bride shone forth like a peerless pearl in all her maiden loveliness!

All eyes were fixed on Her. And in all truth she merited the universal tribute of admiration so spontaneously showered upon her. Clothed in a flowing robe of white and costly fabric, neither silk nor satin, yet heavier and more beautiful than either, whose folds suggested, although they covered, the matchless beauty of her faultless form, fastened on the left shoulder, and studded across the open bosom with gems of sparkling whiteness, and girdled round the waist with a broad scarf or sash of the same colour. Embossed upon this costly robe were bunches of flowers made of lustrous pale-pink gems. Upon her head was a diadem of the same white fiery stones, and her wealth of hair hung down in its heavy crimped coils of golden glory. Blushes suffused her cheeks and contrasted well with her snowy brow, whilst her liquid violet eyes shone with the passionate tenderness of a new-born subtle desire, as her white bosoms rose and fell in responsive harmony to the great joy surging and swelling within her heart! Her white shapely arms were bare from the shoulder, and round each wrist was a broad bracelet of fine gold, united by a slender chain of the same precious metal, which hung down looped nearly to her feet. Every inch a peerless queen she looked as she stood facing the altar, by her father's side, radiant with happiness, proud in her conquest, and conscious of her victory, as only a woman can be who weds the man of her choice for Love.

In a few moments the soul-inspiring music ceased, although its strains were already drowned in the tumult to all but those standing near the players. Then the heralds again blew blasts upon their trumpets, as a signal for

silence; and as the last echoes of their brazen call died away, Echri stepped forward and said:

"Brethren, we are assembled here to celebrate one of the most solemn rites of our Holy Church; ye to witness, and I to perform, the ceremony of marriage between the beloved daughter of our temporal King, and a man who hath journeyed hither from the star-world Earth, by us called Ramos. God works His mighty will in divers ways; and in this union of hearts to-day, we see the beginning of the union of worlds. God, in wondrous apocalypse, hath promised this united Universe to His now scattered people, and in His wisdom hath ordained that Ramos and Gathma shall first be linked together in the chain that is to spread unbroken round Creation. Throughout Gathma's long and glorious march through time, no such union as we celebrate to-day hath ever been; it is an epoch in our history, and is pregnant with importance to the peoples that dwell on Ramos and on here. More than usual solemnity hath, therefore, attached itself to this nuptial rite to-day; and it is my holy duty to inspire thoughts among ye which, although unusual at such ceremonies as these, are in full keeping with the one we now proceed to celebrate."

"Echri's words produced a great effect, and the breathless silence was even painfully intense when he ceased to speak. At this point the King turned towards Echri, saying:

"It is scarcely meet of me to interrupt thy holy offices; but, as thou hast well said, this ceremony stands in our annals alone; and that being so, I command indulgence."

"Proceed, O King, for thy words are wisdom," Echri answered, with white head bowed in loyal reverence.

"Echri, as thou knowest, during all the countless ages of our Royal race, it hath been the unvarying custom for the sons and daughters of our ancient and illustrious house to wed with those of high degree. Our Princes have taken unto themselves Princesses to wife; and our Princesses have had Princes found them for husbands. Our beloved daughter shall not break this unchanging edict, for I now create her spouse, this man from far-off Ramos, a Prince of our Royal race, and instal him here and now with all the rights, privileges, and dignities pertaining to such rank."

Then addressing Graham, who stood listening to the King's words in bewilderment, he continued:

"Man of Ramos, by the ordeal of Fire, and by the right of conquest, thou hast well merited the honour and the dignity I do now confer upon thee. No longer art thou Harry Graham, of Earth or Ramos; henceforth, as Prince Tihernah, of Edos, shalt thou be known," and taking the gold sword from the Minister standing by, he presented it to Graham, with the roll of parchment and the seals confirming the rank to which he had just been exalted.

Graham's few stammering words of thanks were stopped by the King, who, interrupting him, smilingly commanded the wedding service to proceed.

Once more did Echri step forward, and bade Volinè and Graham stand side by side before him at the altar. Then, taking the slender chain of fine gold which connected the bracelets on Volinè's wrists, he commanded Graham to grasp it in his left hand and to break it asunder, saying as he did so:

"The bondage of thy maidenhood this man hath broken; henceforward, in thy state of wifehood, shalt thou only cleave to him, and him only, who hath set thee free.

"Volinè, doth thou enter this state of thine own will, and prepared to abide by the conditions and fulfil the duties of thy sacred office as wife to him?"

"Even so, O Holy Father."

"Prince Tihernah, thou takest this maiden unto thee of thine own will, and art thou prepared to abide by the conditions and fulfil the duties of thy sacred office as husband to her?"

"Even so, O Holy Father."

Then Echri, taking Volinè's left hand, placed it in Graham's right, and as they stood thus together, the two hundred Priests commenced to swing their incense-pots, and to sing a solemn chant in sweet harmonious voice. The singing and the incense-throwing having ceased, one of the aged Priests attendant on Echri came forward and gave to him an instrument, fashioned very like a lancet, but with a long carved handle of solid gold, embossed with gems. Taking Volinè's right hand in his, he pricked her arm below the elbow so that blood did flow, yet causing her no apparent pain. Then taking

Graham's left hand, he proceeded to do the same unto him; and when the blood trickled down, he crossed Volinè's arm and his, letting the two streams of blood intermingle in a tiny crimson torrent.

"Blood is life; so therefore let the lives of this man and maid mingle and fuse together that they do now and henceforward, until death, be One. May the arrows of God's wrath o'ertake all they who seek by temptation, force, or stealth, to break this bond asunder; and may His holy blessing rest upon ye both, as well as upon the unborn posterity within ye, for Man and Wife ye have now become!"

This was all. Yet the bridal ceremony was solemn and imposing to a degree no man could conceive, who had not witnessed it.

As soon as all was over, the grand procession returned in the order that it entered, with the exception that Volinè walked out blushing and smiling, leaning on her husband's arm. Soon afterwards the assembly dispersed themselves, and the grand bridal feast was served to a thousand special guests.

The gay and festive scene at the bridal banquet was little less imposing than the nuptial ceremony. The bride and bridegroom sat on the King's right hand, at the head of the table, both looking supremely happy, and both, if we mistake not, heartily wishing that the feast was over, and they could enjoy their new-found bliss entirely by themselves.

The banquet over, Volinè and Harry had yet one more ordeal to pass, and this was the grand procession of triumph in which they were conducted to their own apartment—accompanied by the strains of music and the voice of song; by white-robed virgins, emblematical of innocence; by sad-faced Priests, and officers of State; by high-born dames and nobles—all, according to ancient custom, bent upon seeing the last of the beautiful bride and her handsome groom at their chamber's threshold.

Here we draw the veil before the consummation of highest human happiness; for the tender, passionate secrets of the bridal chamber are too sweet and too holy to be made privy of all men!

[1] This portion of the narrative is in the handwriting of John Temple.—ED.

CHAPTER XX.

THE LAST WORDS FROM YONDER.

Days and weeks have come and gone since the events recorded in the previous chapter. For seven days after the wedding, Edos was entirely given up to feasting, to rejoicing, and to revelry. Of Graham—Prince Tihernah now—and his beautiful wife, we saw little during this interval; for the day following their marriage they left Edos, to spend their honeymoon at the stately dwelling which had been given to them by the King for their own private use. Both Temple and the Doctor have come in for their share of honours, each having received a title conferring many privileges.

As soon as the actual wedding festivities were over, the Doctor was hard at work again, busy with his investigations, and planning out in microscopic detail project after project, for the ultimate benefit of humanity. He was a very Titan in his labours. He had called together—under the direct patronage of the King—in congress all the leading scientists of Gathma, all the wise men of Helmath, deeply skilled in the arts and sciences, with whom he discussed his plans and projects. The greatest and the most important of these was one for establishing regular communication between Earth and Mars. His views were accepted by his scientific compeers with the wildest enthusiasm, and a society was formed forthwith, pledged to carry out the daring scheme.

The loss of the *Sirius* did not prove so disastrous, after all. There are cunning artificers and skilful engineers in many parts of Gathma, able to work out the Doctor's designs with even greater exactness than the men of Earth. Another point, vastly favouring the Doctor's plans, was the wonderful development of electrical science, a branch of knowledge only in its infancy on Earth. How this marvellous force has become utterly subservient to human will, in Gathma, has been dimly hinted at in many parts of our narrative; but Doctor Hermann, whether wisely or not, has deemed it best to say little until we return to our native Earth again.

Already a new carriage is being constructed on the same plan as the *Sirius*, but embodying many improvements, some of them the result of our experience on the way hither, others the suggestions of cleverer engineers than we. Several years must of necessity elapse before the grand experiment

will be tried, as the Doctor is anxious to acquire as much information as possible before returning. Already his five-and-sixty years of life begin to press heavily upon him, and he feels that if he once gets back to Earth, he will not be equal to the hardships and the risks of another journey here. Younger men, we doubt not, will be eager and willing to make this awful plunge across the sky, as soon as the tidings of our glorious success reach Earth, and they are put in possession of the secrets that will bear them triumphantly here.

And now, as these manuscripts already exceed in bulk and weight the measure that has been allowed them by Doctor Hermann in his calculations when making the machine that is to attempt to bear them to Earth, but few words are we permitted to say.

The result of our enterprise has been one unqualified triumph. Many perils, many hardships, many dangers have been encountered and have been overcome, as the reader of this stirring story, which is but a fragment of what we have to tell, already knows. We have piles upon piles of manuscripts dealing with scientific, social, and religious subjects; folios upon folios of sketches portraying objects upon which the eyes of earthly man have never rested, and of which he has not the faintest conception. A few of these we send with this.

Not only are we enriched with the knowledge we have gained for ourselves, but we are heavy-laden with the results of unnumbered centuries of scientific research, conducted by accomplished philosophers here.

Their discoveries in the science of astronomy are marvellous, and make us look upon our own attainments in this direction with supreme pity. The conditions of life upon this planet are exceptionally favourable to the advancement of this science, the grand age of the astronomers permitting them to perfect experiments and calculations, and observe phenomena which on our own world have to be left to posterity.

Many wondrous things have they told us of the movements of our own Earth, not the least remarkable being a sudden change in the inclination of her axis, four thousand two hundred and twenty-five years ago—that awful catastrophe, as we read in our own Holy Records, that flooded parts of the world even to the summit of her mountains, and so changed the conditions of life upon her surface that all creatures that dwell thereon have not

recovered, and never will recover, from its direful results. Never can we forget the feelings of awe that crept over us as we read the record of our own tribulation and woe of our own fall from physical mightiness to nothingness, as observed—actually observed—by those men of Gathma, who scrutinised the heavens with such wondrous skill in days when the science of the firmament, with us, still lay unquickened in the womb of Time's futurity!

There in those stirring records, too, we read of the changing aspect of our own polar regions, as viewed from Gathma, more than thirty millions of miles away—of how the polar crescents of snow spread themselves lower and lower, higher and higher, devastating and depopulating continents!

The attainments of zoologists are none the less grand. Evolution, a theory that only dawned on earthly minds with the teaching of Pythagoras, about two thousand four hundred years ago, and was only elaborated towards the close of the nineteenth century of the Christian era, has here passed from speculation into fact, through the uninterrupted researches of ten thousand times ten thousand years! Here has the human animal confessed his glorious unbroken descent from lower types, for the proofs of his ancestry are complete, and his wondrous descent doth only magnify his Creator's glory in his sight. He has no bigoted past to wrestle with, and to shake his reason; no Genesis to warp his judgment, or to stay the march of his intellect by saying:

"Things are so since Time began; Man's wisdom and his knowledge are false!"

Even to summarise our impressions of this beautiful planet-world of Mars, or Gathma, would require the space already taken by this narrative. But what appealed most forcibly to us, after a long sojourn upon its fair surface, was the vastness and stability of everything—its freedom from crime and from strife; the crusted age of all its institutions and customs; the superiority of its uniform religious dogma over our own divers beliefs; the calm dignity of its civilised inhabitants; and the arrangement of all things to harmonise with the extraordinary longevity of its people. In fine, it is a world at the very zenith of its long and gradually accumulated splendour—an ideal world at the summit of its glorious course, which can only be described as the bright and comely Heir of Time itself!

Having witnessed the splendours of this sister-world, and knowing the indescribable benefits which may accrue to the men of Earth through intercourse with its people, we are anxious that our fellows shall partake, and that speedily, of the riches with which this world is blessed. We have therefore written this narrative partly as a message of hope, as tidings of humanity's great coming joy, trusting that it may reach Earth, and be found, and published to all men.

We may soon follow our messenger across the sky. Even by the time that it falls upon the surface of our native world, we may be on our way thereto, bringing with us new ideas, novel inventions from the planet we have visited. We reserve the disclosure of our discoveries, and our secrets, until we reach Earth again; for we feel it due to ourselves that we should proclaim them in person; and practical John Temple considers that we should at least receive some financial return for the information it has cost us so much to obtain.

One, however, of our little band elects to remain behind in Gathma. Graham, as yet, evinces no desire to visit his native world. The tender ties that bind him here are stronger than those earthly ones which may still linger within him. Besides, we hear that already his union with this handsome maid of Edos has been blessed! and that all in good time the link between Earth and here will be forged yet more strongly in Volinè's maternity!

Two days after the above lines were penned, Temple and the Doctor are engaged in an anxious consultation. The despatch of our manuscripts to Earth forms the subject of discussion. The delicate-looking piece of mechanism lying on the table before us has been thoroughly tested, and proved successful. It is a small electrical engine, carrying enough motive force to propel it beyond the limits of this planet's attraction, attached to a cylinder of iron, in which our precious message is first to be encased, and then the two halves fixed together as one.

"Temple, if we can only get our messenger far enough into space, it will not be affected by attraction here, and the next body that should draw it onwards will be the Earth."

"Well, I have but to add a few more lines, and then all may be sealed, and we can despatch our message on its stupendous flight across space. Are

your notes complete?"

"A few more words of instruction, and I have done."

On the morrow following this discussion our message is about to be despatched. It is a great day in Edos. From far and wide the people of Gathma have journeyed hither to see our words depart. In two hours' time we seal these manuscripts in their iron covering, and attach them to the motors.

Time is speeding on. The scene around us here is a curious and imposing one. We stand upon the summit of one of the hills on which the fair city of Edos is built. A forge and brawny smiths, who have come hither from Pamax to complete our task, are in the foreground; the King, surrounded by Ministers and servants, by Princes and Priests, watches Doctor Hermann and Temple with heightening wonderment, the latter busy writing these few last words. Volinè and her husband peer over Temple's shoulder as his fluent pen races across the sheets of white paper, describing this closing scene. A dense multitude lines the background, equally filled with curiosity and wonder.

"What message, O King, may I send from you to my own people on the star-world Earth?" said Temple, pausing for a moment and turning towards the King of Gathma.

"A message of Peace and Goodwill! Tell thy brothers yonder that the hand of fellowship is reaching out towards them from our world to thine, and that great things shall come to pass for their good and ours."

"And your last words, Doctor?"

"Are words of encouragement to the men of science at home. To my dear old friend Darwin I especially address them. Tell my brethren that I long to be amongst them, once more, to tell of my discoveries, and to increase the scope of their labours to an extent they have hitherto not dared even to dream!"

"Have you aught to say, Graham—or, rather, Prince Tihernah?" said Temple, smiling.

"I will answer for him," said Volinè, playfully. "Tell the dwellers on thy star-world yonder that when the carriage which this message heralds doth

arrive thereon, a Princess of the Royal House of Gathma shall visit them."

"Let it be as you say, darling. If it is your wish to visit my world out there beyond the sky, then will I relinquish my desire to remain here in Gathma always, and go with you; for, of a truth, there is nothing that I can deny you," said Graham, his eyes filled with admiration and love for his peerless wife.

We are now about to place this last page of our manuscript with the roll of others in their iron resting-place, and in ten more minutes from now they will have winged their flight away! Adieu!

"Now, my comrades, your signatures, please."

Signed

HEINRICH HERMANN, F.R.S.,

JOHN TEMPLE,

HARRY GRAHAM, M.INST.C.E.

Adieu! Adieu!!

End of Extract from the MSS.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FIFTEEN
HUNDRED MILES AN HOUR ***

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