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The Lone Inn.
The Mystery of Lanyon Court.
The Expedition of Captain Flick.
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Captain Flick.
THE EXPEDITION OF CAPTAIN FLICK

A STORY OF ADVENTURE

BY

FERGUS HUME

Author of "The Mystery of a Hansom Cab," "The Mystery of Landy Court," "The Lone Inn," etc.
"Who dares to say romance is dead,
   Because the world is waxing hoary?
While lands unknown await our tread,
Who dares to say romance is dead?
In realms beyond the eastern red,
   We still may find its golden glory.
Who dares to say romance is dead,
   Because the world is waxing hoary?"
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The Expedition of Captain Flick.

CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERIOUS LETTER.

"A fool is he, who cares to be,
A stay-at-home at five-and-twenty;
When limbs are old, and blood is cold,
And all the tales of life are told,
There's time enough for peace and plenty."

Were it not the end of this notoriously sceptical century, I should have no hesitation in setting forth this narrative without apology; the more so as there are two witnesses who can testify to its veracity. Nevertheless, I feel bound (bearing in mind the extraordinary events which are herein related), to preface the same with the assertion that it is true. At the risk of being dubbed a liar, and dismissed to the company of Marco Polo and Sir John Mandeville,
THE EXPEDITION OF CAPTAIN FLICK.

I declare that I shared in the deadly perils which beset our ship's company in the island of Isk; and furthermore, that I saw with my own eyes the manifold iniquities of those who dwelt thereon, heathens and barbarians. If the tale savour of "The Thousand and one Nights"—as it assuredly does—the fault lies not with the teller; for I have neither taken from, nor added to, but have set forth to the best of my ability—which I admit is small—the story of that strange expedition, into which Harry Greenvile and I were cozened by Captain Flick, more commonly called "Roaring Tom." For all shortcomings in the matter of style and literary worth, I would ask the indulgence of those who read; and would also beseech them to abate their scepticism, when they remember in what terra incognita these doings occurred. Having thus much protected myself from scoff and doubt, I will proceed to the events.

This story begins on a May morning of 18—, when I was staying with Harry at his demesne of Bucksford, in the fair county of Devon. The Court, with its appurtenances of meadow and moor and wood, overlooks Barnstaple Bay above the town; and it came to Harry, as heir, a twelvemonth before the arrival of Captain Flick. With him dwelt his sister Bertha—fairest of Devonian maids, and my promised
wife; also Mrs. Barber, commonly known as Aunt Chrissy—whose domestic rule dated from the passing of her sister-in-law, Mrs. Greenville, ten years before. The rents of Bucksford, and of divers London properties, ran up to some ten thousand a year; so Harry entered into his kingdom with as good a chance of happiness as ever fell to the lot of a young man. He had not yet turned his thoughts to matrimony, being full of fire and adventure; but Bertha, who was close on her majority, had consented to become my wife; and to take up her abode in Shropshire as Lady Evans.

Our marriage had been stayed unexpectedly by the death of her father, but in three months I was to lead her to the altar; and latterly I had come to Bucksford to consult with Harry touching settlements on my part, and a disposition of Bertha's share of certain monies on his. Time had assuaged the grief of us all for the death of Maxwell Greenville, and we were as merry a quartette as could be found in the three kingdoms. I would that Captain Flick had not come to spoil our mirth and break up our party; but come he did, and dearly did we pay for falling in with his mad humours.

On that morning—which I remember well as dating the first intimation of what was intended us by Fortune—I had spent more time over my toilet
than I care to confess, though, to be sure, such vanity stands excused to a lover; and I descended in the expectation of finding breakfast at an end. But the meal was untouched, the room empty; and I heard Bertha singing, as she paced the lawn before the house. Outside I went, nothing loath for a matutinal chat, and here I was greeted with a reproofing smile and an uplifted forefinger.

"It is close on ten, Denis," said she, offering her cheek. "At what hour do you think we breakfast?"

"Faith, that is more than I can say," was my answer. "Breakfast at Bucksford is like Easter, a movable feast. But, if I am late, others are later. Mrs. Barber and Harry, for instance."

"Aunt Chrissy is not coming down this morning, as she has a bad headache; but Harry has been up and away to Bidesford these four hours."

"He can do with less sleep than I, then. We talked till midnight."

"The subject of conversation must have been interesting."

"Very!" said I, smiling. "It was about a young lady, called Bertha Greenville, who——"

"No compliments before breakfast," she replied, tapping my cheek. "Be sensible, or I shall leave you. Let us wait here for Harry, and admire the view."

It was well worth admiring, but I looked less at
the scene before me than at her who was to be my wife. The glimpse of slate roofs below the trees skirt ing the park; the shining streak of the Taw uncoiling like a snake seaward; the lengthy bulk of Lundy, frowning between sapphire sky and turquoise sea; I had seen them a hundred times, so I wasted no glances there which were better bestowed on Bertha. She was as beautiful a maid as ever saw light in Devon; and that being a county of fair women, the comparison is no mean compliment. But, putting aside a lover's partiality, she was a very Venus for locks, a Juno for dignity, and a Hebe for girlish grace. That, I take it, is a desirable trinity from Lemprière.

Yet it were fitter to compare her with Brunhild and Gudrun than with Hellenic deities; for although the Greenviles of Bucksford claim kindred with that famous Bideford family which gave Sir Richard to the last Tudor, and Sir Bevil to the second Stuart (and truly I discern in Harry many notable traits of Elizabethan and Carolian ancestors), I concluded, from the physical splendour which distinguished brother and sister, that there was Norse blood in their veins. Bertha was a stately and tranquil maiden, clear skinned, and golden haired, with that serene beauty of countenance which pertains to the heroines of the north. I first saw her when Harry brought me as his college chum from Oxford, and must own that
I then felt a trifle abashed by her majestic purity. But that awe wore off when I learned to know her better, for she was merry at heart, and could unbend to her friends, though sufficiently imperious to the outside world. My feelings quickened, through months of intercourse, from admiration to love, and I was blessed beyond my deserts by finding that she inclined kindly towards me. Thereupon I asked her for heart and hand, to which she consented, and being of a good Shropshire family, titled and wealthy, I had no difficulty in obtaining the approval and blessing of Mr. Greenville. So, in this wise, it came about that I paced the lawn by her side, affianced lover and promised husband.

While thus strolling, we talked of divers things touching our future, but principally we conversed of him for whom we waited breakfast. Harry had a passion for sea travel and adventure—inherited no doubt with his Norse blood—and he was only happy when sailing his yacht, the Carmen, in perilous seas. Of this Bertha, who was a true stay-at-home housewife, did not approve, and so spoke her mind on the subject. "If he would only settle down and marry," she said, referring to her brother, "it would be so much better for him; but he is always longing for travel."

"Where is the Carmen now?"
"At Plymouth, where she is being overhauled for a long voyage. Harry intends to start as soon as our marriage takes place."

"Well, that won't be for three months, Bertha; so you will have him with you for some time yet. Where does he intend to go?"

"I don't know. He has been in all four quarters of the world, so——"

"Save the South Seas, Bertha," said a gay voice at her elbow, and we turned to find Harry, booted and spurred, beside us.

My friend always reminded me of the hero of "Westward Ho"—surely one of the noblest books in our English tongue—for he was a fair-haired giant, all bone and muscle and genial good humour. His steady blue eyes, and firm lips, showed that he was prudent as daring; and, indeed, in many ways he was wise beyond his years. Less a scholar than an athlete, he had been renowned at Oxford for all physical exercises; and he was as fine a specimen of English youth as the most fastidious could desire. Never was there a more splendid young man. That lean frame was inured to fatigue, those brawny arms could smite to some purpose; and a quick eye and cool head enhanced the advantages of his physique. He was unfit for social gatherings and club dawdlings, and looked out of place amid
the tame surroundings of civilization. The lad was a born adventurer, destined to be foremost among those pioneers who carry the flag of England into unknown regions. Quick-witted, resourceful, prudent, dauntless, Harry Greenville was a modern type of those Elizabethans who first widened our bounds of empire. Those croakers who lament the decay of English physique would change their note did they see this lad of Devon.

It was small wonder that one so overflowing with health and vitality and desire for adventure should find irksome the quiet country life to which, by his landed interests, he was condemned. Riding and shooting, swimming and rowing, were all very well in their way; but they lacked the danger which alone gave zest to life in Harry's opinion. Whenever it was possible he turned the nose of the Carmen towards trackless oceans and unknown lands; and although his father had been dead only twelve months, he had already accomplished a voyage to the Sea of Okotsk, from whence he had reluctantly returned to grace our wedding. It was true that there was yet three months to spare, but the delay was caused by Bertha, who further postponed the ceremony for six weeks; and great was the wrath of Harry when he found that he could have stayed away longer without difficulty.
As yet he had never been in love; and he preferred the excitement of danger and travel to the smiles of beauty. He was as wedded to the sea as Venice, and cared more for masculine company than for that of women, though he did not set up for a Sir Galahad of purity. A good comrade, an honourable man, a venturesome explorer, he was a fine creature in all respects, and I was as proud that he should be my brother-in-law, as that Bertha should be Lady Evans.

"Hallo, you two!" said he brusquely, "I must apologize for being late. I suppose breakfast is over?"

"It ought to be, but is not," replied his sister, kissing him. "I waited for Denis."

"Just out of bed, I suppose," growled Harry genially, poking me in the ribs with his riding-whip. "What indolence! Why, I've been up since sunrise, and had a glorious gallop to Bideford on Black-Dick."

"Those who ride early brag all the morning and sleep all the afternoon," said I, pointedly.

"Egad, not I!" retorted Harry, following his sister into the house. "I'm off to town by the midday train."

"Again!" expostulated Bertha, as she seated herself at the table. "You only came back two days ago. What is the attraction in London?"

"I have to see about stores for the Carmen.
Besides, you and Denis can do your billing and cooing without my assistance."

"Come now, Hal! We don't make ourselves objectionable in that way."

Bertha laughingly supported my contention, and we both waited for Harry to make some jesting reply. In place of doing so, he looked silently at a letter he had just picked up, and the colour left his sunburnt cheeks.

"What is the matter, Harry?" asked his sister anxiously; "no bad news, I hope."

Harry forced a laugh, and opened the letter in a leisurely fashion.

"No. But this letter is addressed to father, and so gave me a shock."

"To father!" said Bertha in a low voice. "That is strange. "Surely all our friends know that he is gone."

"One does not, my dear sister—Captain Thomas Flick."

"Flick! What an odd name!"

"No odder than some of your Devonian appellations," said I dryly. "Coffin, for instance."

"Now then, old Evans," retorted Harry, who had recovered his spirits, "don't asperse the West country. Coffin's as good a name as Howard or Hamilton, and—"
“What about Captain Flick?” interrupted Bertha, anxious for information; “who is he?”

“If this letter is to be believed, he was a school-fellow of our poor father’s.”

“So Aunt Chrissy says, Harry.”

“No doubt she is right,” retorted her brother; “he must have known father well, to make so cool a request as is herein contained.”

“Read the letter, and let us judge,” suggested I, seeing Bertha rather affected by the mention of her father.

“Read it yourself, Denis,” replied Harry, passing it to me. “I wish to eat my breakfast; and, moreover, the ancient mariner writes so crabbed a hand, that I can only grasp the drift of his epistle. You are a bookish man, old Evans, so expound.”

The calligraphy of Captain Flick was indeed in need of improvement, and I saw that he could handle a rope better than a pen; but my studies had given me some skill in deciphering crabbed text, so with a trifle of difficulty I succeeded in reading aloud the following epistle:

“143, Quarral Street, W.

“Dear Maxwell,

“Have you forgotten Tom Flick who used to thrash you at Eton some fifty years ago? Lord,
how time flies! If you have not, I am anxious to run down to Bucksford, and renew my acquaintance with you. I have given up the merchant service these many years, and have been knocking about the world in a craft of my own. But she has been wrecked—confound all cyclones!—and being too poor to buy another I wish to borrow the Carmen. I saw her some years ago at Plymouth, and learned that she belonged to you. It will be worth your while to let me have her for twelve months or so, as I wish to use her for an expedition, which means money to us both. You were always a stay-at-home, so I suppose you will not care to come with me on a perilous voyage, the like of which has not been heard of this century. I’ll pitch my yarn when we meet; so, if you are inclined to oblige an old friend, send an invitation to the above address, and I’ll hoist sail for Devon in twenty-four hours.

“Yours as ever,

“Tom Flick.”

I could hardly finish this extraordinary epistle for laughter, and Harry choked and sputtered over his breakfast in a most disgraceful manner. Bertha alone looked rather vexed. The brusque tone of the communication was not to her taste.

“What a rude letter,” she said with calm
disapproval. "He has not seen papa for nearly forty years, yet he proposes to call and borrow the Carmen."

"Tom Flick is a character, Hal," said I, smiling; "you should certainly see him."

"Egad, I wouldn't miss him for a thousand pounds. I'll call at Quarral Street when I'm in town, and, if I like him sufficiently, I'll bring him down here. You won't mind, Bertha?"

"Not at all. But Aunt Chrissy might. Now I come to think of it, I believe I can identify the gentleman as a friend of hers before she was married."

"All the more reason she should be glad to see him," said Harry blandly, slyly aware of his aunt's sentimentalism.

"I'm not so sure of that, Harry. It is my belief that this gentleman is a rejected lover."

"Pooh! Aunt Chrissy must have got over all that sort of thing in forty years. I expect she'll renew the flirtation."

"Not if Captain Flick's speech is as uncultivated as his letter."

"It's a novelty in the way of letters," said Harry, with a broad grin; "he's so cock-sure of getting what he asks for."

"Will you lend him the boat, Hal?"

"My dear old chap, I can't say till I see him. I might."
"Then he'll wreck her, as he did his own yacht," said Bertha severely.

"Oh no, he won't! I'll be there myself to look after things."

"Harry! A perilous journey."

"That's just what I like, Bertha!" said the young man cheerfully. "If Flick can perform all he promises, I shall certainly let him have the Carmen to further his ends; but I must go too. I wonder what he's after," concluded Harry reflectively.

"It hints at buried treasure," said I, glancing again at the letter. "Spanish doubloons and treasure-ships of the Dons. I can conjecture no other reason for his mention of money."

"H'm, perhaps! However, he wants to sail the boat into strange waters. That is enough for me. I'd follow him to Prester John's kingdom, if there's fighting to do."

"But, Harry," expostulated Bertha, as her brother arose, "you had better speak to Aunt Chrissy. She may not like the idea."

"Well, I'll go up to her room now, and lay the proposal before her. If she disapproves, I can see Flick in town. But," added Harry, turning as he was leaving the room, "if Flick is at all a decent sort of chap, and can propose something worth thinking about, I'll go off with him. Timbuctoo, Manoa, or
the Fortunate Isles. It's all one to me—provided there are adventures ahead."

"You may never come back."

"My dear Bertha, I'm not born to be drowned, or scalped, or roasted. I'll come back as full of lies as Baron Munchausen."

And so he walked out of the room, leaving Bertha and myself to finish our breakfast in peace. Although none of us knew it, this was the first step which involved all three in a series of surprising adventures, the like of which have not occurred since Drake went picarooning on the Spanish main. And so do I start this strange and eventful history.
CHAPTER II.

"ROARING TOM."

"From London port, to Rio Bay,
I've sailed for many a weary day,
To Bristol town, from Frisco's gate,
I've shipped as captain, seaman, mate;
But, now my voyages all are o'er,
I lie a wreck upon the shore:
For here I be, at sixty three,
A mariner in misery."

Seeing that the coming of Captain Flick was likely to eventuate in the departure of Harry to unknown lands, on an unknown quest, we had much discussion as to what manner of man the tempter might prove to be. Therein we were greatly assisted by Mrs. Barber, who confessed, with many sighs and regretful shakings of the head, that Flick had been a candidate for her hand when she was a West country belle.

"Though, indeed," she said reprovingly, "Tom Flick was the wildest of them all."

"How many were there, Aunt Chrissy?"

"Nine, my dear, and one would have made me a
countess. But, indeed," resumed Mrs. Barber, with a sigh, "I preferred a commoner. Poor Francis—it is fifteen years, next Christmas, since he left me a widow! So Tom is coming here again. Dear! dear! It seems like yesterday when he went away."

"Is he handsome, Aunt Chrissy?" asked Bertha with true feminine curiosity.

"He was very handsome, my dear; but rough in speech and manner."

"So I should think, judging from his letter," observed I dryly.

"As a young man, he often came here," continued Aunt Chrissy, "and your father was greatly attached to him. It was quite a Damon and Pythias friendship."

"Oh, aunty! when he did not write to papa for nearly forty years."

"My dear, that was all my fault. Tom proposed, and I refused. He was so masterful and domineering, that I could not bring myself to marry him. He quarrelled with your father on my account, and so we saw him no more. Forty years," sighed the old lady, "quite a lifetime! I wonder what he is like now."

"As domineering as ever," said I, remembering the language in which the letter was couched. "He demands rather than begs for the Carmen."
"Why does he want the yacht?" asked Mrs. Barber anxiously.

"I cannot say. He reserves such information for a personal interview."

"I hope it is for none of his wild schemes, my dears. Tom was always full of visionary and ridiculous ideas. It was no use arguing with him, for he bellowed every one down. 'Roaring Tom,' they used to call him in my young days."

"And Roaring Tom he is still," said Bertha, smiling. "I am sure I shan't like the creature. Probably he is Caliban and Falstaff in one."

"No, my dear Bertha," replied Mrs. Barber, annoyed by this reflection on her taste in swains, "if Tom is at all his old self, you will like him as much as I did. He was the most charming of men—a trifle imperious and noisy, but intensely fascinating."

And, in proof of this assertion, Aunt Chrissy proceeded to detail certain episodes of that old romance in which she had figured with Flick. From her reminiscences, it would seem that the man was somewhat eccentric, with a liking for wild schemes and impossible adventures. That his proposed expedition might be one of the like nature was highly probable; and, privately, both Bertha and myself were minded to find it so visionary as to be impossible of fulfilment. We did not approve that Harry should
throw away his life in realizing the vain fancies of a hot-headed dare-devil; yet, knowing the lad’s predilection for difficulties and dangers, we had but small hope of staying him in the adventure. Bertha, especially, was certain that the result would be otherwise than we wished.

"It will be all settled by the time they arrive here," said she prophetically, "and Harry will dance in with the information that he leaves for Timbuctoo or the Orinoco next week."

"But that is impossible. He must wait for our wedding."

"What is our wedding in his eyes, compared with the chance of fraternizing with savages? He won’t stay, Denis; and who will give me away if he is absent?"

"My dear," I answered jokingly, "in default of the necessary male relative, we will employ Aunt Chrissy. But you need not anticipate the worst, as yet. After all, Harry has not even written to advise us that he intends to bring Captain Flick."

"Oh, he’ll arrive, Denis, I am certain; and take Harry with him on this horrid expedition."

"In that case we must induce the captain to renew his addresses to Mrs. Barber. The influence of love may keep him in England."

But, indeed, our fears were—for the present—
groundless; for when Harry returned, with Flick, no mention was made of the proposed expedition. At their first meeting, as I afterwards learned, the astute seaman had refused to unfold his schemes, or to commit himself to a course of action; alleging, and not without reason, that he had yet to assure himself of Harry's qualities, before interesting him in a plan which required confidence, prudence, and daring for its fulfilment.

"I'll have no young hotheads at my heels," said Roaring Tom, when pressed for an explanation. "Wait till I've taken stock of you for a week or so, and I'll let you know what I think. If you prove a lad of mettle, why, I'll tell you what's in my mind; but if I don't take t' ye, there's no more to be said."

"Save this," retorted Harry smartly, "that if I don't go, you may whistle down the wind for my yacht."

Flick was in nowise offended by so blunt a reply; for, candid himself to the verge of rudeness, and often beyond, he encouraged the same license in others. In his own mind he was more impressed with the qualifications of Harry than he judged prudent to admit at so early a stage of their acquaintance. The overflowing spirits of the young man, his temerarious disposition and ardent love of adventure, recommended him to one in whom the
same characteristics, qualified by experience, were to
be found. Moreover, Harry's splendid physique, and
abnormal strength were likely to be of inestimable
service in the straits into which Flick apprehended
they might fall. If, then, with these advantages, were
combined a steady head and a cool judgment, the
captain had little doubt but that the matter would
terminate in a mutual arrangement to realize the
daring scheme which he had in his mind.

With a view therefore to study the disposition of
his proposed colleague, under advantageous circum-
stances, Flick gladly accepted an invitation to pass
a week in the country; and with his baggage in
charge of an ugly little negro—of whom more here-
after—he put himself aboard at Paddington with his
host. The greater part of that journey was occupied
in Harry asking, and Flick baffling, questions con-
cerning the hinted mystery of the letter which had
brought them together. Needless to say Roaring
Tom, who was as dogged as a mule and cunning as
a fox, came off victorious; and Harry arrived at
Barnstaple without being a wit the wiser concerning
that which had taken him to London. These details
were reported to me by Harry when we waited
dinner and Captain Flick in the drawing-room.

Aunt Chrissy and Bertha were also present, both
curious to see the man of whom Harry had made
so strange a report. Bertha, with no memories to hamper her fancy, conceived an elderly red-faced Boreas, rugged of mood and honest of purpose; but Aunt Chrissy could not credit that her slim young sailor with his brilliant eyes and dashing manner, had declined to so gross a creature. Yet, on the entrance of Flick, loud voiced and burly, Bertha's portrait proved to be the more truthful of the two.

Roaring Tom—and a more fitting name was never bestowed—was a huge fat man, only a shade smaller in height than Harry, and in bulk he much exceeded our Bucksford Hercules. His face, burnt red by wind and salt spray, was large featured and heavy jowled, while the sparse tufts of white hair, brushed aggressively upward, gave him no distant resemblance to an enraged cockatoo. Notwithstanding his sixty-five years, there were few lines on cheeks or forehead, and from his wide mouth, unhidden by beard or moustache, proceeded a voice which Neptune might have envied. It was a good-humoured countenance; yet it could set stern and cruel enough when occasion demanded, as I have reason to remember. Planted squarely on his feet, with his huge hands hanging down clumped into fists, and a liberal display of white teeth—his own—Roaring Tom resembled an amiable sea monster; yet he had about him an air of good breeding which rendered pardonable his most
ungainly gambols. He was Falstaff for girth, Samuel Johnson for domineering, a very whale for unwieldliness, yet a gentleman by right of an inborn breeding which, to a certain extent, neutralized all these defects. Bertha, who, womanlike, is quick in her judgments, fell in love with him on the spot.

"Oh, the sweet sea monster!" she murmured in my ear, as Flick rolled forward to salute his early love. "Oh, the gentle Polyphemus!"

"By gad! Hey! What! It's Christina!" roared Flick, as gently as a sucking-dove. "Ay, ay, it's forty years since I set eyes on ye, ma'am. We're neither of us younger, but ye've grown old gracefully. Hey! ho! ho! Married, I hear, ma'am?"

"Married and widowed," said the old lady, wiping away a tear which I took to be a tribute either to Flick or to her deceased husband. "And you, Thomas?"

"A bachelor still, Christina. Your fault! Why! What! You sent me away, you know. Should have married me—should have married me," growled Flick, shaking his head, "then I shouldn't have been an elderly bachelor or you a widow, Christina."

Finding no ready response to this embarrassing speech, Mrs. Barber introduced her quondam lover to Bertha, who saluted him with a more friendly smile than I ever yet saw her bestow on a fresh
acquaintance. I think the thought that Flick had been the schoolfellow of her father—whom she had dearly loved—contributed not a little to this unbending. The old sailor enclosed her slim fingers within both of his hands, and softened his voice for the greeting.

"'Great is Diana of the Ephesians,'" said he, eyeing her keenly. "Harry told me you were pretty, my dear, but did not lead me to expect a goddess. Ay, ay," added he in a lower tone, as she laughed at the extravagant compliment, "you have poor Maxwell's laugh when he was a pretty lad at Eton. Humph! we won't talk of that. But I will say," he continued, raising his voice to its normal bellow, "you're a splendid-looking young lady. Hey! if I were only younger, my dear—— But I shan't say more, or this young gentleman will call me out. Eh, Sir Denis? Tell me what you have done to deserve such good fortune as this."

"Put it to the test by proposing marriage," I retorted, greatly tickled by this plain speaking.

"Good! good! You've some brains under that curly hair, sir. Hey, Christina, the young ones are bolder than we were."

"No one could have been bolder than you, Thomas," replied Aunt Chrissy, with a sly smile.

"Eh! eh! Pooh, madam! I was as prim as a
boarding-school miss in those days. I'm not prim now—no, by gad!"

"I don't think you are," said Bertha demurely.

"Ah, you're a pretty mutineer! A very—— Hey, what's that? Dinner? Not before it's wanted! A day in the train makes me hungrier than a week aboard. Come, Christina," he added, offering his arm to the old lady, "we'll go down together, as we did in the old days. I wonder if you can eat as good a dinner now as you did then?"

Aunt Chrissy's reply to this scandalous question was drowned in the uproarious laughter of Flick, who headed the procession to the dining-room, and insisted on shaking hands with the old butler, whom he remembered a mere lad in bygone days.

"Hey, Jeffries! What! alive still? So am I, you see—well and hearty. But your poor master—and my old—— Well! well! we'll talk of that another time," concluded Flick hastily; and with a tenderness which sat incongruously on so large a creature, he led Mrs. Barber to the table.

We were all pleased that Flick had remembered the old servant; and, as it proved afterwards, it was but one of the many ways in which he showed how good a heart was hidden under his rough exterior.

At dinner the captain proved himself a valiant trencher-man, and was not behind-hand in giving his
opinion about the wine, or in praising any dish that specially recommended itself to his fancy. Yet while thus satisfying his appetite, he was not unmindful of Mrs. Barber's claims to attention; and talked about old times and old friends till both he and she grew quite sentimental. Once his eyes rested on a portrait of the late Maxwell Greenvile, which hung over the sideboard, and he sighed meditatively as he thought of his former schoolfellow. I think Bertha, who noted that he brought his glass to his lips while looking at the picture, liked him the better for that silent tribute to the memory of her father. Flick could have devised no better plan for gaining her goodwill.

But all this time not a word about the expedition. Flick talked of many things, of many places, of many people; but he gave no hint of what his reason might be for wishing to borrow the yacht. Not until dinner was nearly at an end did Harry obtain the reward of his persevering questioning, and succeed in eliciting a remark concerning the motive of his visit. But the hint thus carelessly thrown out enabled us to guess, in some measure, the motive of the proposed expedition. Indirectly the subject was brought about by Flick himself.

"So you're fond of travelling," said he to Harry, commenting on a remark of Bertha's. "I'm glad to
hear it. It's better to go round the world, lad, than to stop at home and see the world go round. Ho! ho!"

"A very pretty epigram," I interjected, "but only applicable to certain folk."

"Meaning Harry and myself. Gad! it's true enough. You and that young lady there are too busy with matrimony to think of roving. Eh, I don't blame ye, not at all. But such home-staying wouldn't suit me. Gad! no. I've knocked about the world for forty years, and would do so for another forty, only that would take me over the century, and I can't expect such a length of days."

"Why do you not settle down, Thomas?" hinted Aunt Chrissy seriously, "and think seriously."

"Because I'm a creature of habit, Christina. And as to thinking seriously, I've had to do that scores of times in order to escape with my life. Nay, nay, ye can't learn an old dog new tricks; and I'll go on wandering till I lay my bones in some far-off clime. Perhaps this trip, for aught I know," he muttered in a lower tone.

"Is it so very perilous, sir?" asked Harry, seeing his chance.

"H'm! I can't say. I know no more than you do of the manners and customs of the place whither I am going."
"It must be the North Pole you intend to visit," suggested Bertha, a trifle satirically.

"Nay, nay, Miss Greenvile! It's further south, my dear, though in what latitude or longitude I can't say."

"Isn't this place marked on the map, captain?"

"I hope not," grumbled the mariner. "I don't want my little claim 'jumped,' as they say out West. It's an unknown land, Sir Denis. Ay, as unknown as was America when Columbus hoisted sail at Palos."

"Are there any unknown lands now?" said I dubiously. "I thought we had found all that was to be found on this earth of ours—save the Pole itself."

"There are spaces of ocean," said Flick emphatically, "which have not yet been explored. Wide wastes of sea ample enough to contain islands of some magnitude."

"And it is to one of these islands that——"

"Precisely, my lad. Now you have an inkling of what I intend. More I shall not tell you at present: you may learn the truth in Greece."

"In Greece!" cried all; "and what," said Harry singly, "may Greece have to do with your unknown island?"

"Nay, lad," growled the captain cunningly, "you
would be instructed ere I have proved your capacity. In seven days or less, if I find you staunch and true, I shall lay the whole matter before you. But,” added he after a pause, “I will say this much, that ere we make for the high seas, we must cast anchor off a certain port of Greece—to learn the route.”

“From whom?”

“Certain strangers who may be there. I shall say no more at present, but direct your attention to my negro servant.”

“Dosk?”

“The same. On his breast is a certain tattooing which can explain the whole secret. So if you gentlemen,” concluded Flick, with a grim smile, “can read picture-writing, I dare swear my tale will be no news to you when the telling comes.”

Which hint set Harry afire to see the body of Dosk, and read the enigma if he could; a matter which he accomplished within the week by a stratagem which recommended him greatly to the consideration of Roaring Tom.
CHAPTER III.

THE UGLY LITTLE NEGRO.

"Child of the torrid zone,
Burnt black 'neath tropic skies;
From lands unseen, unknown,
By tempests northward blown,
Hither you come alone

"You, who have stormless seas,
And warm winds bearing balms;
WEEP as the wintry breeze,
Shakes the complaining trees,
And long for former ease
Beneath your native palms."

THAT Captain Flick should so pointedly stimulate our curiosity was, to my mind, a proof of his determination to secure both yacht and owner for the proposed expedition. Outspoken as he feigned to be, no one could be closer when nothing was to be gained by babbling; and that he had admitted even so much of his schemes sufficiently betrayed the bent of his thoughts. It needed little subtlety to see that the visit would terminate to his liking;
for he possessed, in an eminent degree, the art of adapting circumstances to forward his aims.

Yet, as is often the case with the crafty, it seemed to me that his diplomacy was scarcely needed, as Harry was fairly set on joining in the enterprise. The very vagueness which environed Flick's destination, stirred up the venturesome spirit of the lad; and his patience was sorely tried during those seven days of suspense. In nowise pleased that Harry should risk life and limb in what promised to be a mad undertaking, I talked seriously of what he owed to his estate and tenants; pointing out, and I think justly, that absenteeism was the ruin of landed interests. But all to no purpose, for I might as easily have hidden the Taw turn on its course, as move this would-be pioneer from his determination.

All afire for exploration and adventure, he indulged in a thousand conjectures as to the motive and direction of the journey; and he wearied brain and eyes in tracing on the chart imaginary routes, which tended—so ignorant was he of Flick's purpose—to the four points of the compass. The expedition could not, he thought, be designed for the Polar regions, as Flick hinted at Southern waters and negroes. These terms more directly indicated Africa; though such stress was laid on the possession of the yacht, that it would seem that the
captain contemplated taking her whither she would be of more use than skirting continental coasts. But to all such surmises the wary Flick said neither “yea” nor “nay.”

Entering the library, I found Harry twirling the terrestrial globe, and chuckling over this latest outcome of his thoughts. With some pride he communicated the same, and sought my opinion thereon. I must premise that his mode of addressing me was the result of high spirits and familiarity.

“Here you are, Old Soberpables,” said he disrespectfully; “I was about to look for you, to tell of my discovery.”

“Have you found out Flick’s mare’s nest?”

“Mare’s nest it may be, but that we shall see. Here, old lad, I believe this expedition has to do with an island in the Indian Seas, t’other side of Capricorn. Flick wants to obtain something from that island, and to use the boat in order to escape.”

“An island!” I repeated, bending over the chart spread out on the table. “Roaring Tom talks of negroes and Africa——”

“Pish! It has nothing to do with Africa. If it had, we could easily get there by a Donald Currie, or a “Union” liner, and Flick would be bent on borrowing money for the engaging of carriers and guides. He wouldn’t want my boat, for it would be of
no use in an overland journey, and she is overdeep in the draught for river travelling. No, Denis, it's an island the old man is hankering after."

"What sort of an island, and where?"

"Ask me something easier. I've been poring over this map till I know every inch of it. If the island is unknown, I'm blest if I can spot any possible place where it can hide. The Indian Ocean is as well known as Piccadilly.

"No doubt, Hal. Still, the liners keep more or less to their regular routes; and it is just possible that in the intervening spaces there may lie some unconsidered geographical trifle."

"It's near Africa, anyhow. You heard the old man talk of negroes."

"The term might include all dark-skinned folk, from the Central African type to the South American half-caste," said I reflectively. "By some people, Arabs, Hindoos, Guaches, Polynesians, and such like, are all denominated niggers. I wouldn't pin my faith to so comprehensive a term, Hal. To my mind the strangest of his hints is the coupling of Greece and negroes. What have the latter to do with the former, I should like to know?"

"So should I, my lad of Shropshire. But," added Harry in a more hopeful tone, "there's that nigger servant of his."
"Dosk! Well, what clue can that hideous piece of ebony afford you?"

"Don't you think it possible that he comes from Flick's unknown island?"

"Assuredly I do not, and for two reasons. Firstly, nothing has been said about an unknown island; and, secondly, if Dosk came from one, how could Flick converse with him in his own tongue? An unknown island, an unknown race—an unknown race, an unknown tongue, and there tumbles down your fine castle of fancy."

"Deuce take your syllogisms!" retorted Harry, by no means inclined to surrender his point. "I don't see the connection at all. However, let us grant your argument, and come to the tattooing."

"That's better! Have you seen it?"

"No. The creature is muffled up in that sailor rig, which makes him look like a monkey on a barrel-organ. I can't strip the man, so I fail to see how I can get a glimpse of his black hide."

"Try strategy," I suggested; "inveigle Dosk to Raleigh's Pool, and induce him to swim. Then you can see the illustrations on his chest."

"I might do worse," replied Harry, accepting my jocular hint in all seriousness. "All is fair in love or war, and as the secret of the expedition is shown by the tattooing, I should like to forestall Flick's
communication, and score one off that tantalizing Polyphemus. By the way, where is he?"

"With the ladies, no doubt. An ocean Hercules thrall to a couple of Devonian Omphales. Both Bertha and Aunt Chrissy are enamoured of this noble sea captain."

"The old rhinoceros!" laughed Harry, rolling up the map. "I don't wonder at it—there is something likeable about him. He is a prime favourite here, at all events."

Harry spoke no more than the truth; for Captain Flick, with his blunt speech and frank simplicity, which latter was, I think, in part assumed, had ingratiated himself with all. That Aunt Chrissy, mindful of her youthful romance, should like him, was to be expected; but I wondered that the haughty Bertha should manifest such pleasure in the society of a rough seaman. Indeed, so much did she affect his company, that I laughingly congratulated myself that the lure of adventure would shortly remove so dangerous a rival. Flick followed her about everywhere, and greatly amused her by his quaint remarks and openly confessed appreciation of her beauty.

"Upon my word, Bertha," said I one afternoon, "I don't think it is safe for me to leave my Devonian nymph in the clutches of Polyphemus. Ere I return, you may be carried off like another Galatea."
"He is a delightful old bear," said Bertha, smiling; "and his compliments, if plain-spoken, are genuine. I wish the poor old man would settle down quietly, instead of venturing his life on a perilous voyage."

Mrs. Barber, who was present, looked up from her knitting at this last speech, and shook her head, with a glance around to see if Flick was within hearing.

"He wouldn't thank you to call him a 'poor old man,' my dear," said she dryly. "Thomas thinks of himself as one in the flower of manhood."

"He's so optimistic that he can persuade himself into any belief, aunty. All the same, he is a gallant old gentleman, and were I not engaged to Denis, I should set my cap at Roaring Tom."

"There's a confession to make in the hearing of your future husband," said I, lingering at the door.

"If my future husband will leave me so much alone, he must expect to find a rival. One of sixty-five is better than nothing. Where are you going this afternoon, Denis?"

"With Harry, for a swim in Raleigh's Pool. That is the ostensible reason, but Harry has some scheme in his head."

"I see that Dosk creature is with him," replied Bertha, glancing out of the window. "Has it to do with him?"
"Yes; and with the expedition."

"I believe you are bitten with the mania also, Denis, and encourage Harry in his folly."

"On the contrary, I go to dissuade him, if possible."

This was hardly true, as I was as curious as Harry about the tattooing; but it served as an excuse to take my leave. On the lawn I found Harry and the negro, and, on my joining them, we all three turned down a path towards Raleigh's Pool. This was a large cistern dug out of the earth, faced with stone, and brimmed with the coldest of water. Fed by subterranean springs, it was chilly on the hottest days, and therefore much affected in summer by those who stayed at Bucksford. Tradition ascribed its conception and execution to Sir Walter Raleigh, but of the truth of this I am ignorant. Nevertheless, it was called by the name of that famous Elizabethan; and, as I never heard his claim to its creation disputed, I presume there was a grain of truth, as there generally is, in the common rumour.

Leaving Dosk, who, child of the tropics as he was, shivered most pitifully in the shade of the trees, to mind our clothes on the bank, Harry and myself plunged into the pool, and refreshed ourselves greatly. On all sides rose the trunks of oak, and ash, and sycamore, girdling the water with a verdant ring of whispering leaves, while overhead arched the blue
and sunny sky. Engrossed in our swimming, we failed to take notice of the negro; but he was recalled to our minds by the rising of a melancholy chant. In some amazement, for the music was fitful and barbaric, we climbed out of the water to listen and look.

Dok had wandered to the end of the pool, and was grovelling before a statue of Venus which stood white and nude amid the surrounding green. He bowed abjectly before the image, raised his arms as in supplication, and again chanted his invocation to the goddess. To my astonishment he thrice repeated the name of Aphrodite; and then, his orisons ended, he crept back to where we were drying ourselves.

"That's strange, Hal," said I, desisting for a moment in sheer amazement; "he calls on and worships Aphrodite."

"And Flick talked about Greece," cried Harry, greatly excited; "depend upon it, Denis, I am right. This man is an inhabitant of the island whither Flick is bound, and, judging from his late occupation they there worship Hellenic deities."

"Nonsense! What can an island of the Indian Ocean have to do with Greece?"

"And why should a negro of that island call upon Aphrodite?" retorted Harry. "There's some connection between the two, strange as it may appear."
"Well, have a look at the tattooing, and see if that will help you," said I carelessly; "though, unless Dosk is a descendant of the blameless Ethiopians with whom Zeus dined, I don't see how such extremes as classic and barbarian can meet."

While I dressed myself, Harry pointed to the pool, and intimated to Dosk that he should plunge in. In place of refusing, as I thought he would, the negro stripped himself with the utmost celerity, and seemed only too pleased at the chance of a bath. But before we could even gain a glimpse of his chest, Dosk sprang into the water, and proved himself as at home there as any fish. He dived and swam like an otter—another proof, as Harry remarked, that he belonged to an insular race. By the time we had finished our toilets he was on bank again, drying himself with one of our towels. Then we saw certain vermilion scorings on his chest, which strongly excited our curiosity.

Standing naked in the strong sunlight, Dosk looked like some grotesque idol of ebony. Never was there so black a skin, so misshapen a frame, so contorted a visage. His ugliness was absolutely perfect, and he resembled those fantastic Japanese images, carven so as to utilize the excrescences of the wood for limbs and trunk. Broad, squat, bandy-legged, with arms of abnormal length, he was more ape than
man; and a wide mouth, oblong eyes, and huge ears, accentuated his barbaric look. The degraded Bushman of South Africa was a step higher—at least as regards physical attributes—in the scale of creation, than this dwarfish monstrosity.

"My stars!" said Harry, as the negro shuffled into his clothes; "this creature is certainly the missing link! He is the ugliest little reptile I ever set eyes on. Maybe he is of an unknown race, for I never saw a thing like him claiming humanity."

"Never mind that at present," I returned impatiently; "you had better be sharp and examine the tattooing, or he'll have his clothes on in a minute."

Thus adjured, Harry advanced towards Dosk, who had by this time assumed the greater portion of his garments, and gently laid his hand on the bare shoulder of the negro. With a gesture of alarm, the black creature sprang back, and showed his teeth like a snarling dog, doubtful of unasked-for attentions. I was close behind, looking over Harry's shoulder, and I took in at a glance the extraordinary tracings marked on the dark skin of the dwarf. Thereon was scored in bright scarlet lines the representation of a nude woman standing on an island; a dove perched on the finger of her left hand, and the right arm pointed aloft to a five-rayed star. The whole of
this symbolism was encircled by the convoluted coils of two snakes.

Incautiously, for the negro's attitude was inimical, Harry laid his forefinger on this curious emblem, but scarcely had he touched the bare chest, when Dosk threw back his head with a guttural cry of rage; the next moment he had snatched up his remaining garments, and was racing at top speed up the path leading to the house.

"You've done it now, Hal," said I, as we hastily followed. "Dosk has gone to complain to his master."

"A woman, a star, an island, a dove," muttered Harry, taking no notice of my remark; "what do you make of the mixture, Denis?"

"Humph! that requires some consideration. You are evidently right in your surmise that an island is the goal which Flick hopes to gain by means of the Carmen."

"And the star?"

"Some sidereal religion, no doubt. These negroes may worship the planetary bodies."

"What about the woman and the dove?"

"That is easier to guess. Dosk worshipped that statue of Venus by the pool, and called on the goddess by her Greek name of Aphrodite. In Greece the dove was sacred to the Cytherean deity;"
so, going by these facts, I should say that the figure on Dosk's breast is meant for Venus."

"But how comes it that a negro should be the votary of a dead and gone creed?"

"Flick alone can explain that," I answered; "the key to the riddle is in his possession."

"What about the snakes?" asked Harry after a pause; "the Greeks did not adore serpents."

"No; but Nagya worship is a prominent feature of many tribal religions of the African continent where——"

"But this negro has nothing to do with Africa, I tell you. He is an islander, I am certain, both from the tattooing and from his swimming powers. No inland man would take to the water so naturally."

"Well, let us construct a theory. The race to which Dosk belongs came from the great African continent to an island in the Indian Seas, and thereto brought with them the worship of star and serpent. In some inexplicable way this race came in contact with the Hellenes, and borrowed the cult of Aphrodite to mix it with their own barbaric rites. Though, indeed," I added, smiling, "why such hideous monsters, as Dosk and his countrymen, should devote themselves to the worship of beauty is a puzzle to me."

"That is all very well," grumbled Harry crossly; "but why does Flick want to find out this island?"
"You had better ask him, for, upon my word, the tattooing has only deepened the mystery."

"The seven days are over, thank goodness!" said Harry piously, "and we'll hear the truth from Captain Flick to-night."

We turned the corner of the path as he spoke, and emerged from green wood on to lawn. The façade of the house, with its many windows and stately portico, stretched broadly on the rise of the verdant sward, and, on either side, full-foliaged trees enclasped the mansion in their embrace. The sight thrilled me, as it always did, with the thought of home-life and peaceful days.

"Can you leave that haven," said I to Harry, "for wild wanderings and perilous voyages?"

"I grow rusty in comfort and ease," he answered carelessly, "and I am not of the stuff to be content with domestic bliss. But that my father objected, I would have become a soldier, as you well know; and since that career is barred to me, I must shape my desire for action to some more adventurous course. If Captain Flick can perform all he promises, I'll follow him to the ends of the earth."

"You should have lived in the spacious times of great Elizabeth, lad."

More I did not say at that moment, for we were interrupted by Bertha, who moved swiftly across the
lawn to meet us. The absence of ornament and colour in her white dress added to, rather than detracted from, her stately beauty; and she moved a very goddess over the grass. Yet her face was disturbed, and it was easily seen that something untoward had occurred to ruffle her habitual serenity. What it was she explained as she paused before us.

"That ugly little negro," said she in a vexed tone, "he has been annoying me again."

"Again!" I echoed. "Has he, then, annoyed you before?"

"Yes; only I did not like to tell you. It is a foolish habit he has of falling on his knees every time I meet him."

"Ho!" cried Harry, with a burst of laughter, "he takes you for Venus."

"A very classical compliment," replied Bertha, with a look of surprise; "but what has Venus to do with this black creature and his antics?"

"Ah! what indeed?" said I reflectively. "Only Captain Flick can explain his reasons. To-night, Bertha, your curiosity shall be gratified. Prepare yourself for the hearing of a strange history."

I was right in my conjecture, for the history detailed by Roaring Tom was stranger than any of us dreamed of, and in the end, as will be seen, it led to still stranger adventures.
CHAPTER IV.

FAIR VENUS OF THE STAR.

"Queen Venus was a merry dame,
Who ruled right well in heathen days;
She taught a lover how to claim
His lass in twenty different ways:
So I for one would kneel before her,
And with a thankful heart adore her,
For she hath shown me how to snare
The nymph Dorinda coy and fair.
Fa! la! la! I here proclaim,
Queen Venus is a merry dame."

The above madrigal was composed by an Elizabethan ancestor of Harry's, who was, like most men of his day, a gallant of amorous complexion and poetical gifts. It serves well to illustrate this chapter, which deals mainly with the lady of the song, though in a way not contemplated by Sir Peregrine Greenvile when he courted his Dorinda. As I copied the ditty from a yellow-leaved music-book, I wondered what the knight would have said had he known that his conceit was destined to head as fantastic a story as any imagined by the Euphuists of his day. Then—so ignorant were the times, and so greedy of marvels the generation—the narrative might have
passed muster as sufficiently veracious; but I, infected with latter-day scepticism, inwardly laughed at Flick and his fables. How natural were my doubts can be judged from the ensuing conversation, which is faithfully reported; and if, afterwards, I changed my opinions, it was because my eyes convinced me that the seeming falsehood was only truth in disguise. But my recantation, and its reasons, will be set forth in due time.

That evening our symposium was not graced by the presence of the ladies, which was just as well, as Flick, wrapped up in the subject of his expedition, was in no mood for female society. Aunt Chrissy withdrew after dinner to her own room, on the plea of a headache; and, as she disliked solitude, Bertha also retired to bear her company. Thus, as there was but I to keep Harry within the bounds of reason, the astute Flick judged it an excellent opportunity to tell his story, and secure the co-operation of the lad. To this end he inveigled us to the smoking-room, and there recurred to the subject of Doks's behaviour by Raleigh's Pool, which Harry had related earlier in the day. Even now, at the distance of many years, I can recall the scene of that decisive council: I, the least talkative of the three, seated in a deep armchair by the window; Flick, huge and burly, trumpeting forth his schemes with many gesticulations; and
Harry, towering, a fair-haired Norse giant on the hearthrug, drinking in every word of that wild story. Flick had a kind of rough eloquence not without charm, and he was as powerful as the Ancient Mariner to hold his listener. Talk of Sir John Mandeville and his notable falsehoods: the knight was overshadowed by the glib tongue and brave imagination—as I then thought—of Roaring Tom.

At first the conversation was fragmentary, and dispersed between us three; when I held my peace, it dwindled to an argument, with Flick and Harry as opponents, and finally subsided into the solidity of a monologue spoken by the sea captain, with much power. After a few desultory remarks, Flick introduced the topic of the hour.

"When you touched the tattooing on Dosk's chest," said he, puffing at his cigar, "you insulted his religion."

"So I thought from the way in which he behaved. I violated some taboo, no doubt. What does that signify?"

"Can you not guess?" was the counter-question.

"Let me try," said I, before Harry could speak. "The woman with the dove is meant for Aphrodite, and is worshipped on an island by negroes; these also adore the sidereal heavens."

"That is a very good guess, Sir Denis," replied
Flick in some surprise. "Hey! I would not have given you credit for so much penetration. Ay, ay! there you have the gist of the matter, gentlemen both; but that you may fully understand its meaning, I must tell you of the island and its religion, as related to me by Dosk. He——"

"One moment," interrupted Harry abruptly. "Who is Dosk?"

"An inhabitant of the island of Isk."

"I never heard of it."

"Egad! nor has any one else," retorted Roaring Tom dryly. "So far as I know from Dosk’s story, it is an island in the Indian Ocean, unknown to our geographers."

"If that is so, how did you drop across it?"

"I didn’t. But while bringing my boat up to Zanzibar, I picked up Dosk tossing about in an oarless and sailless boat. He pitched a yarn of having been blown out to sea from this island of Isk by a cyclone."

"H’m," said I sceptically, "how did you understand the tongue of this unknown islander?"

"Hey, lad! I thought you’d make that objection. Why, because I know the lingo of some East African tribes, and, allowing for insular corruption, that nigger speaks the same dialect! When he came aboard I could catch the drift of his story, and now,
after six months, I understand nigh every word he says."

"Then this insular race is an offshoot of some East African tribe?"

"Philologically speaking, there can be no doubt of it," replied Flick after a pause. "Some thousands of years ago these niggers emigrated to the island of Isk, wherever that may be."

"How can you fix the period of their migration, captain?"

"How? By the evidence of Dosk, and the facts of Grecian history. Now then, gentlemen, can you tell me when Praxiteles, the sculptor, lived?"

Harry shook his head hopelessly, but I, whose brain was better stocked with stray facts of classical lore, made a weak attempt to answer this most extraordinary question.

"He lived a few hundred years before Christ, didn't he, captain?"

"Three hundred years before Christ," corrected Flick, giving the exact date; "and thereby I know, in a fashion, when the island of Isk was peopled."

"It pleases you to be mysterious, sir," said Harry, with a heave of his mighty shoulders. "What has an East African tribe, isolated in the Indian Seas, to do with a Greek sculptor?"

"That, my boy, is the whole point of the story."
"As how?"

"The inhabitants of this island," continued Flick slowly, "worship a statue of Aphrodite which was fashioned by Praxiteles for her temple at Cythera. Now, as Praxiteles lived 300 B.C., and this is the nineteenth century, I take it that Dorsk's people must have populated Isk for over two thousand years."

To this daring announcement there succeeded a silence, and we looked at Captain Flick with astonishment, not unmixed with scorn. That he should attempt to palm off as true so mad a fable on two common-sense men, seemed as impudent as it was ridiculous. In my own mind I at once rejected the whole story as incredible; but Harry, more impressionable and trustful than I, gave Flick the benefit of the doubt, and without expressing his disbelief, demanded of him if it were true.

"True, sir?" echoed Flick, with a burst of wrath. "D'ye think I'd waste my time, or your own, in telling a cock-and-bull story? Of course it is true. Egdal that monkey of a Dorsk hasn't the brain to invent so strange a story, and so——"

"You forget, captain," interjected I mildly, "we have not yet heard the story."

"Then you shall hear it now, and can believe or disbelieve as you think fit. I heard it from Dorsk,
and he says 'tis preserved in the annals of the island."

"Annals!" cried Harry, taking a seat. "Then these negroes are civilized?"

"Not having been to Isk, I cannot answer that question. They must have some kind of a civilization, judging from the legend."

"The appearance and brain-power of Dosk are against that."

"Dosk, sir? Pooh, pooh! A poor fisher-lad—one of the plebs, sir. But on the island of Isk there are cities and temples. The negroes are ruled by a white king, and there is a band of priestesses who minister at the shrine of Aphrodite."

"This is getting interesting," said I ironically. "Go on, captain, and let us hear more marvels."

"You don't believe me, sir?"

"Oh yes I do. Only I think Dosk might have imposed on——"

"Imposed on—imposed on!" roared Flick, thumping the table. "There isn't a man born can impose on Roaring Tom. But I don't wonder you doubt me," he added in a lower tone, "for the yarn is as queer a one as was ever told."

"Go on, captain; go on," cried Harry, rubbing his hands. "How did the statue get from Cythera to so outlandish a place as Isk?"
"That's a long story," said Flick, relighting his cigar. "As I said before, I heard it from Dosk, who was picked up by me some hundred miles south of Capricorn. He told of the island of Isk, of its temples and cities, and white rulers, and barbaric civilization; and so raised my curiosity that I would then and there have headed the yacht for it. But provisions were low, and the boat short-handed, so I judged it wiser to keep straight on for Zanzibar, there to get things ship-shape. Unfortunately, we were caught in a cyclone, and sprang a leak. After twenty-four hours at the pumps, we took to the boats, and I saw my ship go down before my eyes. She was a good craft," he added with some emotion, "and swam like a duck; but no ship that was ever launched could have outlasted that storm. When she went under we headed for Zanzibar, and thence I managed to get to London with Dosk; pretty well on my beam ends for cash. However, I have an annuity, which, though small, is enough to keep me going; but I was not rich enough to build, or buy, or hire another yacht, so I despaired of ever being able to reach Isk. Then I remembered that my old schoolfellow, Maxwell Greenvile, owned the Carmen, which I saw at Plymouth some years ago; so I wrote to him, as you know. Having been abroad for the last twenty-four months, I had not heard of his death; but you see——"
the captain broke off with a gesture of regret; and added slowly, "But if he had lived, he would not have refused me the use of his yacht."

"Nor will his son refuse you, captain," said Harry heartily. "The boat is at your service, Flick, on condition that you let me accompany your expedition."

"I ask for nothing better, lad, and there's my hand on it. You're just the kind of comrade I want 'longside of me, for I won't disguise from you that there are perils ahead. These islanders are very jealous of their statue, and won't let a soul land on Isk if they can help it; though, as the island isn't known to the civilized world, there isn't much chance of that."

"So I should think," said I dryly. "You offer a charming conclusion to a pleasure trip, captain—the chance of being killed by misanthropic savages. But all you have told us is, I presume, the prologue to your story. What of the statue?"

"It was carved by Praxiteles for the temple at Cythera," said Flick quietly, "and thence was stolen by a youth called Hesperus. He fell in love with a priestess of the goddess, and fled south from the vengeance of the people, taking with him his beloved and the statue of Praxiteles. The trio of lovers and statue were wrecked on the island of Isk in the
Indian Seas. They must have chartered a fair-sized craft,” added Flick dryly, “for a life-sized marble statue can’t weigh less than six hundredweight.”

“But how did they get themselves and the statue to Isk?” demanded Harry.

“Faith, lads, that’s more than I can say. Geography wasn’t much of a science in those days. They might have sailed through the Pillars of Hercules, drifted south to the Cape, and by skirting it have gained the Indian Seas. Or they might have crossed the Isthmus of Suez, where the canal now is, and have picked up a ship in the Red Sea to continue their journey. Or, again, they might have sailed up the Nile, and struck off overland to the coast. These are the only possible routes they could have taken, so take which one you think most feasible. At any rate, however, they got out of the Mediterranean—their ship was wrecked on Isk.”

“And the statue?”

“Oh, they held tight by that in all their wanderings. The people of Isk, as you can see by Dosk, are a particularly ugly race of black dwarfs. Struck by the stature and beauty of the white strangers, they worshipped them as gods; so Hesperus and his wife, seeing no chance of returning to their own country, built a temple, enshrined the statue therein, and instructed the negroes in the cult of Venus. The
woman ministered to the goddess, and the man ruled the negroes as king."

"And now their descendants do likewise?"

"Yes and no," replied Flick ambiguously. "Hesperus made a law that when the king required a wife she was to be sought for in Greece."

"In Greece," we echoed, beginning to see daylight.

"Or rather I should say in Cythera," said Flick, correcting himself. "When a queen is wanted, a band of negroes repair there and persuade, or buy, or steal the most beautiful woman they can find. Then she is taken to the island and married to the king."

"But there must be plenty of possible brides on Isk."

"No. All the female children of the royal pair are made priestesses of Venus, and cannot be married."

"That is directly opposed to the cult of Aphrodite," said I hastily. "I hardly think the goddess would approve of such celibacy. But what of the male children?"

"Three are kept alive, so as to ensure the succession to the sovereignty. The rest are killed."

"What a bloodthirsty race," said Harry in disgust.

"Eh! why not?" replied Flick equably. "No doubt the Hellenic cult has been grafted on some debased African superstition. As a matter of fact,
it is so, for before the arrival of Hesperus, the negroes worshipped the Pole Star and a sacred serpent."

"Extremes meet," I murmured; "and no doubt the Greek blended the two religions into one. He gave them Venus, and retained star and snake."

"That's so, Sir Denis! But now, lads, you know as much as I do. What do you say to searching for Isk!"

"I cannot come, captain, being detained by Cupid; but Harry——"

"Oh, I'll go!" cried Harry in an excited tone. "I wouldn't be out of it for the crown of England. But," added he in a perplexed tone, "I don't clearly see the reason of your expedition."

"The reason!" said Flick blandly, "is to restore to civilization the statue of Aphrodite, carved by Praxiteles for the Temple of Cythera."
CHAPTER V.

HOW WE DECIDED TO TAKE SHIP.

"Oh, shall we idly stay at home,
Where neither storms nor dangers be;
Or spread our daring sails to roam,
The wide waste spaces of the sea.

"Come, let us venture on the flood,
And search for empire, fame, and gold;
For we be Englishmen, whose blood
Flowed in the veins of Vikings bold."

Thus craftily did Flick broach the subject, and dazzle Harry with chimerical visions; whereupon ensued endless arguments, for and against the expedition; the ladies and I being in opposition to the would-be adventurers. Harry, as I guessed he would, held by the captain and his extravagant fables; but Bertha and Aunt Chrissy, fearful for his safety—and with good reason, as Flick admitted—disapproved of the whole mad scheme. For my part, disbelieving in the truth of the story, I effected to treat it as a jest, and advised Harry to waste no time or money in attempting so foolish a quest.
How his common-sense could be gulled by fairy tales of unknown islands, and idolatrous islanders, and classical anachronisms, passed my comprehension. The very genesis of the scheme, *ex pede Hercule*, foretold its improbability.

At certain times, according to Dosk, an embassy of negroes repaired to Cythera, there to select a bride for their king; and as a new ruler had lately ascended the throne of Isk, it was certain that within a month or so he would send northward for a Greek wife. On this slender assumption, Flick proposed to sail for Cythera, and there await the arrival of the negroes; when, by following in their trail, he might hope to reach the unknown island. From this point all was to be left to the flux of circumstance.

His idea was to carry off the statue of the goddess, and sell it in Europe as the undoubted work of Praxiteles; he hoped therefrom to realize a sufficient sum to render comfortable his declining years. As a casuist, I did not hold with the idea, for I failed to see by what right Flick could justify the shady morality of the transaction. The statue was indubitably the property of the negroes, and he had no more right to contemplate such a raid than he would have had to steal the crown jewels. But this view of the question did not commend itself
to the mind of Flick, whose instincts were those of a fillibuster, and who held by the brutal rule that might is right. I did not argue with him on this point, as I did not believe in the existence of either island or statue; and so much I said openly, in reply to Flick's assertion that the story of Dosk was true.

"If it is true, sir," said I with some scorn, which I took no pains to conceal, "in what quarter of the globe is this island hidden? Do you think it at all probable that any land of considerable magnitude could escape the eagle eyes of our geographers? Here, captain, is the chart of the world—Mercator's projection. Show me, if you please, where, in your opinion, lies the island of Isk."

In nowise loath, Flick took up the gauntlet thus thrown down, and placed the tip of a gnarled forefinger on the blank space of ocean intermediate between Africa and Australia.

"I should place it hereabouts," said he triumphantly.

"Your reasons, captain?"

"I can only give you circumstantial evidence," said the captain, frowning. "See here, Sir Denis. I was coming up from the Auckland Islands, and made for the nor'ard, intending to fetch Zanzibar by Mozambique Channel. It is a roundabout way
of getting there, no doubt; but time was of no value to me, and I simply cruised where my fancy took me. Now then, lad, I picked up Dosk shortly after leaving St. Paul's Island. If he was driven south'ard by a storm, his home must be up here nigh Capricorn."

"If so the liners to Australia and New Zealand, skirting the Cape, would have long ago come across Isk; that is, if it is of any size."

"I don't know so much about that, sir," retorted Flick, losing his temper. "I only know that the island is there—in my opinion—and I'm going to look it up with Harry."

"I'm with you there, captain," chimed in Harry heartily. "We'll start next week."

"Indeed!" cried Bertha, who was seated at the window, "and what about my marriage? It takes place in three months."

Flick and Harry looked at one another in dismay. They had not thought of this obstacle. It was clearly impossible that Harry could leave England at such a juncture, without setting family affections and social observances at defiance; and Bertha saw that she had at length found a way of nipping the mad scheme of Flick in the bud.

"You can't think of leaving till then," said Bertha, following up her advantage.
"No; but afterwards," muttered Harry, consulting Flick by a look.

"Hey! What!" cried he, growing red. "Wait three months, and perhaps miss the negro embassy."

"True enough," said Harry gloomily. "You see how it is, Bertha."

"I see that it is my brother’s duty to remain here," replied Bertha haughtily, "and Captain Flick cannot say otherwise."

"True enough," said Flick, repeating Harry's words; "and yet I don’t want to miss my chance. If I stay, the negroes may be gone. If I go, I offend this young lady by taking her brother."

"Suppose I suggest an alternative," said I, hastening to avert a quarrel. "It is three months before I have the happiness of making Bertha my wife. Her trousseau is, I believe, all in order; and I can vouch that Harry and I have arranged all legal business touching the settlements. Consequently there is nothing to be done here for, say, twelve weeks. Why, then, should not the three of us—Flick, Harry, and myself—go to Cythera, to see if there is any truth in Dusk’s story."

"You mean as to the negro embassy?"

"Precisely. I don’t believe myself that there is the slightest chance of one arriving; but, to humour the captain and Harry, I am willing to go and see
At Cythera we will wait a reasonable time, and then return to England for my marriage."

"But if the negroes arrive, sir—hey?" demanded Flick grimly.

"They won't arrive. I believe the whole story to be a creation of Dosk's brain."

"By ——!" thundered the captain, bringing down his mighty fist on the table, "it is as true as gospel. The tattooing on Dosk's chest substantiates every detail."

"Humph! The story has been manufactured to fit the symbol."

"I see well, Sir Denis, that nothing will convince you but your eyes. So, if Miss Bertha will consent, I accept your offer. We will go to Cythera, and," added Flick savagely, "if the negroes are not there, I will myself return to England to be present at the marriage."

"Good. There is some chance of matters being settled, Bertha."

"I don't want you to go," she said in a low voice. "I cannot bear to be separated from you even for twelve weeks."

"Well, and why should you?" cried Harry gaily. "Come also."

"To Cythera?"

"Yes. Let us make up a party. Aunt Chrissy
can act as chaperon, and I am sure the *Carmen* is large enough for us all. Come, Bertha, you are fond of the sea, and are a good sailor."

"Harry, I cannot come. I have no time, and—— What do you say, Denis?"

"Oh, I should be delighted with a pre-matrimonial honeymoon," said I, laughing; "but I think you had better settle the matter with Aunt Chrissy. At all events, a trip to Cythera will reveal the truth or falsehood of Dosk's story."

By this compromise, it seemed as though the difference of opinion which existed amongst us would be removed. If no negro embassy came to Cythera, all Flick's fine schemes would be at an end, and Harry saved from going on a wild-goose chase; on the other hand, should Dosk's story prove true—— But I could not bring myself to credit the fantasy, and, providing we went to Greece, I quite looked forward to returning to England long before the lapse of three months. Flick thought otherwise. Which of the two was right will be shown hereafter.

It was no easy task to gain Aunt Chrissy's consent to embark for Cythera, as she was as rooted to Devon soil as any oak, and protested against a lady of her age being removed from congenial surroundings. Indeed, had it not been for Harry's persuasions, she would not have moved from the spot; but,
idolizing him as she did, it was impossible for her to refuse his earnest request; so, after much talk and many lamentations, she consented to this Mediterranean cruise. Bertha was easier to manage, as I pointed out to her that the only way to deal with the bee in Harry's bonnet was to let him see for himself, by the non-arrival of the negroes, that the island of Isk had no foundation in fact.

"If Harry goes alone with Flick," I urged, "notwithstanding the non-appearance of the chimerical negroes, he may be persuaded to remain waiting at Cythera, and will not return in time for our marriage."

"Harry would not break his word."

"I am well aware of that; but remember, Captain Flick is a monomaniac on the subject of this island, and may persuade him into staying at Cythera till it is too late. Whereas, if we all go, both of them will be forced to admit that they have been deceived, and thus they will return when we wish. I think, on the whole, we may as well indulge Harry in his freak."

"Then I agree," said Bertha reluctantly, "since it is the only chance of making him see sense. But I wish Captain Flick had never come near us."

"So do I, Bertha; but the spilt milk proverb comes in there."

So it was settled, and, with great rejoicings, Captain
Flick and his one supporter left Bucksford for Plymouth, there to overhaul the yacht for, what we expected would prove, a short and merry cruise in Greek waters. How long that cruise lasted, into what perilous seas we ventured, and with what dire dangers we were confronted, I am afraid to say. But that Providence had mercifully blinded our eyes to the future, I doubt whether one of us would have set foot on the deck of the Carmen.

Yet even then, when we began our voyage with fair promise, I had a premonition of coming danger. Some instinct warned me, despite my disbelief in the existence of Isk and its barbarians, that Fate was luring us into narrow straits, fatal to life and liberty; and it was in my mind, even at this eleventh hour, to protest against the coming of Bertha and Mrs. Barber. But, unwilling—vain fool that I was—to expose myself to ridicule, I held my peace; and in due course I escorted the ladies down to Plymouth.

Here we found that Harry’s sailing-master had broken his leg, and was unable to proceed on the voyage. In such dilemma, Flick had taken charge of the boat, and he was now in his element, in getting things ship-shape. Harry was duly grateful to Roaring Tom for thus relieving him of the responsibility, for he had heard many encomiums passed on the seamanship and cool courage of Flick.
The event proved his fitness for the post, as he was a born administrator, and so dexterous in his management of the men, that he got twice as much work out of them as another would have done. Burly, red-faced, and trumpet-voiced, he permeated the ship with an activity wonderful for so old a man; and thundered, and bullied, and put to his hand on all occasions: yet so kindly and large-hearted was he withal, that the crew soon adored Roaring Tom, and would have followed him to the death if needs be: as indeed they did before many months had come and gone.

The *Carmen* was as pretty a craft as ever danced on Channel waters; and after a trial trip or so—made before I arrived with my charges—she satisfied even the extravagant demands of her new skipper as to speed and sea-going powers. Rigged as a two-masted, fore-and-aft schooner, her sailing powers were excellent, though she relied more on steam than wind for travelling. Her powerful engines, of three hundred horse-power, could spin her twin screws to some purpose; and at racing speed she averaged eighteen knots with ease. I am thus particular in describing the yacht, as we hereafter owed our lives to her speed and endurance. But that comes later in the story.

What with seeing after guns, and ammunition, and
stores, and cordage, and canvas, and all the thousand and one details connected with the fitting out of a ship, Flick and Harry had their hands full. The latter submitted in all things to the former; and no article, even the most trivial, came on board without being passed by Flick. Years of experience had taught him what was requisite, and when the Carmen lifted her anchor, she was filled with all necessaries likely to be needed for a long and perilous voyage.

"Though I don't know why you should be so particular at this moment, Flick," said Harry carelessly; "for in any event, whether those niggers arrive or not, we shall return here for Bertha's marriage."

"It is as well to be prepared for emergencies," retorted Flick curtly.

He caught my eye as he answered Harry, and looked—I thought—oddly at me, with a remark on his lips, but restrained himself with a singular smile, and went forward. Then, in my ignorance, I set down his reticence to caution; but later on I saw reason to change my mind, and that at no distant date.

Meantime Bertha and her aunt, who had made themselves comfortable below, came on deck to see the last of England. It was a bright day, and the waters of Plymouth harbour sparkled in the sunlight.
Thence, in days of old, many ships had gone on strange voyages: the ships of Drake and Hawkins, and many another valiant English mariner; but I question if any had before her so eventful a journey. As the yacht, with spinning screws and fluttering flags, slid past the verdant heights of Mount Edgecombe, I again felt that dismal foreboding grip my heartstrings.

"Why so silent, Old Sobersides?" said Harry, coming to my side; "anything wrong?"

"Nothing, as yet. But I have a presentiment of coming troubles."

"What kind of troubles, you Jeremiah?"

"I can't say. But you mark my words, Harry," I added, pointing to the receding shores so verdant in the sunlight, "it will be many a weary day before we set eyes on old England again; if indeed we ever do."

It was a true speech, as I then thought and now know; but Harry laughed at my forebodings.
CHAPTER VI.

THE ISLES OF GREECE.

"Leave the grey isles of the North,
Girdled by the wintry wave,
From the haven venture forth,
To the tideless seas which lave
Those fair islands of the Greek,
There with daring hearts to seek
Doings worthy of the brave."

The details of our passage from Plymouth to Cythera call for no special mention; for I am unwilling to follow the bad example of many travellers, and chronicl, trivialities. To my mind, one voyage is much the same as another; and a lengthy description of uneventful days is apt to breed boredom in the most lenient of readers. Therefore I refrain from prolixity, and merely note those incidents which bear directly on the future; since it is as well to hold by the unities, and admit nothing irrelevant to the development of this veracious narrative.

I can only describe the weather by the hackneyed epithet of "glorious," for never were there such cloudless skies, such stormless seas, as fell to our
happy lot; even the Bay of Biscay failed to prove worthy of its evil name, and the yacht skimmed its heaving surface like a sea gull. The dome of turquoise arched overhead, the darker blue of the waters spread below, and our boat ensphered, as it were, in a cerulean globe, bore southward, unchecked by wind or wave.

We passed at noon through the Straits, and leaving Gibraltar frowning on the left, steamed into the haze of southern summers. By day the sun, like some necromancer, converted the blue Mediterranean into a sea of fire, and our boat was but a tiny spot of blackness on that glittering plain. With nightfall came coolness and purple twilight, and many constellations. At such quiet moments we sat on deck, conversing of many things in a desultory manner. With me Bertha, as befitted a future matron, talked of our Shropshire home; but on occasions we lent willing ears to the lawless conversation of Flick and Harry. Their talk was all of battle and danger, and peril by sea and land; and while we contemplated coming years of peace in England, they looked forward to exploration and adventure in the far lands which fringe civilization.

Thus, our thoughts being so diverse, we fell naturally into two parties; for Flick and Harry left myself and the ladies severely alone, and it was only
in the twilight, after dinner, that they gave us any of their company. Then Roaring Tom told stories of his somewhat shady past, which made Bertha exclaim and Aunt Chrissy shudder; although, personally speaking, I enjoyed the fierce excitement of these yarns, which mostly dealt with human nature in the rough, and sinful doings in lawless lands. Their narrator had been everywhere, he had seen and done everything, yet with the weight of sixty-five years on his broad back, he still relished hair-breadth escapes, and looked forward to dicing with Death—staking life for a moment of fierce living. The man was a veritable Ulysses, as crafty, as venturesome, as unfortunate as the Fate-tormented Greek.

Hitherto I have omitted all mention of Dosk; but, needless to say, he was on board, under the eye of our captain. On this ugly little creature lay the burden of the future, for Flick intended him to be an intermediary between himself and the negro embassy. As it was not likely that Dosk would further Flick's nefarious intentions regarding the statue, the real object of the expedition was concealed from him by our astute leader; and the islander was under the impression that Flick's sole object in seeking Isk was to restore him to his home. From this belief can be judged how uncivilized was the creature: he actually believed that men would do a kindness without
ulterior motives. He did not relish the voyage in the yacht; for the power which made her rush so swiftly through the water, careless of wind and tide, at once mystified and terrified him greatly. For the most part he crouched in Flick's cabin, and when he came on deck, curled himself up in a distant corner, to drone barbaric songs. These were of so melancholy a nature that I judged the men of Isk—if they existed—to be of anything but a joyous temperament. Sometimes the negro would grovel before Bertha, whom he evidently took to be the incarnation of his deity; but, as she rather objected to this excessive adoration, Dosk was allowed to remain below as much as he pleased. The creature was quite out of his element, and no one was so glad as he when we dropped anchor in the harbour of Cythera, and he once more felt firm earth below his feet.

All this time we had not slackened our speed, for Flick, anxious to make the most of the limited time accorded to him, kept the engines hard at work, and only when it was absolutely necessary did he stop them for a few hours. Then the yacht swirled along under a cloud of canvas, and took advantage of every breath of wind to lessen the distance to her goal. Roaring Tom handled her admirably, and, as if quickened to emulation like a sentient thing, the Carmen, both in sailing and
steaming, so acted up to her reputation as to delight us all, and Harry in particular. He was never weary of expatiating on her speed and beauty and manifold perfections, and I think he would have willingly prolonged the voyage indefinitely.

Skirting the African coast, we passed between Sicily and Tunis, caught a passing glimpse of Malta, arid and sun-scorched, and headed in a straight line for Cythera, at the southern tip of the Peloponnesia. Well do I remember the evening before we reached our destination, for it was then that Flick forced me to confess to a certain belief in his wild story. As a matter of fact, doubtful as I was of its truth, it was impossible to escape the contagious enthusiasm of the would-be adventurers; and, despite my matrimonial future, I found myself hoping that we should find the negro embassy at Cythera when we landed. Indeed, the prospect of adventure began to infect me with longings to join therein, and but that my future was settled for home-life and marriage vows, I verily believe that Flick would have whirled me off, against my better judgment, into a participation of his wild schemes. So one who disapproves of gambling may overlook a game, and end by taking a hand. The strongest nature is not proof against every temptation.

On this special evening whereof I make mention, we had come on deck after a late dinner, and were in
that happy mind which usually follows a good meal. The night was warm, but not unpleasantly so, and the yellow moon rode low on the waves to the westward. Stars scintillated in the purple sky and flashed in the mirror of the sea, and the yacht, ploughing through this begemmed plain, left behind a broad trail of white foam. Not a breath of wind stirred, and no sound could be heard but the creaking of the boat as she swung and swayed, and the steady throb of the engines as every stroke of the propellers urged her onward.

Bertha was seated by Aunt Chrissy, with a guitar, and every now and then she sang idle snatches of song to the old lady. Harry had gone below to worry Dosk into talking to him—for, with a view to prepare himself for Isk, he wished to learn the negro tongue; and I, with Flick, leaned over the taffrail, looking into the steel-hued water sweeping steadily past the black hull of the yacht. The whole scene was suggestive of luxurious ease and restful content, so that I was quite startled when Flick’s strong voice jarred the silence.

“T'o-morrow,” said he, looking upward, “we shall sight Cythera, and by noon be anchored in her harbour.”

“And then, captain?”

“Then we shall prove that Dosk’s story is true.”

“You still hold to that belief?” said I doubtfully.
"Would I have come all this way if I did not, lad? I am no fool, to be deceived easily. The negroes may not have arrived yet, but they will come before the month of the bride is out."

"The month of the bride?"

"Ay! So they call June. It is their time of marriage at Isk, and the embassy hither is always timed so as to arrive then."

"So that is why you were anxious to sail for Cythera at once?"

"It was. May would have been too early—July too late. The embassy will come and go in the month of the bride, which now begins. If the negroes come not within the next few weeks, then, Sir Denis, I will admit that you are right."

I did not immediately reply, for the tone of the man was so confident that my scepticism was shaken, and I felt a conviction that the tale, wild as it seemed to my sober sense, might be true after all. Flick, no mean reader of character, noticed my indecision, and as if to decide the wavering in his favour, placed an ornament in my hand.

"Look at that, sir. Hey! Tell me if it was wrought by barbarians."

It proved to be a boss or brooch of silver, exquisitely en chased with a representation of the same mystic symbol which Dosk bore on his dark skin—
woman, isle, star, snakes; all were wrought with a minuteness and delicacy which excited my wonder and admiration. None but a master of his craft could have produced so fine a piece of workmanship, which compared not unworthily with the ornate art of the Renaissance, and, as a further proof that the legend was true, beneath was inscribed in Greek letters the name "I Σ K."

"There, Sir Denis," said Flick, enjoying my unconcealed wonder, "what think you now of my story?"

"This goes a long way towards proving its truth, captain. Why did you not show it to me before?"

"You were so determined to make me out a superstitious old wife, that I could not bring myself to undeceive you. Harry was bent on coming without much temptation, else I might have clinched my arguments with that. Well, sir, do you believe now that there exists an unknown island in the Indian Seas, given over to the worship of Aphrodite?"

"I won't admit that the story is entirely true," I answered cautiously. "I agree with you that the island exists, and that perhaps the inhabitants worship a statue. But that it represents Aphrodite, or that it is the work of Praxiteles, I still doubt."

"But you see the name 'Isk' on that brooch is written in Greek letters."

"True enough! You may be right after all
Come, captain," I added, handing back the ornament, "don't press me too hardly. I have now some belief in your enterprise, but I am not prepared to give way on all points. That embassy, for instance."

"Well, sir! It will arrive this month at Cythera."

"If it does, Flick, I will recant my heresies, and wish you good fortune in your adventure."

"Do more than that, Sir Denis. Leave off persuading Harry to abandon the expedition."

"H'm! You ask a great deal. Not only I, but the ladies are opposed to his going."

"You can persuade them otherwise. I tell you I must have Harry," continued the captain determinedly. "Come, Sir Denis, you won't rob me of my right hand."

Before I could frame a reply, Bertha, who had been humming to herself, broke into full-voiced song I was glad of the interruption, as it gave me time to consider the most suitable answer to make on so weighty a subject. "Let us go sailing," sang Bertha lightly.

"Let us go sailing—sailing,
Beyond the harbour bar,
And seek those lands, whose golden strands,
Allure us from afar.
There we can live in dreamful ease,
Beneath the shade of stately trees,
And be at rest, in love's own nest,
Till gleams the morning star."
"There, you see," whispered Flick triumphantly, "take that as an omen that the lad should go. Better to wear out his life in adventure and peril, than rust at home."

"One moment," I replied, recognizing the song. "The oracle may speak otherwise in the next verse."

Bertha resumed her song, all unconscious of its fateful intents.

"Away with dreaming—dreaming!
And shape your life anew,
To save our kin, from death and sin,
We need good men and true.
In London town, in street and den,
To aid our starving Englishmen,
And save our poor, from danger sure,
There's work enow to do."

"Now then, captain; is it not clearly Harry's duty to stay at home and devote his money and life to helping his fellow countrymen?"

"Bah!" growled Flick, "let the parsons do that. A fine lad like Harry, with the instincts of a pioneer, would be thrown away on such work. There are plenty to slum, and save, and preach, and feed poor people. But there are few of Harry's sort, and we need them every one to widen our empire. Are you one of the 'Little England' lot, sir?"
This I denied, whereupon Flick contradicted me, and then ensued a lively argument, in which I was worsted. At least, it ended in my promising to place no bar in Harry's way if he wished to sail for Isk; and I also promised, rashly enough, to bring the ladies round to the same way of thinking.
CHAPTER VII.

A RUINED SHRINE.

"The sanc is empty, the altar bare,
  Torn is the veil from the sacred shrine:
The priests have fled in their wild despair,
  And those who worshipped, forsaken pine;
They burn no incense, they spill no wine,
  Nor wait the terror of Jovian nods;
Strong were the beings they deemed divine,
  But Time is stronger than all the gods."

HAVING thus reached the first stage of our journey, I found myself so moved with that wild story of Isk, that, but for my ties to home and Bertha, I could have attached myself to the expedition. But the better spirit prevailed, and I put such thoughts from me, seeing plainly that it was my duty to wed Bertha, and return to England. Yet, while the lust for travel and adventure was on me, I judged, by my own feelings, that it would be worse than useless to turn Harry from his purpose; for if I, bound by the laws of honour, were minded to sail in Flick's train, how could I hope to hold Harry, who had no such scruples to stay his intention. Therefore I spoke
openly to him, and bade him sail south if he wished, only requiring that he would return for a month to Devon, there to be present at the marriage of his sister with myself. To this, after some discussion with Flick, he readily consented; and so, saving that duty, he was irrevocably bound to aid in the enterprise. After which adjustment of plans, we went ashore at Cythera, and sought for information touching the negro embassy.

It is not my purpose to describe this island; for, lying as it does within the bounds of civilization, and being much frequented by tourists, it is known to many; moreover, there are other places and events which must be set forth at greater length. Therefore I will only say, that this isle of Venus seemed to me a fair land, but one that could be made fairer, were the inhabitants only of an industrious nature. But indeed they were indolent creatures, almost barbarians—alas, that I should so have to describe Greeks!—and other than trading and cultivating and building sufficient for their wants, they had no thought to make the isle what it should have been, a fruitful and blooming garden.

In the miserable village which lay adjacent to the harbour, there was no shelter fit to live in, so we stayed on board the Carmen, which was anchored some little distance off the shore. We made daily
excursions into the town—so called—and surrounding neighbourhood, less to view the beauties of the scenery, though well worth the seeing, than to question the islanders concerning the coming of the negroes. Then did I learn the truth of Dosk's story.

An old man, who had dwelt in Cythera all his days, informed us, after much questioning, that forty years before, a body of black men had come to the island in a scarlet-painted ship. By offerings of jewels and much gold, they induced a beautiful woman to set foot on their vessel, and then hoisting sail, they carried her off like a second Helen. Since that time no sign had been seen of scarlet ship or negroes, nor had the woman been heard of again. This visit took place when our informant was a lad; and then he had been told by his grandfather that just such another ship and crew had entered the harbour many years before. By dint of further inquiries we learnt that the negroes made their appearance at uncertain intervals. Sometimes they would come twice in ten years, then remain absent for thrice that time, and in this instance they had not been heard of for forty years. Their object was always to secure the fairest woman in the island, and hitherto they had succeeded in their mission. These stories, as may be guessed, convinced me that Dosk had spoken the truth.
 Needless to say, Flick and Harry were delighted by this confirmation of the negro's tale; and, now that it was mid June, they looked forward daily to the arrival of the scarlet ship and its black crew. Should it arrive, Flick proposed to land four of us at Gibraltar, and then follow the barbaric bark southward to its destination. When he found the island, he was to return to Mauritius, where Harry, after our marriage, would meet him, and together they could make for Isk. How all these fine plans were overturned by circumstance remains to be told.

Both Bertha and Aunt Chrissy were quite resigned to Harry's departure, as they felt how hopeless it was to restrain his ardour. Moreover, in a good boat, with a staunch crew, and a sufficiency of weapons, they trusted he would emerge scathless from the adventure. Still, oppressed by premonitions, I had my doubts as to whether this would be so; but, bound by my promise to Flick, I abstained from remark. In a word, all went well, and there appeared to be no bar to the success of the enterprise.

While waiting the arrival of the negroes, we made excursions into the interior of the island, and saw the majestic relics of Hellenic civilization. Even Aunt Chrissy put aside her eternal knitting, and interested herself in the wealth of antique ruins scattered over
hill and plain; while Bertha became an authority on archaeology. I may here mention that her beauty attracted great attention amongst the islanders, themselves a handsome race; and it was just as well that she was so ignorant of the language as to miss the outspoken and coarsely worded compliments of which she was the recipient. I, better versed in the Greek tongue, had much difficulty in withholding myself from thrashing these insolent rascals; but I kept my temper, for a brawl would have procured us the ill-will of the natives, and might have proved detrimental to the success of Flick's expedition.

One of our favourite resorts was a ruined temple of Aphrodite, which stood in the centre of a little plain, covered with olives and carob trees. On all sides it was shut in by low hills, and entrance was afforded by a narrow defile which led upward from the village, itself bordering the harbour wherein lay our ship. Harry declared that this was the veritable temple whence Hesperus had thieved the statue; but he had no authority for this wild statement other than his own imagination. Still, he may have been right after all, for the statue of Praxiteles must have stood somewhere; and why not in this fane, which, judging by its ruins, appeared to have been of considerable splendour and importance? But, statue or no, here Aphrodite was worshipped in the palmy days of
Greece, and across the low-lying land, by the slow-flowing stream, came the white-clad votaries of the goddess.

A fairer scene I never beheld. Overhead the blue sky, around the circle of green hills, and underfoot aromatic herbs, which when crushed exhaled delightful perfumes. The temple itself, of white marble, amber-hued by sun and time, stood a stone's throw from a reedy stream, and was approached by massive ranges of steps, flanking a broad terrace. On this, elevated thereby above the plain, arose the building itself, with massive fluted columns, ranged in a majestic row; but many were broken, and the temple, completely unroofed, lay bare to wind and rain.

The court was overgrown with rank grass, interspersed with bright flowers, and strewn with the fragments of pillars, altars, and mutilated statues. The western wall had fallen down, but the other three still lifted their pillared fronts to the sky; and at the further end still stood the carven altar before the empty niche which had of yore held the statue of the goddess. Nature had done her best to hide the work of Time and iconoclasts, by covering the ruins with grasses and flowers and stunted shrubs; yet the scene was mournful in its desolation. Under the blue firmament, amid the delights of that flowering plain, still stood the temple of the Cytherean goddess;
but her shrine was empty of its divinity, her altars smokeless, and we barbarians from the grey isle of the West, desecrated the sacred precincts with idle talk and laughter.

Bertha was of the same mind as myself in this, and as we sat eating and drinking amid the ruins, she looked round with a melancholy smile.

"It seems barbarous," said she in a low voice, "to profane the sanctity of this place."

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed Harry, on whose matter-of-fact nature such a speech was thrown away. "The sanctity of the place has evaporated in thousands of years. We do not believe in god or goddess, so we can have no compunction in making ourselves comfortable here."

"I wonder if you will express yourself so openly at Isk?" observed Flick dryly.

"Not much, captain. There the religion of Greece is still a power, and I have no wish to figure as a victim."

"You need have no fear of that, Harry," said I, looking up. "Aphrodite does not desire human sacrifices."

"Maybe not," observed the captain leisurely, "but the Pole Star does."

"The Pole Star?"

"Ay, lad. The negroes offer a man to the Pole
Star once a year, and very likely the sacred snake receives the same attention."

"Oh, Harry, I wish you were not going!" sighed poor Aunt Chrissy.

"And what about me, Christina?"

"It is you who are leading Harry astray, Thomas," she answered reproachfully; "but indeed, you might make better use of your time than in seeking such barbaric places. Why cannot you stay in England?"

"I have no settled income, ma'am," responded the captain gravely. "Wait till I bring back the statue of Praxiteles and sell it for a large sum. Then I'll stay at home, and go to church, and discuss politics with the rustiest of your provincial cabbages."

"What is Dosk doing at the altar?" cried Bertha, before a reply could be made. "See, I believe he recognizes the symbols of Venus, and is worshipping."

I had remarked this before; for while we were speaking Dosk had crept up to the stone, and traced with his finger the myrtles, doves, nymphs, and heifers carved thereon. Some such altar must have existed in his home, for stirred to a dim memory by the familiar imagery, he flung himself on his face, and in guttural tones fraught that wild melody which I had first heard by the Raleigh Pool. There was something pathetic in the adoration of this solitary negro. The shrine was empty, the altar
bare, the goddess fled; yet here at least she had one faithful worshipper; alas, no bright Greek, but a dusky savage of a people other than those who had reared her fane.

That afternoon we explored the ruins, and found therein many things to excite our curiosity and gratify our sense of beauty. We ventured into the dark little chambers of the priests, descended winding staircases, trod the flagged way along which the processions were wont to pass with dance and song; and read mutilated inscriptions to the foam-born goddess. Up the white walls clambered dark green ivy, lush grasses overgrew the fallen columns, and a jungle of shrub and bush and rank vegetation filled the wide courtyard. But aloft some mighty pillars still reared themselves, and bore on their summits carven processions of maid and youth, with lute and cymbals, and rose-wreathed oxen. Against the fast-darkening sky they rose in solemn beauty, and the place was beginning to fill with shadows, when, lo! a miracle.

Through the doorless entrance streamed the rays of the setting sun, and flooded the temple with gold. It was to my mind—rendered poetical by the spell of the place—as though Apollo in his anger was darting his arrows at the desecrators of that antique fane. Bertha, who was standing by the altar, seized by a
spirit of frolic, stepped lightly thereon, thence into the niche, wherein the statue of the goddess had been in former days.

"Hail, Queen Venus!" cried Harry, entering into the spirit of the jest; but I, impressed by her beauty, heightened at that moment by the sunlight, forebore to speak.

Some loose locks of her golden hair streamed down her breast, and in her long white dress, which nearly resembled the Greek chiton, with bared head and folded hands, she did indeed look beautiful. The glory of the sun etherealized her into something more than mortal, and a worshipper of Aphrodite might well think this English girl was the goddess herself in divine splendour.

A cry from Dosk made us turn our heads. In at the doorway hustled a crowd of black dwarfs, who, wide-eyed and amazed, beheld the appearance—as they doubtless thought, of the incarnate Venus.

"By gum!" roared Flick, darting towards the door, "the negro embassy."

Ere he could cross the court, they had vanished as by magic, and we emerged on to the terrace to see them swiftly speeding in disorder across the plain.
CHAPTER VIII.

THE SCARLET SHIP.

"Strangely in the sunrise gleaming
Scarlet hull on waters blue,
Black the sails, and black the crew
'Tis a bark of evil seeming;
Fashioned by some grim magician
Sure it is a ship of doom,
Filled with wretched beings, whom
Fate hath sentenced to perdition."

It was quite dark when we returned to the yacht, for, tempted by the coolness of the evening, we had lingered till late in the ruined temple. Notwithstanding that there was no danger to be apprehended from the negroes, we all felt a sense of relief at finding ourselves again on board. Moreover, the sky was heavy with clouds, and there was every indication of a stormy night; so it was just as well that we had not delayed our return. In the thick darkness it was impossible to catch a glimpse of the ship which had brought the islanders, though Jenner, our mate, assured us that she lay but a short distance away, on the other side of the anchorage. He gave
a graphic description of the arrival, which I translate out of his vernacular into current English.

"I was standing by the wheel, sirs," said Jenner, addressing us generally, "when I saw something black notched in the eye of the sun, then half under water. Every now and again there was a flash and a glint of red; so I got out my glass to see if it was the sea-serpent come to pay us a visit. Then I guessed it might be the nigger boat we expected, and, as she drew near, sure enough it was. The queerest craft I ever set eyes on, gentlemen, and I've been round the world more than once. She was painted a brilliant crimson, and had black sails, black oars, and a grinning snake figure-head, like the pictures of those ancient Northern boats. Out of the sunset she came, gentlemen, her oars moving like the legs of a centipede, and those who worked them singing a song as made us shiver. It was like the keening of the mourners at an Irish wake. Well, captain and ladies and gentlemen," continued the mate, flattered by the attention given to his tale, "she passed us rowing hard for the shore, and we heard the niggers shout with surprise when they saw our boat. At first I thought they were going to beach her, but in place of doing so, they backed water, and let go their anchors over yonder. When they shipped oars and furled sails, a boat full
of them went off to the shore, and made for the town. Just before you returned, sirs, they all came running back, and a-boarded their Noah's ark. You can hear them singing at this minute. Hark!"

And true enough, as he spoke, a faint murmur of music moaned across the waters. So thin, so melancholy, so low breathed; it was like the sigh of the wind in an Eolian harp, as fitful, as wandering, as wild. There was something menacing in its long-drawn harmonies.

"It's a rum start, sirs," said Jenner reflectively. "I don't know when I saw such a queer lot—or so outlandish a craft."

That night the windows of heaven were opened, and the rain descended in sheets from a sky surcharged with labouring clouds. Under the lash of falling torrents, the usually calm waters of the harbour boiled like a witches' cauldron; the wind swept shoreward in fierce gusts; the yacht strained at her cables, till we thought they would part, and let us drift helplessly on to the rocky shore. Despite the turmoil, Bertha and Aunt Chrissy, worn out with the excitement of the day, had retired to rest; but the three of us, well wrapped up in oilskins, proceeded on deck, to catch, if possible, a glimpse of the negro boat. In the intense gloom, strain our eyes as we might, it was impossible to see a yard; but
momentarily, when a livid zigzag of lightning cut
the sky, the scarlet ship started out of the darkness,
like an evil phantom. Sometimes, during the fitful
lulls, we caught sounds of distant singing, and had
no doubt that the negroes were invoking the goddess
to save them from disaster.

To ease the strain on the cables, Flick had the
screws going, but even then, so strongly rushed the
wind from the sea, that we were apprehensive of
danger. If a modern boat like the Carmen found it
difficult to weather the tempest, how could the antique
craft described by Jenner hope to last through the
night? Some such thought occurred to Harry, and
he gave it utterance.

"I wouldn't be surprised if those niggers were
wrecked," he bawled, clinging to the weather rigging;
"if we can't stand it, how can they?"

"Oh, the devil looks after his own," roared Flick,
peering through the gloom; "besides, they are
more sheltered than we are. Well, Jenner, what
is it?"

"Dok's overboard, sir," replied the mate hurriedly.

"An accident?" I cried, thinking the creature had
been whirled off in the grip of the wind.

"No, Sir Denis. He went over of his own accord,
and struck out for the niggers' ship. I guess he wants
to see his countrymen," concluded Jenner calmly,
with the air of a man to whom the matter was of no interest.

"Now what the deuce does that mean?" asked Harry in a perplexed tone.

"The ungrateful little reptile has deserted me," growled Flick savagely, "just when I wanted him so particularly. But it's pretty certain he'll be drowned in that sea," he added grimly, pointing to the seething waters.

"Not he, captain. Those coast niggers swim like sharks. Well, we've lost him, anyhow, and must go on our own hook. At all events he can't do us any harm, as he is ignorant of our plans."

No doubt this was the most philosophical way to look at the matter, but the desertion of Dosc was decidedly vexatious. Flick had intended to use him as an intermediary between himself and the islanders, but his flight had put an end to such intentions. Meantime the storm gave us all sufficient to do, and so wearied out was I by the events of the last twenty-four hours, that, when the weather grew calmer towards dawn, I was thankful to retire to my berth for a little rest. Flick and Harry, men of iron as they were, remained on deck all night, and made their appearance at breakfast, none the worse for their vigil.

After a hurried meal—for we were too much
excited by the arrival of the negroes to eat leisurely—we passed the morning in examining their craft, and remarking on the oddity of her appearance. She rolled a quarter of a mile away, a red hull on blue water, and, from her antique shape and vivid colouring, afforded us sufficient speculation as to the manners and customs of those who built her. Contrary to our expectations, she had in no way suffered from the tempest.

Long and narrow, and low in the water, she was not unlike a Viking ship, and her dragon-head at the prow was drawn menacingly back as if about to strike, with fierce eyes and lolling tongue. Of a bright crimson hue from stem to stern, her squat masts bore broad black sails, now awkwardly furled to the scarlet cross-sticks. The double row of holes piercing her sides showed that she possessed two banks of oars, and, as we judged therefrom, she could move at a good speed against wind and tide. From her high poop a black rudder swung with the roll of the sea, and the whole length of the ship was covered by a tent of black cloth, under which, I presume, the crew lived and slept. Her hull was adorned with barbaric signs in gold; but the oddest part of such decoration was undoubtedly a huge eye painted on the prow, as though the ship were a sentient thing and needed it to guide her over seas. A greater contrast than
that which existed between this queer craft and our yacht can scarcely be imagined: the one a triumph of modern engineering skill—graceful, powerful, swift; the other a relic of barbarism, such as our rude ancestors launched to skirt Mediterranean coasts. It was the Alpha and Omega of ship-building.

"That eye has seen some queer sights, I guess," said Roaring Tom in a meditative fashion. "I never saw so useless a piece of shipwright's work in my life. Why, she'd go on her beam-ends in the first gale of wind."

"Yet she weathered last night's storm, captain," said I dryly; "and do not forget that such ships as you see there sowed the first seeds of civilization. In them the Phœnicians traded beyond the Straits, and in them the men of Norway sailed to conquer Britain. Do not despise the small beginnings of great things, Flick."

"I wonder how so odd-looking a ship managed to sail the Mediterranean without observation," said Bertha, who was much interested in this barbaric spectacle.

"That's more than I can tell you, my dear. In this age of newspaper gossip I should have thought she would have attracted as much attention as the sea serpent."
“How do you think she came, captain?” asked Harry; “round the Cape and through the Straits, or up the Canal?”

“The first, lad, the first. A vessel of that build would have been questioned in the Canal; and, as I don’t think those niggers wish to draw attention to themselves, I expect they sneaked past Gibraltar under cover of darkness.”

“Unless,” I interjected meaningly, “they know of a third way into the Mediterranean.”

“There’s no third way, as ever I heard of,” retorted Flick disdainfully. “Suez and Gibraltar Straits are the only means of getting in or out. This craft must have come by one way or the other.”

“But how did Hesperus manage to sail a boat of that fashion down the Atlantic?” chimed in Bertha. “You say yourself, captain, she would go under in a storm.”

“He went by Suez, perhaps,” said Aunt Chrissy, with naïve ignorance.

“Impossible! There was no Canal in those days,” said I. “It is my opinion that he sailed up the Nile, and struck off eastward to the coast.”

“Hallo!” sung out Harry, before Flick could continue the argument, “here is our lost sheep returning.”

“Dosk!”
"There he is. I can spot his black head bobbing up and down."

The sun rays, as with the touch of Midas in the old myth, had converted the water into a sheet of dazzling gold, and, with the aid of our glasses, we could plainly descry the negro making for the yacht. Jenner came up at this minute, and saluted Flick with a respectful grin.

"I don't think those niggers wanted Dosk, sir," said he. "I had my glass on their ship, and saw them throw spears at him as he jumped overboard."

"He didn't get the reception he expected," said Flick grimly. "Serve the ungrateful little beggar right. I have a good mind to rope-end him."

"Oh, Thomas, you wouldn't be so cruel!"

"Why not, Christina? 'Spare the rod and spoil the child.' That's good Scripture, isn't it?"

"But see what excuse Dosk can make before punishing him," pleaded Bertha, who was more tender-hearted than people thought.

"Oh, he'll be full of excuses and lies, no doubt, my dear. But I'll see what he has learned of his countrymen's plans, and let him off this time. Here he is. Hallo, Jenner, throw a rope to the monkey."

The little negro crept on deck, with the salt water dripping from his clothes, and looked uglier and more repulsive than ever. With an abject howl, he
crawled to the feet of Flick, who was so angry with him that, but for the restraining presence of the ladies, he would have kicked him for his escapade. As it was, he saluted him with a torrent of abuse in the negro tongue, and then listened grimly to the explanation of the runaway. Harry, benefiting by his lessons, understood somewhat of the conversation; but it was quite unintelligible to me, and I waited impatiently for an interpretation. At length Flick dismissed the negro, who crawled away to his quarters like a whipped dog, and turned to explain.

"He has only escaped with his life, as his countrymen, thinking he might betray the whereabouts of their mysterious island, wished to kill him. Fortunately, he got wind of their amiable intention, and jumped overboard."

"Why did he leave us?"

"Wanted to go back in the red ship to Isk. But now that he knows his life is not safe with those black monkeys, he is content to remain with us."

"No doubt," said I dryly; "but when you land him at Isk, his life won't be worth a quarter of an hour's purchase. The very fact of his returning with us will convince his countrymen that he is a traitor."

"That's his look-out, Sir Denis," replied Flick so coolly. "I don't care what becomes of him long as he serves my turn."
"Thomas!"

"Captain Flick!"

"Well, well, ladies," resumed the captain impatiently, "as you are so tender-hearted, I'll do my best to save him from the clutches of his friends. But at Isk I can't protect him. Egad!" added Flick grimly, "we'll have enough to do to protect ourselves."

So Dosl was restored to favour, and henceforth kept close at our heels when on shore, seemingly grateful to be saved from his bloodthirsty countrymen. But I disliked the creature. There was a cunning look in his eyes which augured ill for those who were foolish enough to trust him; and notwithstanding his apparent gratitude, I for one was quite prepared to find him of a treacherous nature. The sequel to our stay at Cythera proved that I was not altogether wrong.
CHAPTER IX.

LETHE.

"And those who rashly ventured on that isle,
Did breathe such perfumes, strange and magical,
As thieved their memories from them; and enthralled
Themselves in such wise, that they straight forgot
Home, friends, and kin, all the familiar past."

All that week the scarlet ship lay in the harbour, silent and menacing; for her black crew, save for their singing, made no noise, and, passing most of their time under the awning, rarely showed themselves or looked in our direction. She might have been a ship of the dead for all the stir there was aboard; and this absence of life inspired Aunt Chrissy with distrust and dislike.

"I don't like their silence," said she, alluding to the negroes. "Depend upon it, Denis, they are plotting against us."

"Plotting against us?" I echoed in surprise. "For what reason? We have nothing they can possibly desire, save Dosk; and I don't suppose they'll board our ship to take him prisoner."
"Oh, I don't know," replied Mrs. Barber ambiguously; "but I distrust their looks, and I have a presentiment that they will yet bring us trouble."

"Nonsense! I had a presentiment, also, and it came to naught."

"Well, you mark my words, Denis. This wretched cruise will not end well. If Thomas would only take my advice, he would leave those negroes alone, and return to England before it is too late."

After the failure of my own premonition, I could afford to laugh at Aunt Chrissy and her warnings; but in the end her feminine instinct was more than justified, and often in days to come did I wish we had taken her advice. But her warnings, like those of Cassandra, were not believed, and we continued to watch that silent ship, and attempted to make friends with her crew. This last proved impossible of achievement, for though Flick once or twice addressed them, when we were on shore, they gave no sign in return, save to scowl at his knowledge of their tongue, and move swiftly away at our approach. They were as misanthropical as they were ugly.

Dosk was a fair specimen of the race, but many of his countrymen were even more ill-favoured than he. A more repulsive set of dwarfs—for all were under five feet, and some barely three—I never beheld.
Frizzled mops of hair increased the size of their already large heads, and the peculiarly vivid red of their thick lips looked most forbidding against their coal-black skins. Yet their grotesque faces inspired pity rather than mirth, for each countenance was stamped with an expression of profound melancholy. The generally accepted idea of the merry negro character was contradicted in this instance; for these odd creatures were savage, silent, sombre; they neither laughed nor chatted amongst themselves, but moved in a stealthy fashion, with bent heads, like hounds nosing a trail. An air of deadly menace pervaded scarlet ship and sooty crew.

They decked their misshapen frames in red tunics reaching to the knee, and also wore voluminous black cloaks and crimson turbans. On every bare breast appeared the symbolic tattooing of woman, isle, and star. Silver bracelets and anklets adorned arms and legs, and some, higher in rank, had gold chains round their necks. This strange garb added to their sinister appearance, and I remarked on it to Flick, while we were one morning waiting our boat on the beach. Dosk was crouching at Harry's feet a little distance away, and we all four were looking at the negroes scattered along the sands.

"Should you reach Isk," said I, viewing these black animals with repugnance, "I do not envy you
a lengthy sojourn amongst these creatures. They are, I am certain, a horrible and cruel race."

"No doubt, lad. But with those bows and arrows and spears they can't do much against our guns and revolvers."

"They may have other means of defence of which we are ignorant. Who knows what their barbarism may have produced?"

"Pish! Don't talk to me, sir," growled Roaring Tom; "it has produced nothing but what you see. With our yacht, and crew, and weapons, there will be no danger at Isk."

"I hope there will be some fighting, at all events," cried Harry, who approached at the moment; "but I'm pretty sure on that score. These islanders won't let their Venus be taken away without a struggle."

"They have a right to defend their own," said I dryly. "I don't believe in your 'might is right' theory, Flick."

The captain winced at this, as he knew my opinion concerning the motive of his expedition. However, he argued the point, as usual.

"It isn't their own, Sir Denis. They stole the statue from Cythera, so why shouldn't I steal it from them? Tit for tat, my lad. It will only be a case of the biter bit."

"I hope not in your case, captain. If—-"
Flick whipped out his revolver, and, followed by Harry and myself, made for the negroes. Page 105.
We were interrupted by a guttural cry from Dosk, and turned to see the poor creature struggling with four of his countrymen. Fortunately, our boat was within hail, and shouting to Jenner to row quicker, Flick whipped out his revolver, and, followed by Harry and myself, made for the negroes. Dosk uttered dismal squawks, which at any other time would have made us laugh; but the peril was too imminent for such mirth, for the negroes faced us boldly, with uplifted spears. They were apparently unacquainted with firearms, for they threw themselves fearlessly against the muzzles of our revolvers, and jabbered fiercely in their execrable tongue. Their attention being directed to us for the moment, Dosk wriggled himself free, and raced for the approaching boat. The islanders made as to follow, when we, wishing to merely frighten them, fired over their heads; whereat they set up a terrific cry, and scattered back to their companions. Then we hoisted the cause of the trouble into the boat, and rowed hastily back to the yacht.

"Oh," said Flick savagely, "they show their teeth, do they? Well, I guess they had better keep out of range of this six-shooter."

As for Dosk, he hid himself below, and could not be induced to leave his berth till the evening. Then I found him in the saloon, standing on a chair, and
fiddling with the swing-lamp. But before relating this episode I must indicate the position of those on board, so that the reader may fully understand the event of that evening.

We usually dined at eight, and lingered at the table till past nine o’clock; while at the same time the crew, as the yacht was anchored, retired to their berths, where some turned in, and others gossiped together. Thus, with the exception of the look-out man, all on board were concentrated in two places—we in the saloon, the sailors in the forecastle. Only when it was too late, did I see how this arrangement facilitated the schemes of the negroes; but at that time we had not the slightest notion that they intended us harm, or would dare to meddle with the Carmen.

As before mentioned, I found Dosk busy with the lamp; but on catching sight of me entering the saloon, he slipped down with a growl, and, before I could stay him, he darted through the doorway, and up the companion. Rather disquieted by this peculiar conduct, I jumped up on the chair to examine the lamp in my turn, and, if possible, to ascertain the reason of Dosk’s actions. In this position I was found by Harry, who had just finished dressing for dinner.

“Hallo, Denis!” cried he, opening his eyes, “why
are you messing about with that lamp? Call the steward."

"Dorsk has been fiddling with it," said I, stepping down after a fruitless inspection, "and I wanted to see what he had been up to."

"Perhaps he has stored a lump of dynamite in the reservoir," replied Harry jestingly. "Pooh! nonsense! I dare say he was only trying to find out where the light came from."

As my nature is, I regret to say, incurably suspicious, this explanation, though perfectly legitimate, failed to satisfy me; and I was about to take exception to Harry's jesting when the ladies entered, followed by Flick. Not wishing to frighten them, for the mere mention of negroes alarmed Aunt Chrissy, I said nothing about Dorsk's visit; but Harry, in his usual blundering way, blurted it out.

"H'm, queer smell," said Flick, taking his seat, "a sickly sort of odour."

"Dorsk has been here, and no doubt he left the odour behind him," said Harry carelessly.

"I wish you would keep that creature away from the saloon," interposed Aunt Chrissy uneasily. "I don't like those black people."

"But Dorsk is harmless enough, aunty," murmured Bertha, whom nothing alarmed.

"I don't believe it," said the old lady energetically.
"You mark my word, he's as dangerous as the rest of them."

I confess that I agreed with Aunt Chrissy; for the sullen look and savage snarl of the negro when I disturbed him showed anything but an amiable spirit. If his countrymen were of the same savage temperament—as was probably the case—I did not envy the reception which awaited Flick and Harry at that distant isle.

During dinner we talked of the attempted capture of Dosk, and congratulated ourselves that we had carried our revolvers ashore. The adventure was sufficiently remarkable for one day, but Aunt Chrissy, who had a vein of superstition, warned us that we might expect further trouble almost immediately.

"I have always observed," said she, with the mien of a sibyl, "that one misfortune follows another, and that two similar events occur almost together. You were attacked by the negroes this morning, Harry; depend upon it they will attack you again before twenty-four hours are over."

"I'm sure I wish they would," yawned Harry, blinking his eyes. "Anything to render me less sleepy."

At this Bertha said that she also felt drowsy, and I remarked that I was more inclined for bed than table; while an interpolation by Flick ascribed this
general lethargy to the closeness of the atmosphere. In fact, the atmosphere of the saloon was heavy and drowsy, as though it were the cave of Morpheus.

"Bless me, Christina, wake up!" cried Flick, rapping the table; "you are going to sleep also. What is the matter with you all? Confound it, I'm yawning myself! Here, one of you fellows, open the ports and let a breath of fresh air into the place."

A steward ran to obey the order, but in doing so stumbled against the divan and fell full length thereon. To my astonishment he did not attempt to rise, and I looked at Harry to see what he thought of the man's action. Harry was leaning his head on his arms, his arms on the table; Aunt Chrissy was fast asleep with her head thrown back, and Bertha was hanging insensible over the side of her chair. Only Flick and I were awake, and we rose from our seats with a suspicion that there was some devilry at work.

"The lamp! the lamp!" gasped Flick, his face turning grey before my eyes. "What the——"

Then he fell also senseless on the floor near the recumbent form of the steward. Round the lamp hovered a thick golden haze, in the midst of which burnt the light indistinctly, and as I looked up, for I had been unable to keep my legs by reason
of vertigo, this yellow cloud seemed to roll downward. A burning breath of poisonous air clutched me by the throat and made me gasp for air. Fortunately I had not succumbed so easily as the others, owing to the position of my seat near the open door. Towards this I crawled, unable to think, almost unable to move, while the lamp continued to send forth wave after wave of death-laden air.

With that strength of despair which comes at supreme moments I fought against that deadly atmosphere, and crawled up the companion. How I did so remains a mystery to me to this day, for I have no recollection of the painful climb. One moment I seemed to be enveloped in the perfumed fog, the next gasping for breath under the stars. Only a moment of sensibility was vouchsafed me, but in that moment, which seemed to last an hour, I heard the cry of the look-out man, and saw the negro dwarfs swarming on deck, silent and triumphant. Then I knew no more.
CHAPTER X.

SOUTHWARD HO!

"Below the girdle of the world
Drop down, no danger fearing
Betwixt the Horn, and Capricorn,
Let us go buccaneering;
For there the ocean's ample breast
Holds lands unknown to story,
Where we may chance on wild romance,
And gain both gold and glory."

It is impossible to give any detailed account of that distracted time, for events so quickly followed one another, that I retain but a confused recollection of what actually took place. My most vivid memory, is, that all who succumbed to that deadly asphyxia, remained unconscious for four-and-twenty hours. Not until the following evening did we recover our senses; and then we made two terrible discoveries—Bertha was missing; the scarlet ship was gone.

It needed little thought to explain what had occurred. Attracted by the beauty of Bertha, the
islanders had determined to secure her for their king; and, aided by the treacherous Dosk, whose fear of them was feigned, they had succeeded in accomplishing their object. Dosk had been entrusted with an unknown liquid, which when blended with the oil of the lamps, gave forth a poisonous perfume of a lethargic nature. The lights in saloon and forecastle had been impregnated with the drug by that abominable negro, and, with the exception of the look-out man, all gathered in those two places had been rendered unconscious. Then, in response to his signal, the islanders had boarded the yacht, and carried off the unconscious Bertha; now they were sailing for Isk with their prize.

At first Flick and Harry refused to believe that the asphyxia was produced by the impregnated oil; but I related to them the stories of medieval tyrants who had used the same means to accomplish their aims. The Borgias, in particular, made use of the drug; a few drops of which, when sprinkled on a flambeau or mingled with the oil of a lamp, amply sufficed to suffocate a room full of people. That used by the negroes only differed from the medieval drug in the result; for the latter caused death, while the former only induced an unnatural and prolonged sleep. Save that we all had headaches and were violently sick, no ill effects resulted from our lethargy.
The devilish ingenuity of the islanders had stopped short of death, and we were thankful for so much mercy, as with recovery came the desire for revenge. There was not a man on board the yacht but burned to rescue Bertha and punish those who had carried her away.

I pass over my own grief and that of Aunt Chrissy, as it is necessary to relate how we followed in the trail of the spoilers. Harry swore to reach the island in the face of all obstacles and recover his sister, and in such resolve he was warmly supported by Flick and myself; for on discovering my loss I threw myself heart and soul into the project of the expedition. Moreover, Roaring Tom, mortified at being thus tricked by the man whose life he had saved, was anxious to meet with and punish the traitor for his vile ingratitude. So here we were, three obstinate Englishmen, bent on carrying through a dangerous exploration at all hazards. Had the negroes known the tempers of those with whom they had to deal, they would, no doubt, have finished more effectively their villainous work. As it happened, they left alive a number of mortified enemies who desired revenge; and who were prepared to obtain it at any cost. Never a ship sailed southward manned by more angered and dogged men.

Ignorant of the route taken by the negroes, we
anxiously discussed the most likely direction towards which to direct our energies and follow in pursuit. Harry insisted that they must have sought the Indian Ocean through the Canal, that being the shortest way to their destination; I thought that, to avoid awkward questions at Suez and Port Said, it was probable that they had sailed up the Nile, with the intention of striking for the East Coast through Abyssinia; but Flick, with whom lay the casting vote, gave his word for the Straits, under cover of darkness, and round the Cape. In no other way, said he, could so unique a ship escape remark; and this, as the most sensible suggestion, was forthwith adopted.

Yet, so as to place the matter beyond all doubt, I suggested that on our way westward it would be as well to cable to Suez from Malta, and wait at that island for the reply. If the scarlet ship ventured into the Canal, we could have her stopped, and follow on at once; while, should the answer be in the negative, it would be easy to pursue the islanders by their only remaining exit through Gibraltar Straits. I had quite abandoned the idea of the Nile route.

"That is all very well," said Harry, when I made this suggestion, "but already they have had a start of over twenty-four hours, and should we not follow at once they will pass Gibraltar and we shall lose the trail."
“That's a chance, certainly. But you said yourself that they might have gone by the Canal.”

“So I did, but I have changed my mind. As Flick says, a craft of that appearance would be questioned by the authorities, so it is more than likely the negroes will slip past Gibraltar under cover of darkness, and so take to the open sea. What do you think, captain?”

Flick made no immediate reply, but nursed his chin with a thoughtful look in his eyes. As we always deferred to his experience, he knew the responsibility of the expedition lay with him, and he was therefore cautious in giving his opinion. “I am inclined to adopt your suggestion, Sir Denis,” he said at length. “Certainly while waiting a cable from Suez we may lose a few days, but the yacht at top speed can soon catch up with that rowing-boat.”

“They have sails and oars, captain, and a good start. If they pass the Straits—”

“Well, lad, if they pass the Straits, they drop south to round the Cape. We know that much, and I guess we'll catch them coasting Africa. Depend upon it, a lubberly craft like that red cock-boat won't go out of sight of land.”

Our plans being thus satisfactorily settled, we left Cythera for Malta, though there was a trifling delay on account of our propeller. The negroes,
clever enough to guess what drove the ship, or perhaps instructed in such knowledge by their spy, had vainly tried to snap off the fans, in the hope of disabling us from pursuit; but, finding the ironwork too strong for them, they had lashed the screws together, so that they could not spin. This weak attempt was easily frustrated, by cutting the ropes, which impeded the revolutions, and, this accomplished, we headed the yacht south-west without further loss of time.

Poor Aunt Chrissy! she was quite broken down by the loss of niece, and blamed herself for having yielded to Flick's persuasions. If she had held firm, and remained in England, the disaster would not have happened; but, as it was, she expected never to see Bertha again. In vain I tried to calm her fears, by pointing out that Bertha, as the future wife of the king, would be treated with all honour.

"Don't tell me, Denis!" cried Mrs. Barber tearfully. "You saw what savage faces those negroes had. Depend upon it they will offer up the poor child to their horrid idols."

"I have no fear on that score. Dosk said nothing about human sacrifices."

"Dosk! The horrid little monster was full of falsehoods. I can believe nothing that comes from him. Oh, my poor child! Why did I ever come on this wretched voyage? She is lost—lost for ever!"
"That she isn't," said I determinedly. "Whatever happens, I'll bring back Bertha safe and sound to Bucksford."

"You promise more than you can perform. I expect the whole lot of you will be killed at Isk."

"Perhaps you would rather we did not go, Aunt Chrissy?"

"I had rather nothing of the sort, sir," replied the old lady indignantly. "It is your duty to rescue Bertha, because she is to be your wife; and Harry's, as she is his sister. And it is the duty of Thomas also," added she emphatically, "for he and his foolish expedition are the cause of all this trouble."

I did not envy Flick's position, while Aunt Chrissy was on board, for she railed at him with right good will for bringing us all into such trouble. Recognizing that there was a certain amount of truth in her reproaches, Flick forebore to defend himself, and expressed his contrition on every possible occasion. This big rough seaman was wonderfully gentle with the distraught old lady, and bore her reproaches with great equanimity. Harry and I came in for our share also, as Aunt Chrissy was too angered to be just; but we made all allowance, knowing the motive which prompted her wrath.

It had been suggested that she should catch a P. and O. liner at Malta; but this she refused to do,
alleging that, in the event of a negative reply from Suez, she would accompany us as far as Gibraltar, in the hope of sighting the scarlet ship before she passed the Straits. This arrangement was carried out, for on arriving at Malta, we cabled at once to Suez and Gibraltar, only to receive replies that at neither places had the red ship been seen. Therefore we adopted the only course which was left, and steamed for the Straits, with Aunt Chrissy still on board.

Flick quite expected that the Suez authorities would reply in the negative, but the cable from Gibraltar puzzled him. If the scarlet ship had taken that route—and, so far as we could see, it was the only possible means of exit from the Mediterranean—she must have passed the Rock. Her appearance was sufficiently noticeable to excite remark, so it was strange that she had not been signalled. Thereupon Flick reverted to his original idea.

"She went as she came," said he wisely, "under cover of darkness. I'm pretty certain we are on the right trail, and we will catch her up as we drop down the African coast."

So Flick said, so we all thought; but the sequel proved us in the wrong, for the negroes were more cunning than we deemed them to be, and they had laid their plans with a view to baffling possible
pursuit. We learned all this off the Guinea coast, when it was too late to turn back on our course.

At Gibraltar we fortunately found a liner of the P. and O. Company, bound for Plymouth, and Aunt Chrissy took her passage by this, intending to return to Bucksford with all speed, and there wait the result of our enterprise. She was much affected by the parting, and kissed us tenderly, not even excepting Flick, for, as she truly said, it was a question whether she would ever see us again.

"But for all that," she declared, like the plucky old Englishwoman she was, "don't you come back without Bertha. I would rather see none of you three, than see you return empty-handed, having left the poor child to be killed by those horrid negroes."

Whereupon, we three adventurers swore a mighty oath that we would rescue the girl, and bring her back safe and sound to Bucksford; so, satisfied that we would do our best, Aunt Chrissy embraced us once more, and steamed for Plymouth in the outgoing liner. It was the last we saw of her for many a weary month.

Thanks to the foresight of Captain Flick, we were well provisioned for a long voyage, and, to provide against running short, we coaled at Gibraltar. All being thus ship-shape, we lifted anchor and ran through the Straits
"You see, Harry," said I, as the Carmen put her nose to the south trail, "I was a true prophet. It will be many a long day before we sight Plymouth Hoe again."

"True enough, old Evans. The expedition of Captain Flick has started this time."

"Ay," said Flick, laying his hands on our shoulders, "but the object of the expedition is different. Then it was to gain possession of a statue; now it is to rescue the most charming lass in the world. May our enterprise be successful, lads!"

"Amen to that!" said we in a breath.

And so we began that weary search for the island of Isk.
CHAPTER XI.

THE CHART OF ISK.

“Say what path shall I pursue,
O'er the waste of waters blue,
To regain the maid whose charms
Late were ravished from these arms.
Shall I seek the sunset dying,
Or to Eastern realms be hieing;
Sail where Southern billows roll,
Storm the white seas of the Pole?
South, and north, and east, and west,
All must know my heart's unrest,
Till in joy do I regain
She whose absence causes pain.”

ONE of us enjoyed the voyage, as the loss of Bertha made us feel melancholy, and the anxiety of chasing the scarlet ship kept us in constant suspense. Notwithstanding her start of twenty-four hours, we expected to see her shortly after passing the Straits; for it was natural enough that the modern vessel, steaming her eighteen knots an hour, should soon overhaul the primitive tub of the negroes. According to Flick, such a craft would not venture out of sight of land, being but ill-fitted to withstand
the swell and heave of Atlantic rollers; therefore we hugged the coast as closely as we dared, in the fond belief that we should soon espy a scarlet blotch on the horizon. We had glorious weather, and made rapid headway, but day after day passed without our gaining any sight of the ship we sought. Harry had promised ten pounds to the first man who should sight the object of our chase, and, eager to earn the money, all the sailors kept a bright look-out. Reward and vigils were to no purpose, for never a glimpse did we gain of the red ship.

We slipped past Teneriffe, skirted Cape Verde, and came abreast of Sierra Leone. Still no sign of the negroes, and even Flick began to look grave. The strain was telling on my nerves, and Harry himself lost his usual cheerful spirits at the present juncture. We were almost afraid to hint our fears to one another; but as the days passed, and we were still unsuccessful, Captain Flick broached the subject to Harry and myself in his usual blunt fashion.

By this time we were in the Gulf of Guinea, off the Ivory Coast, and the yacht was swirling along at top speed under a purple evening sky. Overhead the constellations burned like lamps, and a yellow moon, showing half her orb above the waters, sent her light streaming in the white froth of our wake. So near were we to land, that the African continent lay like
a dark cloud on our left, while southward stretched
the wrinkled waste of the Atlantic, streaked with lines
of foam. What with the calm splendour of the night,
the humming of the wind among the cordage, and the
pleasant heave of the boat as she rode the waters, it
was all restful and enjoyable; but the three of us
seated on the deck felt worried and ill at ease. Even
smoking failed to soothe us, and Captain Flick gave
voice to the general discomfort when he suddenly
startled the quiet with a round oath.

“May the deuce take this negro ship!” growled
Roaring Tom; “she seems to be a kind of Flying
Dutchman. Here we are in Guinea Bay, and never
a sight of the craft.”

“Perhaps we have made a mistake,” suggested
Harry.

“I don’t see how that can be, lad,” retorted Flick,
unwilling to acknowledge defeat. “The red ship
didn’t go by Suez, that’s certain, or—”

“So the telegram said.”

“Or even up the Nile,” added the skipper, frowning
at the interruption.

“H’m,” said I, doubtfully, “I’m not so sure of
that.”

“I am,” roared Flick, bringing down his fist on
his massive knee. “If she had passed Alexandria,
the news would soon have reached Suez, and we
should have had a different reply to our wire. No, lads," declared the old man, "she only left the Mediterranean by one route—through the Straits."

"Then why haven't we caught her up?" was my very pertinent question.

"There you have me, Sir Denis. I could swear that those niggers would not venture out of sight of land in that craft; yet, though we have hugged the coast from Gib to this place, we have never seen them. I can't size it up nohow," concluded Flick in a cross tone.

"I hope the red ship hasn't gone down," hinted Harry, with a gloomy look.

"Good Lord, Harry, don't talk like that!" I cried, jumping to my feet. "We have had no storm since leaving Greece. Why, any tub could negotiate the Atlantic this weather. There could be no chance of a wreck."

Harry could find no answer to this, and swung on his heel with a whistle. I was vexed that he should suggest such a thing, and remained silent, considering the remark. From a brown study I was recalled by Flick.

"See here, Sir Denis," he said earnestly, "I'm in a fix. We can only hope to strike Isk by following in the trail of those niggers. Now, if we are not at their heels—which I am much inclined to doubt—
I don’t see how we are going to carry out our enterprise."

"You have an idea of the whereabouts of the island, at all events," said I hopefully.

"True enough; but I hardly see how we are to find it even then. We can’t go sailing over leagues of ocean for months and months, searching for unknown lands."

"Did Dosk give you no idea of the latitude?"

"No. I wish I could have found some chart. No doubt there were plenty of charts aboard that Noah’s ark of theirs. Had I been certain of that," added Flick ferociously, "I’d have boarded the boat and got hold of a map somehow."

This wild wish put an end to our conversation for the time being, and shortly afterwards we turned in, all three in very low spirits. Our voyage had started badly enough, with anxiety and disappointment, nor did there seem any chance of improvement. To find Isk it was necessary to catch up with the red ship, but I, for one, had surrendered all hope of our doing so. With our speed we must have overhauled her before now, always presuming that we were on her track; but, as we had not done so, I was resolved in my own mind that she had not taken the Cape route. Under these circumstances, there did not seem much chance of finding the island, and I
wondered that Flick could steam on so aimlessly when we had not the slightest idea of our destination. Yet find the island and rescue Bertha we must. For the statue, which was the cause of all this trouble, I cared nothing; for my affianced wife, I cared a great deal.

Next morning a miracle happened—I say a miracle, because it took place so soon after our conversation. Then Flick had wished for a chart of Isk, so that he might strike the island without following in the trail of the negro embassy, and lo! on the following day, the chart was found. It was Jenner who made the discovery, and he came aft with a grin on his face which showed him to be the bearer of good news.

"Lookee here, sir," said he, holding out a roll of what appeared to be reddish-hued paper to Captain Flick, "this is what I found in Dosk's berth, sir."

With a puzzled look, our commander took the roll, and Harry and myself bent forward to see what could be the cause of Jenner's excitement. He was so eager that he could not wait for Flick to unroll the paper, but snapped out his news there and then.

"'Tis a map of them niggers, gentlemen," said he, with a smiling nod.

"The devil!" roared the skipper, and reeled it out on the cabin table.

The next moment all three of us were bending
over the chart—for chart it was—a barbaric map of the mysterious island.

The material which we had taken for paper was a smooth copper-coloured square of linen, mounted on two ebony sticks; and thereon was traced in black paint a kind of pictorial presentation of the Indian Ocean. However hidden the island was, the geographers of Isk seemed to have a fair knowledge of the terrestrial globe. On this map we descried the irregular east coast of the African continent, the bulky island of Madagascar, with its dependencies. At the top appeared the spike of the Indian peninsula, and the pear-shaped island of Ceylon; furthermore Arabia, Persia, and the intervening Gulf—these latter traced to the extreme verge of the linen. We also recognized the bulge of the great Australian continent; and, midway between it and Africa, we noted a conical-shaped mountain, on which stood a woman with star and dove—this set in a space of lonely sea considerably to the north of St. Paul's Island.

"Venus! Isk!" cried Flick, recognizing the now-familiar symbol. "Good. We can now find the island without trouble. These niggers have a rum idea of latitude and longitude, though," he added, looking at the innumerable lines scrawled over the map. "How the deuce can I steer through all this
scribbling? No matter; Isk lies to the north of St. Paul's Island in a direct line; that's good enough for me. Hurrah, boys, we'll lift this place before many days, rescue the lass, and annex the statue!"

"By all means," said I dryly, "always provided we are not killed in the meantime."

"We'll take our chance of that, old Evans," struck in Harry good-humouredly. "I, for one, do not intend to give in without a fight. By Jupiter!" he continued, running his forefinger over the chart, "this is a find, and no mistake. I wonder how it came into Dosk's possession."

"Perhaps he brought it from Isk," I suggested.

"No, by Jove! he didn't," retorted Flick sharply. "He wore nothing but a loin-cloth when he boarded my boat. He couldn't have hidden the chart from me."

"To say nothing of the fact that Dosk, as one of the plebs, had no right to own this map," said Harry, "if the rulers of Isk want to keep the whereabouts of their island a secret, they certainly wouldn't let a common fisherman keep so important a document."

"He stole it," cried Roaring Tom, bending his heavy brows. "He stole it aboard the red ship. No doubt he intended to get back to Isk by means of this map if his countrymen refused to take him with them. However, it's no use surmising. What we
have to deal with is the fact that this chart puts us right for the island; so thither we go."

He went out of the cabin with Jenner to alter the course of the yacht, so that instead of skirting the coast we should sail in a direct line for the Cape. I picked up the map and looked at it carefully. From Isk up through the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf ran a thick red line, terminating at the end of the linen. I turned over the chart, and on the other side appeared a tracing of Asia Minor, the Archipelago, and Southern Greece. The red line continued across this, up the Euphrates to Aleppo, thence overland to the Levantine coast, and so on to Cythera, where it stopped. Both Harry and I stared open-mouthed at this. Flick found us thus, tongue-tied.

"I say, captain," cried Harry, pointing to the red line, "what do you make of that?"

Flick looked at both sides of the chart, and whistled.

"By gad!" he said in a tone of surprise, "it's the route of the red ship. No wonder we didn't pick her up on the African coast."

"Do you really think the negroes took that route?" I asked doubtfully.

"Why," said Flick, frowning, "there can be little doubt of that; the red line shows it. It's a new way of getting out of the Mediterranean, and one
which would enable them to escape observation. I wonder if Hesperus took that way in the olden days?"

"Humph!" said Harry, looking at the map, "from Cythera to the Levantine coast. I can understand that. Down the Euphrates, through the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean. That's all plain sailing. But what about the overland route down Aleppo way?"

Flick scratched his head.

"I can't say, lad," he replied with some hesitation. "It's an uncivilized place there; so the niggers might have left their red ship on the coast and have picked up another bark on the Euphrates at a navigable point."

"Or else," I suggested, "they might have taken their red ship to pieces, and transported her over the mountains to the river."

"Anyhow, it's uncommonly clever, however they did it," said Captain Flick with unwilling admiration. "With the exception of the narrow breadth of land between the coast and Euphrates, it's all water-way. These niggers are better geographers than I thought. How is it they are so well acquainted with the lie of the land?"

"Oh," said I, "you must remember they come out of their barbaric seclusion at times. Doubtless in one of their Grecian excursions they picked up a set of civilized charts."
"No," said Flick, pointing to the map, "this is incorrect; the coasts are all wrongly drawn. They have ideas, but not correct ones. This chart is of semi-civilized manufacture. However," added Flick, rolling up the linen, "I guess all they wanted was a good route, mostly water-way, to Cythera. They found that by utilizing the Persian Gulf and the River Euphrates. I don't expect they care a red cent for any other part of the world."

"Well, captain," cried Harry, yawning, "I'm glad we've got a hint of the situation of Isk."

"We've got more than a hint, lad. I'll steam straight for Isk by this map. We won't be long in finding it now. I'll tell you one thing, lads."

"What's that, captain?"

"We'll arrive at Isk before the embassy."

"Impossible."

"I don't see it. We have come the longest way, I know; but think of that rowing-boat against our eighteen knots. No, lads, you can bet we'll fetch Isk before the red ship."

Flick spoke with great confidence, but in this he reckoned without his host.
CHAPTER XII.

WE ARE DRIVEN SOUTHWARD.

"The north wind blows,
The good ship goes,
With white-spread wings to the southern snows.

"Let sails be furled,
Lest she be hurled
Into the chills of that frozen world.

"And there remain,
Like a soul in pain,
Chained by ice to the icy plain."

We were a trifle premature in congratulating ourselves on our good luck, for nothing but misfortunes befell us from the day we found the chart. One would have thought that the devil had come aboard, and was doing his best to prevent the accomplishment of our enterprise. But I had better relate our adventures in detail, as they are not without interest, and moreover have a direct bearing on this veracious narrative, as they fully account for our late arrival at the island of Isk. Never was there anything so unfortunate as that unexpected hurricane.
Had we kept on our course, and steered by the chart, no doubt we should have fetched the wished-for island before the return of the embassy; but, as it was, Fate falsified Flick's prediction, and the red ship gained her destination before we did. The elements seemed to array themselves against us, and the Carmen simply battled her way to her goal. We were as unfortunate as the Flying Dutchman, and quite as storm-tormented.

To begin at the beginning. Captain Flick altered the yacht's course after the discovery of the chart and in place of skirting the coast, as heretofore, he now steered in a straight line for Table Bay. Here it was his intention to coal—since we needed a good supply to facilitate our escape from Isk, should it be necessary to retreat—and afterwards to bear eastward to Paul's Island. Thence, going by the chart, he designed to steer northward in a straight line, and, assuming that the negro map was reliable, he hoped to strike Isk without much difficulty. According to Flick, it lay some hundreds of miles to the north of Paul's, not far from the tropic of Capricorn.

"'Tis all right, I tell ye," said he to me, when I expressed a doubt on the subject. "Take Paul's, Mauritius, and Apahuria as a triangle, and I'll bet Isk lies within those seas. We mayn't fetch it straight, but a little beating about will soon bring it
within hail. This craft will be there before the red ship."

That evening, when the chart so unexpectedly turned up, we retired to rest in excellent spirits—all but Flick, who, sniffing a coming storm, stayed on deck. I cast a glance around as I went below, and never did I see so beautiful a scene. The night was oppressively still, not a ripple disturbed the steel-hued surface of the ocean; and the moon having set, the constellations shone with unusual brilliance in the lofty arch of the sky. To nor'ard a long low bank of clouds sat on the horizon, and it was on these that Flick's gaze was fixed.

"There may be a capful of wind," he said with some uneasiness, "but I don't expect it will be much to speak of. We must get away from the coast, though. To get mixed up with reefs during a storm is too dangerous by half. Plenty of sea-room, that's what the boat wants."

He spoke cheerfully enough, but I saw that he was disturbed in his mind at the prospect of those threatening clouds. I knew well that Flick was not the man to dread what he termed "a capful of wind" or even a storm; therefore I apprehended that he expected exceptionally rough weather. He looked aloft at the tapering masts soaring into the dark blue, bare of canvas, spoke a few words to the man at the wheel, and turned to me with a nod.
“Good night, Sir Denis,” he said shortly. “Go below, if you are tired.”

“Call me up if there’s dirty weather,” I replied, turning away.

“You won’t need calling,” was his grim answer. And, sure enough, he proved a true prophet, as I found out before long.

I glanced into Harry’s berth as I sought my own, and saw that he was sound asleep, rocked into slumber, as it were, by the swinging of the ship, a veritable sea-cradle. Disinclined to rest myself—for my mind dwelt uneasily on Flick’s hint—I lay down without removing any of my clothes, save a thick pea-jacket. At first I kept wide awake listening to the throbbing of the screws and the wash of the waters along the smooth sides of the yacht. At length the monotony of sound and motion induced slumber, and a wave of sleep rolled over my brain. In the space of a few minutes I was in the land of dreams, and fancied that I was rescuing my darling Bertha from a crowd of misshapen negroes.

The sudden stoppage of the screws brought me out of my sleep with a shock, and I leaped out of bed and into the saloon. Here I found Harry, blinking his eyes, half asleep, with nothing on but his thin pyjamas. We simultaneously looked at one another for an explanation, when unexpectedly the yacht
heeled to port with a kind of muffled roar, and we were slapped roughly against the walls of the saloon. Then Pandemonium seemed to break loose.

"A collision, by Jupiter!" gasped Harry; and staggered for the companion.

I followed, and—with some difficulty, for the yacht was still at an awkward angle—we managed to scramble on deck. Here we found ourselves enveloped in a cloud of flying spray, and through the white mist we caught a glimpse of gigantic waves overtopping the bulwarks. Flick was roaring out orders, and the crew were tumbling about the slanting decks with the utmost activity. I guessed in an instant that the yacht had been struck by a squall, and bawled the information to Harry, who still seemed to think that we had collided with another boat.

"A storm," said he, tumbling towards the companion. "At that rate I'd better put on my clothes. You come too, Denis, and don your oilskins."

We retreated to the saloon, and wrapped ourselves up warmly, while the shrieking of the elements went on overhead, and the screws, now spinning again, slapped the water with irregular rapidity. The boat had recovered her equilibrium, and was leaping through the waves like a frightened deer. The situation was almost inconceivable from its suddenness. But a moment before we had been slipping
quietly along on an even keel, and now the yacht was in the grip of a hurricane, which threatened to rend her asunder.

On deck, sight was added to sound and motion. Across the pallid sky raced black storm-clouds, driven furiously by the wind, and blotting out the winking stars. The liquid plain of ocean now represented chains of jet-black hills, topped and marbled with white foam. On they came, curling crests so terrific as to threaten destruction to the yacht; but at the critical moment, she soared aloft like a swallow, balanced herself on the giddy height, and went sliding down into the hollow beyond, with her stern sticking up in the air. Always at this moment the steam was shut off and the screws stopped, so that the propeller fans should run no risk of being snapped off short when they again struck the solid mass of the water.

Flick manoeuvred the boat with wonderful skill, and she nobly seconded his efforts. I would not have believed that so small a craft could have battled so stubbornly with such overwhelming seas; but she went leaping onward, breasting the terrific billows, like a thing of life, every timber groaning and grinding with the hammer-like blows of the surge. Spume and spray wrapped her as in a veil, and frequently glass-green seas burst over the taffrail; then she
would reel and stagger, but always bravely recovered herself to dart out of danger, and top the ridges of the seas.

Being a landsman, I am not versed in sea terms, therefore my descriptions may lack point; but I have set down what I truly felt and saw. All shortcomings must be placed to the inadequacy of my nautical knowledge; so I will not inflict further description than is necessary. The storm lasted five or six days, and drove us far to the south out of course, much to the disgust of Flick, who now saw little chance of fetching Isk for a considerable period.

To add to our troubles, the engines got out of gear on the fourth day, and we were forced to rely on our sailing powers. The chief engineer announced that the machinery could not be put right until we anchored in Table Bay, and as that meant a further delay of a week, the information by no means improved Flick's temper.

"It will be a month before we sight Isk," he grumbled. "We've been nearly a week driving to south'ard; now the screws won't spin, and it will take us a devil of a time to lift the Cape."

"Where are we now, captain?" I asked curiously.

"Close on Tristan d'Acunha, I reckon. When this storm swings past us, we must hoist all sail for
the north. If we have luck, a smart run of a few days should take us into Table Bay."

We did have good luck, but not immediately. For two more days we fought with the storm, but on the morning of the seventh, we found a cloudless sky, a bright sun, and the yacht riding easily the yeasty plain of the seas. For the first time for the past week, we were able to take some rest, for the weather, to say nothing of the anxiety, had kept us on deck nearly the whole of that time. The Carmen was rather battered to look at, but her bottom was sound, her sails and cordage in good order; and when the fine weather came, Flick set her nose on the return journey to the Cape of Good Hope. The name of the wished-for haven was a good omen.

We accomplished a wonderfully quick passage to that port, for the yacht possessed considerable sailing powers; and favoured by a fair wind we flew north like a sea bird. With her noble spread of white canvas, she looked a thing of beauty as she swept over the now tranquil ocean; and the sensation of sailing, with its silent speed, was a relief from the constant vibration of the screws. After the storm came the calm, and I think we were all thankful for the ease we enjoyed. It was like convalescence after a fierce attack of fever.

At Cape Town we lingered considerably over a
week, as the accident to the engines of the yacht proved to be more serious than had been supposed. While the engineers were tinkering down below, we went ashore, and took up our quarters at a good hotel. I cannot say that I enjoyed the rest much, for my thoughts were ever with Bertha and her flight. I half expected to find her married by force when we reached Isk; and hinted as much to Flick. He reassured me.

"No fear, Sir Denis. I found out about the ceremonies from Dosek. The bride is placed in the Temple of Venus for purification, and there she is kept for three months. All sorts of sacred doings take place, and she is then conducted with great pomp to the king's palace for the marriage ceremony. We won't arrive at Isk till after the scarlet ship," added Flick, with a vexed air, "but you'll find Miss Greenville safely bestowed in the temple."

"Whence I hope we'll be able to rescue her, Flick."

"Bless your heart, yes!" said Roaring Tom contemptuously; "we'll rescue her, and steal the statue, and light out from Isk in a less time than three months. I'm not the man to let myself be beaten by a parcel of ignorant niggers."

"They beat us once," said I, recalling the circumstances when Bertha was abducted. Flick muttered
something between his teeth and marched away. He did not like to be reminded of that episode, and always retreated when it was brought under his notice. I was by no means so sanguine as he was that the negroes would be easy to deal with. They were subtle and dangerous, and it would take us all our time to accomplish the twofold object of our enterprise, viz., to rescue Bertha and carry off the statue of Venus. It might be that we should have to fight for our lives; but I did not trouble much about this thought, as our boat was well supplied with guns and ammunition, and, not counting ourselves, we had a crew of thirty strong sailors; and so we should be able to defend ourselves against the malice and fanaticism of the misshapen inhabitants of Isk.

"Perhaps our strength will overawe them," suggested Harry, to whom I confided these ideas.

"I'm afraid not. We could not overawe them on our own ground at Cythera, else they would not have dared to attack the yacht. No, my dear Hal; we are about to thrust our hands into a wasps' nest, and even if we come out alive, we shall be severely stung."

"You don't want to back out of the expedition, Denis?"

I laughed at the idea.
"My dear fellow, don't let my words mislead you that far," I replied. "Your sister, my affianced wife, is at Isk, and there I would go if all the fiends of hell barred the way. But," I added significantly, "we must not make the mistake of underrating our antagonists."

"Pooh! pooh!" growled Flick, who had returned; "confounded little black-beetles. I'll crush them."

"Let us hope, Flick, they won't crush us," was my grave reply.
CHAPTER XIII.

IN INDIAN SEAS.

"In Indian seas we sailed, we sailed,

   To gain the burning Hindoo land;

Before the shrine of Siva, veiled

   I saw thee 'mid the Nautch-girls stand.

The sacred drums of serpent-skin,

   Preluded pipings, shrill and wild;

The music wailed— and 'mid the din

   You drew aside your veil and smiled.

Oh, sweet! oh, strange! such dreams as these

Entranced our hearts in Indian seas."

We had no cause to complain of weather when

in the Indian Ocean, for we left all storms on

the other side of Africa, and steamed eastward through

a sphere of azure and gold. The engines of the yacht

were now in excellent order, and she bowled along at

the top speed, for Flick, anxious to make up for lost

time, did not spare the screws. We also coaled at

the Cape, overhauled the armoury, and inspected the

brass carronade, which was the special pride of Flick's

heart. He had shipped it at Plymouth, in the teeth

of Harry's scoffs that it would not be required, and
attended to it as carefully as though it were a human being.

"I don't say we'll use it," said Roaring Tom, when Harry reverted to the subject in the Indian seas; "but it is as well to be prepared."

"I thought you scorned the islanders, Flick."

"So I do, Sir Denis; but, Lord bless ye, it isn't any good being foolhardy. I guess our lot can lick the whole lump of niggers. This gun and our rifles will keep them in order; but no doubt they'll kick at my getting the statue and——"

"And they'll kick at our trying to recover Bertha," I interrupted smartly. "I shouldn't be at all surprised if this cannon proved uncommonly useful."

"By the way, how do you intend to behave on landing, captain?" asked Harry.

"Oh, in a friendly fashion, of course. It will be time enough for us to show our teeth when those niggers show theirs, lad. I hope to carry through this job as peacefully as possible."

"Uncommonly kind of you, I'm sure, Flick," said I a trifle satirically; "particularly as you intend to loot their island of its most valuable possession."

Roaring Tom, who was quite impervious to this kind of talk, rolled away with a grin, and went down to his cabin for an examination of the negro chart. By this time we were well to the east of the African
continent, heading directly from Paul's Island. Taking that as a starting-point, Flick intended to steam north as far as Apahuria in the hope of fetching Isk. It was the only plan he could adopt with any reasonable hope of success, as the negro geographer's ideas of latitude and longitude were so vague that it was almost impossible to steer by his map.

We were quite three weeks exploring these waters, but never a glimpse of Isk did we gain. Perhaps the chart had been left to mislead us, or Flick did not understand the meaning of the lines scrawled across it; at all events, although we steamed for days to all points of the compass, not a shadow of land could we see. Before our arrival in Cythera, I had doubted the existence of Isk, and our present perplexity seemed to confirm that belief; but after the sight of the red ship and her sooty crew, after the abduction of Bertha and the discovery of the chart, I could not help believing that the mysterious island was hidden somewhere in these wide spaces of sea. But in which direction? this was the question I kept constantly asking myself, and to which I could obtain no answer from any one of our company.

After our discovery of the true route taken by the scarlet ship, the offer of the prize-money for sighting her naturally fell to the ground. Now Harry, Flick, and myself renewed the offer and increased the sum;
so that there was twenty pounds waiting for the man who first saw Isk. This reward made the men very eager; but notwithstanding the sharp look-out they kept in the hope of gaining it, in spite of Flick's sailing, as well as he could understand, by the chart, we now seemed further off our goal than before. One felt inclined to believe that Isk was situate in Cloudcuckoo Land.

But for my anxiety about Bertha, I should have enjoyed the cruise in these waters. The ocean was like glass, glittering like a sea of fire under the ardent tropic sun, which flamed a mass of molten gold in the wondrous blue of the sky. Never did I see such sunsets as at that time; they put to scorn the most brilliant pictures of Turner, and when the colours faded out of the west, and the silver orb of the moon bathed sky and sea in her transfiguring light, the beauty seemed too marvellous for earth. It was like fairyland.

One night I remember well. Flick had shut himself up in his cabin, to pore over the negro chart, and try, if possible, to discover the true reading of its symbols; while Harry, having a headache from the heat, had turned early to a hammock swung on deck. Pipe in hand, I was leaning over the taffrail, drinking in the beauty of the scene. I wondered that Harry could sleep so complacently, for then
I was beholding the most extraordinary sight I ever saw in the whole course of my life.

The yacht was shearing through a sea of phosphorescent fire, and the whole circle of the ocean, up to the rim of the horizon, was one heaving mass of liquid gold. Over this the sky, inky by contrast to the dazzling water, shut down like a black lid, and its solid gloom accentuated the sparkle and luminous shine of the main. Every time the yacht dipped her nose, flakes of phosphorus were flung to right and left, till it seemed as though she were steaming through a fiery furnace. The billows reared in mounds of flame, and sank into glittering valleys; while the boat, a black shape amid this radiance, rolled steadily onward, with the waters a pale yellow sluicing past her sides. I had often read of such things, but never till now had I seen this magical transfiguration of the ocean, and I felt as though I were in a fairy ship sailing the seas of some planet where fire took the place of water. Again, I repeat, it was like fairyland.

"Hullo!" cried Harry, waking up at this moment, "are we still in the fiery furnace?"

"Still in it, you unromantic person," I replied; "I've been staring at these wonders for hours, while you have been asleep."

"Oh, I've seen this sort of thing before," replied
Greenville, coming to my side, and producing his pipe. "It's all very grand, you know, but one gets tired of it. I wouldn't lose a good sleep for all the marvels of ocean. I wish we could see Isk amid this sea of fire. Where's Flick?"

"Oh, he's worrying away at that negro map."

"Trying to find out how they steer by it, I suppose," replied Harry, shrugging his shoulders. "H'm! I wish him joy. Seems to me we'll never fetch this infernal place."

"If it wasn't for Bertha, I shouldn't much care."

"By Jove, I should. Of course, Bertha is now my first consideration; but, apart from her, I enjoy the flavour of this adventure. Looking for a mysterious island is like Columbus setting sail from Palos, or like acting a part in one of Jules Verne's wonderful romances."

"Oh, I can't think of that," I retorted a trifle hotly. "I can think of nothing but Bertha and her peril."

"Quite right, old chap; she's your promised wife," said Harry phlegmatically.

"And she's your sister, Hal," said I pointedly.

He looked at me in his merry way and smiled.

"My dear lad, you must not think that I do not feel her loss, although I don't talk about it," he said gravely. "But I know that she is quite safe with those negroes."
"Is she though?" I queried sceptically.

"Certainly," was his earnest reply. "They kidnapped Bertha for her beauty, and they are bound to take all care of her until she is safely landed at Isk. No doubt, as their future queen, she is treated with the utmost deference. As Flick said, she cannot be married to this white ruler of Isk until three months have elapsed, and before that time I hope we'll find Isk and rescue her. Flick may leave the island without his statue," added Harry doggedly, "but I don't turn this boat's nose homeward until Bertha is on board."

"No doubt you are quite correct in your views," said I musingly; "save the trial of being kidnapped, I expect Bertha is safe and well. I only hope we shall reach Isk in time; but it is now seven weeks and more since we lost her, and, unless we find the island soon, the three months will be up."

"It all depends upon the confounded chart. If Flick could only decipher its meaning, we should soon sight the island."

"By the way," said I, after a pause, "I wish Aunt Chrissy knew your comfortable views."

"She does," replied Harry quietly. "I wrote her from the Cape not to worry herself; and to expect Bertha back in a few weeks."

"I am glad you did that, Harry. I wrote also, but
I had not then taken your view regarding Bertha's safety, and I am afraid my letter was not so cheerful as it might have been."

Before Harry could reply, Captain Flick came on deck, rubbing his hands with a pleased expression. He cast a look of careless admiration at the sea of golden haze which environed the ship, but, being used to such sights, he made no remark on the phenomenon. With a broad grin he marched up to where we leaned against the taffrail, and placed a hand on a shoulder of each of us.

"Hey, lads," said he, in his hearty voice, "I've solved the riddle."

"What! the chart?" we exclaimed in one breath.

"Ay, the chart. I stumbled on the explanation by accident, and I know now how the pilots of Isk take their bearings."

"How do they manage, captain?"

"'Tis too long an explanation just now, Sir Denis," he answered, glancing aloft; "and, moreover, it must be worked out on paper. But I've found out the business, and now I'm about to alter the ship's course—for the last time, I hope."

"Whither, Flick?"

"Nor'east, lad. The straight line from Paul's is all a blind. Isk lies nearer to the Australian continent than to Africa, and 'tis over instead of under Capricorn
—almost on the Equator, I fancy. However, we'll know in a couple of days, more or less. I'm afraid we'll have trouble with those niggers, after all," added the old sailor, meditatively rubbing his nose.

"What has converted you to that opinion, captain?" I asked, laughing.

"Why," said he earnestly, "that chart is a perfect blind; it's worked out to deceive any one but the person who knows the right way of taking it. If chance hadn't showed me the key to the problem, I might have steered by it till doomsday without fetching Isk. Whosoever constructed that map has brains, and it gives me a fresh idea regarding the high state of civilization we may expect to find in this unknown island. That being the case, it will take all our power and cleverness to gain our objects and circumvent these clever devils."

"Well, there's one thing certain," said Harry, rather impressed by this speech, "judging from their behaviour at Cythera, they know nothing about firearms; and with our cannon and rifles, with our quick boat and plucky crew, I think we'll be able to rescue Bertha."

"And get the statue."

"I'm not so sure of that, captain," laughed Harry; "however, we'll make a bid for it, you may be sure."

After this inspiriting conversation we turned in for
the night, much exhilarated by Flick's discovery. Before retiring, he worked out the system upon which he concluded that the navigation of the islanders was founded; the solution was certainly ingenious and probable, and as none other seemed likely to elucidate the myriad lines on the chart, we hoped that the new course shaped from this discovery would result in the finding of the wished-for island. At all events, we would know if Flick's solution was worth anything before the end of the week. After so many days of weary anxiety this hope was most welcome, and put new life into us.

The crew were also informed why the course was altered, and one and all kept a sharp watch for the island in the hope of gaining the twenty pounds. On the morning of the third day I was roused from sleep by Harry, who shook me by the shoulder with much excitement.

"Get up, Denis. Isk is in sight!"

I needed no second telling, but, thinly clad in my night-gear as I was, I rushed on deck at the tail of Harry. Captain Flick, with the glass to his eye, was looking to the north-west, where I fancied I saw a tiny cloud. This was Isk.

We had a merry breakfast that morning, and afterwards Flick paid over twenty golden sovereigns to the man who had first sighted the island at dawn. We
had our meal early, as we wished to remain on deck when drawing near the promised land, and as soon as it was over we again rushed on deck, filled with curiosity and excitement.

The sun was just showing above the eastern horizon, and against his golden glory we could now plainly see a tall mountain peak, white with snow, shooting up into the radiance of the sky. The surrounding waters glittered like gold in the newly-risen luminary, and in the centre of this effulgence the island showed blackly, like a cone of coal.

"It is Isk!" cried Flick, snapping his glass together. "I can tell by the shape of the mountain. 'Tis the same as that drawn on the chart."

So, after weeks of weary search, we had found Isk, and we might hope to land upon it before noon. Columbus felt no greater excitement on beholding the New World than we did while approaching that black spot. It was our new world—the mysterious island of Isk, hidden from mankind for over two thousand years—the unknown island of Isk, to which Hesperus had conveyed the statue of the goddess three hundred years before the Christian era.
CHAPTER XIV.

THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND.

"It was a fair land, like to Paradise,
Enclosèd round about with lonely seas:
Such spot as necromancers might devise,
By magic arts from airy fantasies:
And there, 'twixt dawn and dark, breathed many a breeze
All odorous with spoils of tropic flowers,
Which decked far-spreading lawns 'neath ancient trees,
And glittered in the shade of slumb'rous bowers,
Whereto came sleep, and love, and dreams, the night-long
hours."

As Flick expected, it was noon before we came abreast of Isk, and during our gradual approach we had ample opportunity to examine its configuration. It was of considerable size, and volcanic in character; indeed, I believe the island itself was formed by the overflow of lava from the central peak. This shot up into the air some ten thousand feet, and a thin trail of smoke breathing from the top showed that the volcano was still active. The cone, white with snow, rose suddenly out of luxuriant forests thick with green foliage, which rolled downward to the coasts of the isle; thence reefs of black lava shot out into the
blue waters, their presence denoted by lines of broken foam. On the verge of the woods fringing the sands we could see scattered villages, the habitations of which appeared to be built of some black material, and which were roofed with dried reeds. Boats lay near the beach fronting these clumps of houses, and we could descry many figures running about the land, evidently in a state of great agitation at the unexpected sight of a modern ship.

"We have frightened the inhabitants," said Harry, shutting up his glass. "Suppose we fire the gun to announce our arrival—eh, Flick?"

"No," replied Roaring Tom decisively; "the inhabitants may interpret that as a defiance, and I wish to approach peacefully. I'll hoist the white flag and sail round the island."

"What white flag?" I asked, hearing of it for the first time.

"One that I have had manufactured for this expedition," replied Flick gravely. "See, Jenner is bringing it. A little strategy is necessary in these waters, Sir Denis."

The mate spread out the white bundle he carried, and thereon I saw, worked in red bunting, the symbol of the Isk religion. Mountain, woman, dove, star and convoluted snakes—were all delineated thereon, as I had seen them tattooed on Dusk's breast in
vermilion lines. After displaying this strange ensign, Jenner ran it up to the main-top, and I turned to Flick for an explanation. He read my curiosity in my eyes, and shrugged his shoulders.

"My intention is not difficult to understand," he said quietly. "I intend to present myself under that flag as well as the Union Jack."

"And a good idea it is," cried Harry, who had now joined us again. "We shall be able to gain the confidence of the people. They will receive us out of sheer curiosity."

I was doubtful of this point, and shook my head as I gazed aloft at the white flag with its red emblem flaunting at the masthead. From the other mast—I know not what nautical term to apply—streamed the English ensign, and under these curiously diverse pieces of bunting we were to anchor in the harbour of Isk. This latter thought brought my eyes from masthead to shore, but I could see no port wherein we could bring the yacht to a standstill. Indeed, Flick seemed to be of the same opinion, for the Carmen was steaming along the shore at half-speed in search of an anchorage. For fear of reefs, Captain Flick kept her well out from land, but, with the aid of a marine glass, I could plainly see the people on beach and in villages, and mark the excitement caused by our unexpected appearance.
"You intend to sail round the island, Flick?"

"Why?" said he, casting a look over his shoulder in my direction; "it is the most sensible thing to do, isn't it? I can't anchor the boat in this open roadstead, and leave her exposed to storms; a danger like that might cut off all means of escape. The yacht is our salvation, remember. No, no, Sir Denis! These islands must have some kind of a harbour where they stow that scarlet ship, and I'm going to berth there."

"But such a position might enable them to capture the yacht."

"No fear!" was his confident reply. "You and I will go ashore, and leave Harry in charge. No one can board the yacht while he is in command. When we see how the land lies, and what sort of a reception they intend to give us, we can shape our plans accordingly."

"But, I say, Flick, I want to go ashore with you," cried Harry, rather dismayed by the passive part this ancient mariner intended him to play.

"You can go later on," retorted Flick. "This boat's our stand-by, I reckon, and if she goes, we all go. You are second in command of this expedition Mr. Greenvile, and I look on you to obey orders and keep your weather eye peeled."

"Very well, sir," growled Harry a trifle discontentedly. "I'm game. These niggers will get a
warm reception if they board us this time. I'm up to their drugging dodges now."

While this conversation was taking place, the shores of Isk were rolling past like a panorama. The central peak still dominated the island, and dwarfed the forest-clad expanse of flat country which spread out into the ocean. As we steamed along, the coast still preserved its low-lying character and fertile appearance. Woody heights swelling towards the base of the volcano, a broad yellow band of sandy beach, and then reefs of jagged black lava, thrusting themselves into the waters. We kept the ship well away from these reefs, for the way in which they fretted the ocean's breast to foam with their teeth showed us what we might expect, should we approach too closely. A touch on the smallest, and the Carmen would rip from stem to stern. It was a savage shore on which to be wrecked; and I shrewdly suspected that the islanders were as fierce as the reefs which protected their home.

"I see that volcano is still active," said Flick, looking at the wavering smoke streaming from the crest of the peak. "I wonder these Isk people are not afraid of being overwhelmed by the lava. The whole island is volcanic; and these lands by which we are sailing must have been formed ages ago by the overboil of the mountain."
"And you expect that the same event may occur again!"

"It is but reasonable to suppose so. If the volcano were extinct, it would not matter much; but that fire-mountain is too active, and too near, to be pleasant. I, for one, should not care to live on Isk."

"Yet we have undoubted proof that people have lived and flourished on it for two thousand years."

"True. Perhaps the volcano has only lately become active," said Flick. "Seems to me as though it were getting ready for a burst up."

"Let us hope we may be far away when that takes place," said I with a shudder.

By this time we were rounding a curve of the island, and here a change took place in the coast line. In place of a flat country lipping the waters, cliffs of black lava began to dominate the ocean. Some of them rose to the height of two or three hundred feet, broken here and there by inlets, which afforded glimpses of the green forests beyond. The water rolled noisily into these chasms, and spurs of white foam spouted against the gloomy heights. A more savage and inhospitable coast I never beheld.

"There doesn't seem to be any harbour," growled Flick, with a disgusted glance at these iron cliffs. "A sheet of paper couldn't squeeze through those
chasms—let alone a ship. Yet the islanders must berth that red tub of theirs somewhere."

It was late in the afternoon when he made this speech, and we had been steaming for hours without arriving at our starting-point. The island was larger than we had thought; and still the black line of the cliffs towered above the white waters where the reefs fretted the sea to foam. The peak of snow looked cold against the warm blue of the tropical sky, and the ocean glittered like gold as the yacht, cutting through it, sprayed the water to right and left. It was very pleasant steaming along; but we wanted to find the port of Isk, as, with night coming on, we did not care about anchoring in the open roadstead in the vicinity of that dangerous coast.

About five o'clock, when the light was still brilliant, we headed round a bold cliff which jutted out into the water; and then we beheld an immense semicircle curving, as it appeared, into the very heart of the island. In the middle, half a mile away, the cliffs parted asunder, showing a narrow chasm, which apparently led inland. But it was not this astonishing spectacle which excited our wonder, so much as the presence of innumerable boats, or rather canoes, some of great size, which were sailing and rowing down to meet us at the mouth of the bay.
"And, by Jupiter!" roared Harry suddenly, "yonder's the scarlet ship."

She was ploughing in our direction through the flotilla of boats, her black sails furled to her scarlet spars, and her double bank of oars flashing in the light of the setting sun. Flick shut off steam, and at the curve of the coast we beheld her crawling along like a centipede. Undoubtedly the news of our arrival had been sent across the island, and the navy of Isk had come out either to repel or to welcome us.

"The red ship, true enough," muttered Flick, with a frown. "The same that we saw at Cythera. How the dickens did they get her across from the Levant to Euphrates river?"

"Took her to pieces," I suggested.

"Maybe," he replied grimly; "but I'll knock her into as many pieces as she was then if she shows fight. Ahoy there! get the gun cleared."

The sailors, who were greatly excited, needed no second bidding, and in less time than it takes to write, the carronade was slewed round so as to command the approaching ship. Cutlasses and revolvers had been served out to all the men, and they were leaning over the taffrail ready to repel the negroes should they attempt to clamber up the sides. The yacht was rolling slightly in the swell of the
sea, and as we three stood by the wheel gazing at the scarlet craft, I looked to my revolver to see that it was loaded. The critical moment was now at hand when we should learn whether the islanders would receive us as friends or foes; and I, for one, was trembling with nervous excitement. Harry also looked agitated, but for all the emotion displayed by Flick, that grim old salt might have been hewn out of mahogany.

A cry of wonder rose from the canoes as their occupants caught sight of the familiar device on the white flag. In answer to a hoarse order from the scarlet ship, the flotilla halted some instance away, and we beheld the closely packed mass of boats rocking on the waters, and clustering round the larger craft. Evidently those in authority were discussing the meaning of the white flag, the display of which took them completely by surprise.

In a quarter of an hour we saw a boat put off from the red ship, and pull towards the yacht. It was crowded with negro dwarfs, and apparently carried a great personage, for a man stood up in the stern under the shade of a large umbrella. As the boat drew near, he displayed a white piece of cloth, embroidered in red with the same symbol as that on our flag, and the rowers rested on their oars to see if we would accept their coming in peace. Flick
waved his handkerchief in return, and the boat, again urged forward, was soon grinding against the sides of our ship. The next instant the negro ambassador and his suite, umbrella and all, leaped on board.

The new-comers were all ugly little negroes of the same type as those we had seen at Cythera; and their faces were stamped with the same expression of morose melancholy. The chief of them was richly dressed in scarlet cloth, with an ample black cloak of some woollen material, and wore anklets and bracelets of silver; also a silver band round his woolly hair, whence sprang a circle of feathers. Under his huge umbrella, which was borne behind him by a youth, he advanced towards Flick with an air of great dignity. As I have mentioned before, our captain understood the negro tongue, and after the chief had spoken at some length, Flick translated his message to Harry and I.

"This is the chief warrior of the island, lads," he said, pointing to the negro, who nodded, "and he says his king is expecting us. No doubt the embassy guessed we would hunt till we found the isle."

"What about Bertha?" I asked impatiently.

"She is dwelling in the Temple of the Star, and news of our arrival has already been conveyed to her. The king wishes to see us, and this chief asks us to enter into the port of Isk at once,"
"Where is the port?" asked Harry, staring round at the black circle of cliffs.

"Through yonder chasm," replied Flick, waving his hand directly in front; "but I don't intend to accept this offer to-night. Once in that narrow passage, and goodness knows what would happen to the boat. What say you, lads? Won't it be better to anchor at the entrance for to-night?"

"It's safe enough in case of storm, I suppose?" said I.

"Quite safe, and also safe from the negroes. Night is coming on, so we'll berth up yonder till the morning."

As both Harry and I approved of this determination, Flick informed the chief of our intention, and in a few minutes the screws of the Carmen were again in motion.
CHAPTER XV.

THE CITY OF AWAZIL.

"Right so this knight departed, and gat him to a black city built of old time, by magic wholly. And the city height, Carlion, was ridden by many enchantments; whereby he who entered its gates was smitten with grievous dole, taking thereafter no pleasure in adventures perilous, or in the rescue of fayre ladies."

We anchored at the head of the bay, almost under the shadow of the frowning cliffs. Here they rose some hundreds of feet, and immediately in front of the yacht they were split from top to bottom. This chasm admitted outside craft into the port of Isk, which was a deep pool at the base of the volcano, and almost in the heart of the island. Here was built the city of Awazil, the capital of the island, and indeed the only town of considerable size it contained, the rest being mere villages. Defended by the cliffs on one side, and the towering height of the fire mountain on the other, the capital of Isk was almost impregnable. It would take a crafty and patient foe to pierce through that narrow inlet and attempt the capture.

I think it was extremely wise of Flick to refuse
to immediately enter this port. Once inside that death-trap, and our yacht would be at the mercy of these morose savages. Without the boat we could not escape; and, once prisoners, Heaven only knows what would have happened to us. Both Harry and myself agreed with Flick that it was wise to anchor the yacht at that giant portal till dawn, when we would decide what was best to be done.

The chief seemed disappointed at our decision—a fact which did not tend to dispel our suspicions of treachery—but he accepted it with stolid apathy, and shortly afterwards disappeared through the chasm, with the red ship and the whole fleet of boats. We were left in the bay entirely alone, and as the night came on swiftly, we found our boat rolling lightly in the darkness, under the mighty cliffs. The negroes had brought us fruit and fresh meat, so that they seemed disposed to welcome us; but we did not believe in their guarantees of good faith.

"They are a treacherous lot," said Flick, as we stood on deck looking at our sombre environments. "No doubt they intended to decoy us into that port, and then shut up the passage."

"Do you think, then, that there is any gate or barrier in that chasm, Flick?"

"I fancy so, Sir Denis; and I'd like to make sure of it before venturing in."
"But you surely don't intend to steam into the port?" said I anxiously.

"Not till I'm certain of our reception," replied Flick grimly. "That chief—by the way, his name is Ixtael—that chief wishes me to see the king to-morrow, and explain my reasons for coming here."

"But you surely won't tell him that you intend to steal the statue?"

"No; but I'll ask him to restore Bertha to you."

"He won't do that," struck in Harry, with a shake of his head.

"In that case we must take the law into our own hands, and get her aboard somehow," said Flick quietly. "She already knows of our arrival, so we shall doubtless see her to-morrow."

"Will you take the Carmen into port, then?"

"Not if I know it. The boat will remain here in charge of Harry; you and I, with half a dozen men, will visit the king."

"Do you think that will be safe?" said Harry doubtfully. "Once in yonder, there won't be much chance of your getting out."

"My dear lad," said Roaring Tom determinedly, "I told you when we set out on this expedition that it was one of peril. We must interview the king, and penetrate into the interior of the island, else I see no chance of getting your sister saved, or of
annexing the statue. Sir Denis and I will take our chance to-morrow. If we are made prisoners, you must wait for twenty-four hours here. If we don't turn up at that time, lift anchor and steam to the flat coast on the other side of the island. It would be impossible for eight men to force that gate of hell yonder; but we might fight our way to the coast on the other side of the island, and then, under fire of our gun, be able to get safely aboard."

"I shan't leave till I save Bertha," said I doggedly. "What is the use of our saving ourselves if she is left behind?"

"She won't be," said Flick savagely. "If we are forced to retreat across the isle, she will be with us. Ay, and the statue, too, if I can get it. It's a risk, and we hold our lives in our hands in visiting the king to-morrow; still, we will go well armed, and hope for the best."

Harry was leaning over the side of the yacht, looking at the mass of rock reared against the sky. Suddenly he turned towards us with a brisk air.

"I say, Flick," he said quickly, "those niggers have gone inside. We are all alone here, so why shouldn't we lower a boat and explore the passage? Then we'll be able to find out if there's a barrier or not."

Tired of doing nothing, Flick readily adopted this suggestion, and leaving me in charge of the yacht
with Jenner, he went, with Harry and four men, into a boat. I saw them pull into the darkness with some misgiving; but we were so surrounded with perils that one more or less did not matter, therefore I took a cheerful view of the situation. The boat's crew were well armed, and moreover carried a dynamite bomb; so, if the negroes attacked the adventurers, I was certain they would get the worst of it. Science was on our side, and our handful was a match for the whole of these barbarians.

There was no moon that night and few stars, as the heavens were overcast with clouds. In front I could feel rather than see the lofty cliffs looming in the darkness; and at the back a grey sea swirled in white wavelets into the shadows. The night was chilly, and there was a feel of rain in the atmosphere which dispirited me. Never did our enterprise seem so foolhardy as at that moment. Bertha in the power of a savage and cruel race, beyond that giant barrier; ourselves shut out in a boat of no great size, with all to accomplish and nothing done. The task seemed hopeless.

Down came the rain, as I expected, lashing the waters white, and driving sharply across the decks, Jenner brought me a cloak, and, wrapped in this, I crouched in the lee of a boat, peering into the darkness, listening intently for the splash of oars. The
wind ripping through the rigging, the swish of the deep-sea rain whipping the spars, and the sucking noises made by the waves lapping the sides of the yacht—these were the only sounds I heard. Flick and Harry had now been away for over two hours, and I was beginning to feel somewhat alarmed at their prolonged absence, when I heard the captain hailing, and the boat shot out of the drifting rain. In a few minutes they were 'longside, up on deck, and, without wasting any time, descended to the comfortable seclusion of the cabin.

"Whew! what a night!" cried Harry, shaking his rough coat. "Steward, bring in some hot water, and brew grog all round. I'm wringing wet."

"Well," said I, anxious to hear the news, "any success?"

"Depends upon what you call success, Sir Denis," growled Flick leisurely. "We went to look for a barrier in that chasm, and sure enough we found one."

"A regular portcullis, Denis," said Harry eagerly, "all strongly formed of iron bars, which go deep into the water, and extend from side to side. I'm glad we did not sail the boat in, for there would have been no getting out again."

"Pooh! nonsense!" said the captain, pouring himself out some rum. "A charge of dynamite would
soon clear the obstruction away. It's mighty ingenions, I allow, and impregnable to savage foes; but against our scientific instruments of warfare it isn't worth a red cent."

"That barrier sounds nasty," said I doubtfully. "After all, it will be best to keep our boat in this bay. What do you say, Flick?"

"I say nothing at present," he replied quietly. "After our interview with the king and with Miss Greenville, I'll come to a decision."

"Why with Miss Greenville? she can't help us."

"Indeed she can, Sir Denis. She has now had some experience of these islanders, and she will be able to tell us if they are to be trusted or not. And now, lads," he added, finishing his grog, "let us turn in. There is a hard day's work before us, and we need all the sleep we can get."

This was excellent advice, and in a quarter of an hour we were in our bunks. I do not know how the others passed the night; but the novelty of the situation prevented sleep coming to me for some considerable time. I thought of Bertha, of the undoubted peril of the next day's visit, of the savage looks of the islanders, and tossed, and turned, and worried my soul far into the night. Towards dawn I fell into an uneasy slumber, from which I was awoke by Harry.
"Get up, Denis," he said, shaking me; "it's close on nine o'clock, and the water is swarming with boats."

Excited by this news, I dressed myself rapidly and came on deck. The rain had passed away during the night, and the bay looked more cheerful under the rays of the sun. As Harry had stated, the waters were covered with the canoes of the negroes; but these kept a respectful distance away, as though they mistrusted our intentions. As usual the predominating colours of the islanders were scarlet and black; and an uncanny-looking lot they seemed. They jabbered a good deal in their own dialect, but never a smile did I see, or a laugh did I hear. Morose, sad, and cruel-looking, one would think they were a race exiled under the grey skies of the north, instead of inhabiting a tropical island. They were the most misanthropic savages I ever saw.

Shortly after we finished breakfast, Ixtael duly arrived in a scarlet-painted barge, manned by rowers. He intimated that the King of Isk was anxious to see us, and again invited Flick to enter the port in the Carmen. Again the astute Flick refused, but accepted the royal invitation on behalf of himself and me. With half a dozen men we entered the barge, first taking leave of Harry, who was much moved at the parting; as indeed he might be, for it was impossible to say what was intended by the negroes.
"Good-bye, lad," said Flick, as he left the yacht; "remember, if we're not back in twenty-four hours, you are to steam to the other side of the isle and wait our arrival."

Harry promised, and waved his hand as the barge shot towards the chasm. Our party were all well armed, and Flick and myself were on our guard against treachery. We had made all as safe as was possible under the circumstances; but there was no denying that the future was uncertain, and that we were committing ourselves to an adventure, the termination of which not one of us could foresee. It was only the thought of Bertha, and her peril, that nerved me to the task; and I confess to an odd feeling of alarm when the barge entered the dusk of that mighty chasm. I am afraid my readers will set me down as a coward, but it is not so. In the presence of actual danger I am as brave as any man; it was the uncertainty and suspense which made me anxious.

The entrance to Isk was certainly worthy of Dante's Inferno. Through a narrow passage, the black walls of which soared aloft some hundreds of feet, streamed a grass-green body of water, making strange noises in the hollows of the rocks. Overhead, I could see the vivid blue of the sky as through a narrow crack, and here in these tremendous depths all was
chilly and gloomy. The passage wound to right and left for some hundreds of yards, then came two brazen gates, which were now swung open and secured on either side. Through these we passed, and the chasm grew wider, the cliffs became lower, till at length we emerged, between fertile shores covered with trees, into an immense pool, whose sun-smitten waters were dazzling after the gloom of that sombre abyss.

Directly in front of us rose the volcano out of its green forests, while on either side the lands fell away into smiling fields carefully cultivated. The pool was encircled by quays of black lava, fitted together with marvellous precision, and these quays fronted the town itself, which nearly enclasped the port in its clusters of houses. The dwellings were also built of black stone, with streets running at right angles; but on the side of the mountain appeared a lofty building of dazzling white marble, built after the fashion of the Parthenon. This was elevated on a broad terrace, whence steps, long and shallow, also of white marble, descended until they were lost in the belt of green which divided the building from the quay itself. It needed no one to tell us that in this white marvel we beheld the Temple of the Star, wherein was enshrined the statue of Venus; wherein was held prisoner my dear Bertha.
It was a curious scene, and one which impressed itself vividly on my memory. Even now I can close my eyes and recall its every feature; the circular cup of green, the sombre assemblage of low-built houses, the white peak of the smoking mountain, the white temple of the goddess, and, amid all, our scarlet barge moving across the still pool, which flashed like a mirror in the rays of the sun. Flick was likewise impressed with the scene, as he stood beside me.

"It's a queer place, this Awazil," said he, looking around. "What dismal-looking houses of black stone. Yonder is the temple. Aha! The statue is there, I expect."

"And Bertha also," I retorted. "She is of more moment than your statue."

Before he could answer, the barge came 'longside the quay, and we disembarked.
CHAPTER XVI.

THE KING.

"A king, good sirs: true, I am called a king, For some deep purpose of the common weal; But, know the name is but a mockery, And I a puppet set upon a throne That rests upon no sure foundation. Ay! My crown's a bauble, and my sceptre naught, And all my seeming state a rarity-show, To make high holiday, and gull the crowd."

A large crowd assembled to witness our arrival, and I noted that the mass of the people differed in nowise from the specimens we had previously beheld. Dwarfish, ill-looking, morose; the inhabitants of Isk were undesirable in every way. That such monstrosities should worship Venus, the goddess of beauty, seemed strange and incongruous. Had they adored her husband, limping, sooty Vulcan, it would have been more in accordance with their looks, and also more suited to the volcanic character of the island. But Venus, queen of love and laughter!—the difference which existed between goddess and worshippers was wide enough to provoke merriment if
not pity. To this day I have not discovered the reason which led those ugly little negroes to choose a divinity so utterly at variance with their looks and feelings and melancholy.

Through the crowd of these serious-faced dwarfs we were guided by Ixtael, who marched before us with his suite and gaudy umbrella. A number of warriors tailed at our rear, so that we proceeded to the palace less like guests than prisoners. I mentioned this to Captain Flick, as we toiled up the main street, but he dissented from my view.

"I think they mean well enough," he said, casting a look on the crowds; "it is only their incurable suspicion which makes them take these precautions. Did you ever see such a dismal lot, Sir Denis?"

"I never saw so dismal a town," said I, glancing at the black houses on either side; "that sunlight, those green trees, the blue of the sky, and the sparkle of yonder marble temple look ironic in contrast to the gloom of these goblins. They should inhabit caverns, and live on roots."

"They are certainly a step higher in civilization than the usual savage," replied Flick; "that stonework surrounding the port is excellently put together. Then they are workers in metal, as witness the iron gates of the chasm; and the town itself seems well
laid out. But there is no denying that they are a misanthropic race, and confoundedly ugly."

"Well, Flick, if this Greek ruler inherits the racial brightness of his Hellenic ancestors, he must find life very weary in the company of these funereal creatures. A month among them would drive me mad. I trust Bertha has retained her senses."

"Oh, she is with the pretty priestesses of the temple, Sir Denis," said Flick in a comforting voice.

From the quay, where we had disembarked, a wide thoroughfare stretched up through the town to a moderately high hill. At the time Flick made his remark about the priestesses, we had reached this point, and saw before us a pleasant and exhilarating scene.

The black town and its melancholy streets stopped short on this side of the ridge, and we now beheld a gloriously green and fertile country, rolling in undulating waves to the foot of a low range of distant hills. Forests skirted the slopes of the mighty volcano, and broad belts of trees intersected fields of corn, already yellow under the ardent rays of the tropical sun. A silvery river twisted like a snake from left to right, beginning and ending in bosky woods. Towards this the highway continued from where we stood on the crest of the hill, and terminated in a grove of trees on the banks of the stream. In the centre of this pleasant view glittered a building
of white marble, on the highest pinnacle of which flashed a silvery star.

"The palace of Hesperus," said Ixtael to Flick—I may here mention that the captain always translated his speeches to me—"the palace of our lord."

"Hesperus, the morning star," said I, looking at the radiant emblem. "I suppose that is the crest of the family?"

"No, it's the Pole Star these folk worship," answered Flick, as we resumed our march; "but isn't this a smiling country; quite a relief after the cemetery on the other side of the hill?"

"It's a pity those niggers don't imitate Nature, and smile also," I retorted; "they should be happy in this Eden."

For an Eden it was; fertile and pleasant under the sapphire sky. We marched onward between rows of palms, from trunk to trunk of which ran festoons of vines, rich with purple clusters of fruit. The dust from the volcano enriched the soil, and the whole valley at the base of the mountain blossomed like a rose. These negroes were evidently excellent agriculturists, for, on a further acquaintance with the island, we found that every portion was under cultivation, save the wide spaces of forest, which were wisely left by the inhabitants to their native savagery. I could see that the country had been inhabited by a
civilized race for many centuries, as there was a settled, peaceful, garden-like look about the place, which reminded me of certain portions of England. Ceres, rather than Venus, should have been the patroness of Isk.

The avenue down which we were proceeding extended about half a mile from the summit of the hill where the town ended. The road was paved with flat pieces of lava, and was raised somewhat above the adjacent fields, so that in time of rain the water could drain quickly off on either side. Walking gently along this splendid causeway, with the green palms, the fruited vines, and yellow fields on either side, with the burning blue of the sky tempered by the meeting fronds of the trees overhead, we found the journey most enjoyable, especially after the many weeks we had spent on the sea. Near the palace we met with many people, who wore white cloaks over their red tunics, instead of black. I afterwards learned that white was the king’s livery, and was worn by all those who approached his presence.

At the end of the half mile, the avenue ran into the grove of trees surrounding the palace. A few yards brought us in sight of it, and we paused to admire its beauties. On an artificial mound it was built, whence descended broad ranges of white marble steps. The building itself was in the Doric
style, and displayed ranges of fluted pillars, supporting a mighty pediment carven with sacrificial processions and sacred emblems. The palace might have been that of Agamemnon, so truly Greek was it in architecture.

"By the way, do you know what the sacred language can be?" asked Flick, to whom Ixtael had been speaking. "It seems that Hesperus only talks the sacred language on ceremonial occasions."

"No doubt it is the Greek tongue," said I, after a moment's reflection. "The original Hesperus brought it with him, and reserved its use to his court. A Greek, proud of his nation's tongue, would jealously preserve its purity among the barbarian dialects of this island. Yes, Flick, I truly believe we shall hear his Majesty speak Attic Greek."

"Well, do you know it?"

"I am a fair Greek scholar, I believe," said I modestly; "but as to understanding this island monarch, I am doubtful of that. He may speak ancient Greek—Homeric Greek—and then I'm done for. However, we'll see what we can do, captain. If he isn't intelligible to me, he will be to you, for he must speak the lingo of his subjects, and you are well acquainted with that."

We had now entered the pillared porch, and thence passed through a lofty door into a large court,
adorned on all sides with ranges of pillars, and open to the sky. The pavement was of polished marble, there was a sculptured fountain in the middle, representing Cupids spouting water from conch shells, and beds of the brightest flowers. What with the brilliant hues of the flowers, the white of floor and sides, and over all the blue arch of the sky, the scene was singularly beautiful. The captain and I stood still, surveying it with admiration, and even our sailors grunted approval.

"By gad, sir," cried Flick, wagging his head, "the king's palace is much prettier than his subjects' faces. I shouldn't mind living here myself for a few weeks."

During our pause, Ixtael, who had left his suite outside, had now exchanged his black cloak for a white one, and making a sign to us, advanced towards the further end of the court, where a purple curtain hung between two mighty pillars. Passing beyond this, we found ourselves at the foot of a wide flight of steps. At the top of these a broad corridor, adorned with flowers, admitted us into a large hall bare of furniture, save a silver chair set on a square of white carpet, under a white canopy. This, I presume, was the throne, but at present it was vacant, and, save Flick, myself, Ixtael, and our six sailors, the hall was empty. Here we waited with great curiosity for the appearance of King Hesperus: as
the whole success of our enterprise depended upon his reception of us. It was a critical moment.

After the lapse of some minutes, during which Flick and myself exchanged a few remarks, we heard the sound of low music, which swelled out loudly as the curtains beside the throne parted, and the king, attended by a score of dwarfish courtiers, and two young men of his own complexion, made his appearance. What with the amazing surroundings, the grotesque ugliness of the negroes, and the burst of music heralding the entrance of this island potentate, it was more like a theatrical performance than reality. Yet reality it was, and serious enough to us in the position in which we then stood.

Hesperus was a singularly handsome young man of five-and-twenty, tall, slender, and well made; possessing in the highest degree the wonderful masculine beauty for which the ancient Greeks were so celebrated. His oval face, unadorned by beard or moustache, was serene and majestic in expression, and his grey eyes surveyed our company—which must have looked strangely dressed to him—with a steady and unwavering gaze. He was arrayed simply in white tunic and cloak, with gilded sandals, and a silver band round his flowing locks. Ornaments he wore none, but stood forward simply clad as any shepherd, royal by right of the shapeliness
of his figure, and the serene beauty of his face. For the first time I beheld a masterpiece of Nature; and Hesperus reminded me of the matchless statue of the Apollo Belvidere. There was no thought, no fretting care in his expression; with unwrinkled brow and steady gaze, he was as alien to our tormenting nineteenth-century civilization, as were the scowling negroes by whom he was surrounded.

With his two companions, who were also handsome after the old Greek type, Hesperus moved to the silver chair and there sat down. His friends and the negro guard stood behind him, and the repulsive looks of the latter accentuated the beauty of the three white men. At once we beheld the highest and lowest specimens of humanity.

As I surmised, the king addressed us in Greek, but it was so archaic in character that, beyond a word here and there, I was unable to follow his speech. Seeing that I did not understand, Hesperus looked at Ixtael for an explanation. The chief, who was singularly independent in his bearing, spoke to his master and nodded towards Flick, to whom the king then addressed himself in the dialect of the island. I was afterwards informed of the gist of the conversation by the captain.

"Who are you, strangers, and whence come you?" demanded Hesperus with great dignity.
"We are Englishmen," replied Flick in the barbaric tongue. "We come from an island off the coast of Europe?"

"Is England near Greece?" asked Hesperus, whose geographical knowledge was evidently limited to that of the chart we had discovered.

"No. It is many miles from Greece."

"Yet you were at Cythera?"

"We were visiting that island," said the captain coolly, "and there we lost one of our friends. No doubt you know how she was taken away by your people?"

"I know, stranger," replied Hesperus serenely; "she is a beautiful woman, and my people have brought her hither to be my bride."

"That cannot be, Hesperus; the woman is already betrothed to this man."

Hesperus turned his unwavering gaze upon me with a look of indifference.

"When I speak, all must yield," he said quietly. "The woman is at present in the Temple of the Star. There she will remain till she becomes my queen."

"But we have come to bring her away."

"It may not be," rejoined the young ruler. "But I am just. If yonder man has lost his bride, I will give him gifts to carry to his own country. It is enough, stranger. Speak no more on this matter, but tell me how you came hither."
Flick, as he afterwards told me, did not think it wise to further urge the restoration of Bertha at that moment; but gave the king a description of our boat, of the power of our arms, and of the way in which we had found the island. To all of this the king listened without showing any signs of surprise or emotion, and his two companions likewise preserved the same indifference. Not so the negroes, who scowled more than ever during the recital, and shot glances of fury at us when Flick ended. When this was over, we waited anxiously to hear what Hesperus had to say; for, now that he knew the object of our coming, it was questionable whether he would treat us cordially. For a few minutes he leaned his head on his hand and surveyed us steadily; then, after exchanging a few words with Ixtael, he spoke mildly—

"To all strangers who come here we award the punishment of death," he said; "but, as you have come during the Truce of the Bride, your lives are safe for three months. If you remain here beyond that period your blood will be on your own heads, for then we shall assuredly put you to death."

"Thank you very much," replied Flick satirically. "But am I to understand that you will not harm us?"

"Till I am wedded to my bride you are safe, strangers. You can explore our island, you can see our cities and the ceremonies of our religion, and you
can bring your fireship into our port. All this for three months; then, if you still remain in our power, you will be slain."

"That is easier said than done," was our captain's grim retort; "we have weapons that can exterminate your whole population."

Hesperus made no sign of terror, but, serenely passive, repeated his speech.

"For three months you are safe," he said, rising. "Bring your vessel into port, and we will give you of our best."

"Fatten us for the coming banquet, I suppose," said Flick, although he well knew that the islanders were not cannibals. "Well, we will stay and try conclusions with you, Hesperus. But one thing I would ask—that my friend here be permitted to see his affianced bride."

"If the priestess Basilea permits, you can see the woman in the Temple of the Star," replied Hesperus. "But call her not the bride of yonder man; she is mine by the will of the goddess."

"We'll see about that," muttered Flick, and bowed to the king.

With the same indifference Hesperus departed, and the music died away as he vanished behind the curtain. The interview had proved more satisfactory than we hoped.
CHAPTER XVII.

THE TEMPLE OF THE STAR.

"Deep in the twilight of the sacred wood,
Engirt by solemn trees the temple stood:
Before the shrine, an altar fair was built,
And thrice a day thereon the wine was spilt.
Thence daily to the blue and stormless skies
Rolled up the grateful smoke of sacrifice:
Within this fane the goddess dwelt alway,
And hither came the worshippers to pray
For health and wealth, and long-extended lives,
For sure success in love, and wished-for wives."

ESCORTED by Ixtael and the guard, we left the
palace of that amiable king with considerable
satisfaction. We had three months in which to carry
out our plans, during which time we would be able
to explore the island unmolested. There is no safe-
guard so strong as superstition, and I knew that as
our persons had been rendered sacred by a special
taboo, not even the fiercest of these islanders would
dare to lift his spear against us. The news seemed
too good to be true; and, when we were once more
on the high-road, bound for the Temple of the Star,
I ranged 'longside of Flick to ask his opinion. The
negroes looked treacherous, and it did not do to trust too much to their good faith.

"What do you think of this business, captain?" said I in a low voice. "A tame ending to our enterprise, isn't it?"

"The end has not come yet," replied he with a frown. "All seems fair enough now; but if you want fighting you'll get enough of it before long."

"But the king assured us——"

"I know—I know! The Truce of the Bride and all that sort of thing. But you mark me, Sir Denis, the king has no power. He is merely a state figurehead, a necessary part of the state religion. He is a puppet, I tell you, made to mouth the speeches of others."

"Why do you think so?" I asked, rather startled by his earnestness.

"Because his speeches were all prepared. The negroes knew well enough why we came. On missing the chart, they must have known how we came; and it is their intention to flatter us into a sense of security, so that they can the more easily capture and slay us."

"Do you think we are in any immediate danger?"

"Oh no! Our lives are safe enough while this religious festival lasts. The question is—how long does it last?"
"Three months."

"Pooh! You weren't gulled by that lie, were you? It lasts more like three weeks, I expect; and then we shall all be slaughtered to grace the marriage festivities. No, no, my friend; at present these negroes know we are too strong for them to openly attack. They are afraid, because we know the secret of their island."

"They could make that safe by killing the lot of us."

"Certainly they might kill you, me, and the half-dozen behind us," retorted Flick; "but the boat is outside, and they dread lest it might sail away and bring the civilized world down on this island. I tell you, Evans, I don't trust those negroes further than I can see them. There is treachery at work. The question is—whose brain framed this scheme?"

"The king."

"Not much. The king is a pretty boy with no brains. No; he must have some prime minister to consult. But never mind that just now. We'll learn the name of this unseen person when we reach the temple."

"From whom?"

"From Miss Bertha. It is true that she may know nothing; on the other hand, she may know a great deal. Wait till we see her."

During this conversation we had reached the ridge
whence the black town could be seen extending round the port. At this point Ixtael touched the arm of Flick, and pointed to the right where the temple stood. He then shouted to his guard, and immediately the negroes wheeled compactly into a narrow path which trended to the right along the crest of the hill. I was delighted with this move, as it showed that the morose negro was obeying the orders of the king, and taking us to the temple. There was still the consent of the priestess Basilea to be obtained, but I trusted that she would not prove obdurate, and that I would soon be clasping Bertha in my arms. To this moment I had looked forward since our adventure at Cythera.

As I have said, the temple was built on the slope of the volcano, facing the chasm, which formed the sole exit from the port. On all sides it was surrounded by woods, which were evidently held sacred to the goddess. We followed the narrow path for some distance; then it turned to the right, and opened out into a wide avenue, separated from the quay below by a broad belt of trees. Immediately before the temple, which was elevated on a kind of artificial mound, extended a broad terrace, flagged with stone, whence a flight of stairs led to the waters of the port. There were several of these terraces placed at intervals in the staircase.
We ascended the steps of this fane, and paused a moment to admire the many columns, the sculptured walls, and the ornate character of the pediment. By reason of the surrounding green, the building looked dazzlingly white, and wonderfully beautiful, as far removed in looks from the sombre appearance of the port of Isk, as was King Hesperus from his ugly subjects. It was an embodiment of the beautiful mythology of the Hellenes, set amidst barbaric savagery. The contrast was almost painful, so strongly was it marked.

Flick drew a long breath as we stood in the porch waiting the return of Ixtael, who had preceded us to announce our arrival to Basilea. The captain's face was flushed, and he looked ardently around at the splendid building.

"Here," said he, "is the fane of Venus. Soon we shall see the celebrated statue which I intend to take to Europe."

"You'll find that a harder task than you think, Flick. Myself, I am not thinking of your thievish errand, but of Bertha."

"True, lad," replied the captain hastily; "the lass first, the statue afterwards."

He nodded significantly, as though he was sure of his plans, and turned to receive Ixtael, who appeared with a grim look of awe on his face.
"The high priestess of the goddess permits you to enter her abode. You only, chief, and the dark-haired youth. The others must wait here, lest they profane the temple."

"Oh, there's no difficulty about that," said Flick cheerfully; and he ordered the boatswain in charge of the men to remain in the porch.

Then we followed Ixtael, and almost immediately found ourselves in a large and lofty hall. It was here that Venus received the worship of her votaries.

On three sides there were colonnades of pillars standing out some twelve feet from the smooth marble walls. Between these pillars, half way up, hung purple tapestries, woven with the attributes of the goddess. Venus rising from the sea; Venus floating through ether in her dove-drawn chariot; Venus in the embrace of Vulcan—all the tales of the Greek mythology were here presented.

Entering between curtains into the open space formed by the pillars, we beheld at the further end a raised dais, reached by shallow steps. Thereon smoked silver tripods, filled with incense, and in the centre a low flame burned on a triangular altar, sculptured with doves and roses and tangled myrtle. Behind this, extending the whole length of the platform, hung a curtain of silvery sheen, on which was wrought, in glittering stones, the ever-recurring
symbol of the Isk religion. The great curtain wavered as we entered, and the gems flashed out strange colours from amid the undulating silver waves. Flick grasped my arm, and whispered lowly—

"It is the shrine of the goddess," he said in an agitated tone. "Behind the veil stands the statue of Praxiteles."

Further comment was forbidden, for Ixtael by this time was grovelling before the veil, with his forehead on the marble pavement. From a side entrance came a woman, tall and majestic, with hair absolutely white, braided in a kind of coronet round her small head. Her face was dignified, but wrinkled and worn; yet it still bore the remains of great beauty. It lacked the serene expression of the king, and, with little difficulty, I guessed that this stately woman was the true ruler of Isk. She was arrayed simply in a long white garment, with no ornaments; and, as she swept past the crouching Ixtael, she looked like some sibyl, like some heaven-inspired prophetess. Truly the goddess had a noble high priestess!

Without a word, this woman came slowly towards us, and gazed steadily in our faces. The light which crept into that silent hall through oblong openings high above the ranges of pillars, showed our appearance with moderate plainness. Basilea—for we knew her name from the king—looked carefully at us,
smiled in a subtle, unpleasant sort of way, and again moved up the hall. She beckoned us to follow, and glided on before like a ghost. There was something uncanny in her silence—something menacing in her looks. Both Flick and myself, influenced by the hush of the temple, by the mute command of the woman, walked up to the dais in silence.

Turning to the right, Basilea led us through a passage, with narrow doors on either side. Pushing open one of these, she again beckoned. We obeyed, and entered, to find ourselves in a cheerful-looking room of no great size, sparsely furnished in a classic style, with light admitted through a circular opening in the roof. From a sofa at the far end, a woman rose to receive us, and came forward with a glad smile. It was Bertha.

She looked as beautiful as when I had last seen her at Cythera, but her eyes had an anxious expression in their depths. Arrayed like Basilea in a garment of white, with her golden hair unbound, she did indeed appear the incarnation of the goddess in whose temple she was held prisoner. Confident that we would rescue her, she expressed no surprise at our appearance, but looked quietly at the pair of us.

I was somewhat startled and annoyed by this cold
reception, as I was prepared to clasp Bertha in my arms. She saw that I felt hurt, and in explanation directed a significant look at Basilea, who stood near, scrutinizing our faces closely. I then saw that we were placed in a position of some peril, and that it would be necessary to behave as though we were strangers. What it cost me to keep aloof from my affianced wife I cannot relate; but, with a great effort, I managed to bear myself so coldly, as to satisfy even that lynx-eyed, jealous woman, who stood noting our every look.

"I am glad to see you, Denis, and you, captain," said Bertha in cold even tones, not changing a muscle of her face. "If I appear indifferent, you know the reason."

Flick, who was puzzled by Bertha’s speech, glanced sideways at the priestess, took in the situation at once, and conducted himself accordingly.

"Does this woman know our tongue?" he asked, not looking at Basilea.

"No. You can speak freely before her," replied Bertha carefully; "but show no excitement in look or tone. You understand me, Denis, I am sure."

"Yes; I understand," was my reply. "How long can we speak to you?"

"For five minutes, I believe."

"Is that woman dumb?"
"No. She is under a vow of silence for the time being, captain. She is a dangerous woman."

"I can see that. But tell me, Bertha, you are well treated?" I asked anxiously.

"Yes; I am treated like a queen. Make your mind easy on that score. How is Harry?"

"All right," said Flick. "He is in the yacht outside. We are afraid to venture into port."

"You need not be, captain. For three months you are safe."

"So the king says; but can we believe that?"

"You can. Until I am married to the king, no harm can be done to you. I have the information from a priestess who has taken a liking to me. She is the only one here I can trust."

"Well," said Flick, after a pause, "since you assure me that this truce lasts three months, I'll bring the boat into port."

"Yes, do," said Bertha, with an eagerness which caused Basilea to glance anxiously at her. "It is the only chance I may have of escape. But can you get out again. I saw that iron gate."

"Dynamite will dispose of that, my dear girl," said I grimly. "So long as there is no danger of our being attacked by negroes, we'll soon get out."

You are safe for three months, I assure you."
Basilea advanced at this moment, waved Bertha back, and pointed to the door. This showed that the five minutes were up, that the interview was over. I was so vexed that I could hardly move from the chamber.

"Bertha, I want to know the story of your adventures since leaving Cythera."

"I have written them out," she replied quickly. "Can you pick up the packet without that woman seeing it? It is under my foot."

"I'll try. Flick, get the old woman out of the room if you can."

Basilea stood by the door, waiting for us to depart. Flick made her a low bow, and in the island tongue begged her to go first. The request appealed to her vanity, and with a little laugh the woman got the better of the priestess for the moment, and she vanished through the door, followed by Flick. The next instant Bertha stepped back, and there lay the letter on the floor. I picked it up, thrust it into my pocket, and without as much as a glance at her I left the room. Quick as I had been, my exit was just made in time, for I came face to face with Basilea immediately I slipped into the corridor. With a frown she waved me to follow her, and with the captain I soon found myself in the hall again. Ixtael was still grovelling before the silver veil,
making his orisons to the goddess. The high priestess touched him with her foot, threw a glance at us, with a repetition of that unpleasant smile, and slowly departed. I was glad to find myself again in the open air.
CHAPTER XVIII.

A COUNCIL OF THREE.

"If we the question now decide
  Our doings may be marr'd by Fate;
Yet her behest may be defied
If we the question now decide.
Come weal, come woe—whate'er betide,
  We can but do our best, and wait.
If we the question now decide
Our doings may be marr'd by Fate."

THAT evening Harry, Flick, and myself held a very important and very necessary council of war in the cabin of the yacht. Ixtael had rowed us outside in his scarlet barge, and immediately on our arrival we had reported to Harry all that we had witnessed. In his turn he had stated that during our absence the yacht had been surrounded by the canoes of the negroes, of whom he had purchased plenty of butter, eggs, fresh fruit, vegetables, and meat. He had paid them in Victorian silver, as they refused to accept gold, of which they appeared to know nothing; but what they would do with such coinage, save wear it as ornaments, he could not
guess. In due time Ixtael ordered all the canoes back into the port, and carefully closed the iron gates for the night. Now we were left as lonely as on the previous evening. Dinner was over, and, seated in the cabin, we were discussing the situation. There was plenty to talk about.

"Well," said Harry, leisurely filling his pipe, "I am glad to know that Bertha is well treated, and finds herself comparatively happy during her enforced captivity. Of course, I assured old Evans, there, that it would be so. Still, I am glad to know it for certain."

"Bertha can look after herself, Hal. She has plenty of pluck, and knew well enough that we would come after her to Isk. She is also certain that she will be rescued before this marriage takes place. Oh, I assure you she prefers to be Lady Evans, of Shropshire, rather than Queen of Isk."

"The rescue," said Flick, nursing his chin reflectively, "will be difficult."

"It will be difficult to accomplish without bloodshed," observed Harry stolidly; "but for my part I rather hope there will be a row, just to show these niggers that they cannot kidnap English ladies with impunity."

"I don't think the negro mind can grasp that idea Hal."
"Then the negro mind must be taught to grasp it," he retorted. "They are a pack of devils on that island. I only wonder that they should be such fools as to keep their hands off us for three months."

"It's a good idea, that," said Flick, with a quick nod. "We have to thank their religious fanaticism for that."

"No, my dear captain, you are quite wrong. We have to thank that very crafty old lady, Basilea. She is playing some game, of which this truce forms an element. What her game is I am not certain; but I have an idea."

"And your idea?"

"Has to do with you, my dear Hal—with you and your good looks."

Harry laughed a trifle uneasily, and frowned. He thought I was chaffing him, and he was prepared to resent my humour in a careless, jocular fashion. As for Flick, the remark quite nonplussed him, and he stared at me from under his shaggy eyebrows with a kind of fierce surprise. I gave neither of them time to make any comment, but, producing Bertha's letter from my breast pocket, I continued my discourse. The above remark may be taken as a text, whereon I was about to deliver a sermon.

"I did not read you all this communication," said I, smoothing out the letter on the table. "If I
remember, I stopped at the point where Bertha arrived at Isk."

"Yes, Sir Denis, you did," observed Flick, following my speech attentively.

"As you see, Flick, the letter is inscribed on the smooth linen used by the natives of Isk instead of paper. That proves that Bertha must have written this after her arrival here. In fact, she remarks as much, and says she was over a week here before she wrote a word. During that time she made a discovery concerning Basilea and Harry."

"Deuce take me if I understand you!" cried my friend testily. "I have never set eyes on the woman."

"I know that; but she has set eyes on your portrait."

"Well, and supposing she has, what then?"

"Why, your portrait, Harry, and your good looks, procured us this truce which we are so glad of."

"Gad!" said Roaring Tom, laughing, "you don't mean to say that Basilea is in love—with Harry's picture?"

"Well," said I slowly, "I think we might put it in that way."

Harry blushed, Flick laughed again, but neither of them made any remark; as a matter of fact, they did not know what to say.

"You know the earlier portion of Bertha's letter,"
I continued. "She woke to find herself on board the scarlet ship. Like ourselves, that poisoned air made her very sick, and she did not recover until she was landed on the Levantine coast. There she was put into a litter and carried across the mountains to Euphrates River. The red ship, as you know, was taken to pieces by its crew like a toy, and transported on the backs of mules by the route we saw marked on the map. Bertha says that the negroes paid the natives of that country well for the loan of the mules, so they must have plenty of money. When this business was despatched, the red ship was put together again on the Euphrates. She was floated again on a navigable part of the river, and when the negroes re-embarked with Bertha, they rowed and sailed south through the Indian Ocean to Isk."

"It was before then that Dosk was lost?"

"It was before then that Dosk was murdered," I answered, glancing at the letter. "He gained nothing by his treachery, for he was thrown overboard in the Indian Ocean, with a stone at his heels. I can't say that I regret the death of that Judas."

"Served the little beast right," growled Flick. "I'd have done the same myself had I caught him. Go on, Sir Denis; we know all this."

"Of course. But now comes the part that you don't know," said I impressively. "On her arrival at Isk,
Bertha was placed in the Temple of the Star, where we saw her to-day. She was presented to Hesperus, who approved of her as his future queen; and she now waits for the elapse of three months to be married to him."

"That is," said Harry grimly, "if we do not get her aboard this boat in the meantime."

"Bertha," I continued, "carried with her, when she was kidnapped, a double leathern photograph frame containing two portraits—one of myself, and one of her brother. Basilea saw the photograph of Harry, and was greatly taken with it."

"I am immensely flattered," said Harry gravely. "You said she was old, Flick?"

"Old and d—d artful, lad."

"Basilea," said I, "made inquiries about Harry, and learned from Bertha that he would certainly try to rescue her. Knowing that all strangers were slain as soon as they arrived, the old lady cast about for some means whereby she could save Harry's life, and see him."

"Why should she take that trouble, Denis?"

"My dear Hal, you are certainly either the dullest or the least conceited of mortals; she took that trouble because she loves you."

"Nonsense!" he said, reddening, and looking uncomfortable.
"I assure you it is a fact, for Bertha puts it very plainly. I am pleased at her fancy, myself, as, to save you, and consequently us, she promulgated this law forbidding the shedding of strange blood until the marriage of Bertha with the king. Thus, my dear Hal, owing solely to your very fascinating face, we have scored one against the inhabitants of Isk. For three months we are perfectly safe."

"And afterwards?" growled Roaring Tom with interest.

"Afterwards, my dear captain, you, I, and the crew shall be slaughtered to grace the festival, and Harry's life will be spared, on condition that he marries this old lady."

"I'll see her hanged first!" said Harry hotly.

"But I thought the priestesses of Venus couldn't marry?" said Flick. "At least, Dosk told me as much."

"No doubt he did," I replied dryly. "But I tell you, Flick, this artful old woman is the real ruler of the island, and can make or unmake laws at will. It is with her we will have to deal, not with the niggers, or with the puppet of a king, who has no real power."

I folded up the important letter, and restored it to my pocket. The accident of Basilea seeing the photograph, the knowledge which we had obtained
that she was in love with Harry, placed a powerful weapon in our hands, and one which I was resolved to turn to advantage. In the mean time, I made no further remark, but waited to hear what the commander of our expedition had to say. Flick meditated for a few minutes, then raised his head and rubbed his hands.

"You are right, Sir Denis; you generally are right," said he brightly. "This discovery made by Miss Bertha will be of great service to us. By using it carefully we may not only rescue the young lady but secure the statue."

"I don't see how, Flick," said Harry doubtfully.

"I do, and I'll explain my strategy later on, lad. In the mean time we must ingratiate ourselves with the islanders, and during the three months make them believe that we do not see through their iniquitous little plans. The first thing is to inspire them with confidence, so to do that we must take the boat into port."

"I protest against that, Flick," exclaimed Harry energetically. "While we lie outside there is always a chance of getting away. But once in that pool, shut in by chasm and iron gates, it will be the devil's own job getting out into open water. If we lose the Carmen, we lose everything."

"Dear lad, we will not lose the boat," said Flick
quietly: "Do you think I am the man to thrust myself into a position whence there is no retreat? I want the ship in that port for two reasons. Firstly, to inspire the islanders with confidence, and to lull them into false security by making them believe that we do not see their game; and secondly, to facilitate the escape of your sister and the getting of the statue. I shall anchor the yacht directly before the temple, so that in case we have to use force, a small party of us may jump on the quay, run up those stairs, and take the shrine by storm. Then it will be easy to ship both your sister and the statue straight off."

"That's all very fine," said I satirically, "but if we storm the temple there will be a row; if there is a row the islanders will be up in arms; and then, how do you propose to force your way through the chasm into this bay again?"

"Why," said Flick sharply, "I have taken stock of that chasm, and it is of ample width for the boat to get through; also there is plenty of water. I will pilot the boat in to-morrow, myself, and then I will know how to pilot her out."

"You forget the serious obstacle of the iron gates, captain."

"Oh, I'll explode those with a submarine mine. Remember we have ample time before us, so it will
not be difficult to lay down a few charges of dynamite. Those gates will be smashed to pieces in double-quick time."

"The negroes will be after us in boats while we force the chasm," objected Harry.

"What! With thirty men armed with rifles picking off the negroes, and our gun yonder smashing the boats! Don't you worry about that, lad."

"It's my opinion that we should lie out here, Flick."

"And it's my opinion we shouldn't," growled the other. "The entrance to this bay is over two miles wide, and I expect a pretty tidy sea can get up. In the event of a storm our boat might be dashed against the cliffs and go smash. Then," he added, with a grim smile, "I expect we should follow the boat's example."

"But look here," said Harry, "why not keep the yacht on the other side of the island, and conduct Bertha across the plain you speak of, which runs from the volcano to the low coasts we saw the other day?"

"Bah! How the deuce am I to berth the boat in an open sea, within hail of a nasty set of reefs? Where is your seamanship, lad? As to crossing the whole length of the island with the girl, why the negroes might cut our party to pieces before we
got half way—to say nothing of the difficulty of getting that infernal statue overland."

"You may well call it an infernal statue, Flick," said I crossly, "for it has led us all into this trouble."

"I admit that; but I now wish to repair my fault by getting Miss Bertha aboard as quickly as possible. Let us put into port, lads, and lie off the temple, then you will see how I can conduct a campaign. I haven't knocked about the world for fifty years without learning a thing or two."

"There is another thing you have forgotten," said Harry suddenly, "we shall probably have to fly under cover of darkness. That chasm is a nasty place for a ship to find herself in at night."

"I don't see why we should fly by night," replied Flick stolidly; "if we storm the temple and carry off your sister by force, it won't much matter if it's night or day. On the other hand, if we can get her aboard by strategy—a course I much prefer—we will probably steal through yonder chasm—"

"In utter darkness!"

"No! By electric light; you forget what a powerful search-light we have aboard."

"H'm!" said Harry, rising. "I forgot the search-light."

After that remark the discussion was dropped by common consent, and we went on deck. The yacht
was riding easily at anchor under a serene and starry sky, and the horn of the moon shining behind the island threw the black bulk of the cliffs directly on us. Their serrated summits arose fantastically against her light; and the wide gap of the gulch looked even blacker than usual in the funereal gloom of our surroundings. The riding lights of the yacht rose and fell as she swung to the tide, and the little wavelets out in the black space of the bay, showed here and there a glint of light. None of us paid attention to the scene—we were all thinking of the stake for which we were playing: I of Bertha, Flick of his statue, and Harry, I have no doubt, of his sister also. Beyond those black rocks, within the massive strength of those iron gates, she was shut in as in prison, isolated among semi-civilized barbarians from her lover, brother, and friend. I made no attempt to gloss over the fact that we had a hard task before us; we were playing for more than Bertha’s liberty, for more than Flick’s looting—we were playing for our lives.

“Well, Flick,” said Harry, after a pause of some length, “you are the commander of this expedition, so do as you please.”

“Good,” said Flick, laying his hand on the young man’s shoulder. “To-morrow the yacht shall be anchored before the Temple of the Star.”
Over the line of the cliffs we could just see the round crest of the volcano, and while Flick was speaking my eyes were fixed on the mighty peak. A heavy pillar of smoke was rising therefrom, and as I looked a red jet of flame played fitfully among the wreaths of vapour. My exclamation drew the attention of my companions to the sight, and we watched the menacing, fire-charged cloud with some uneasiness.

"The deuce!" muttered Flick doubtfully. "It will spoil our plans if that volcano blows up."

I thought so too. In the face of that sign it seemed madness to shut up our boat in the port of Isk.
CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE HEART OF THE ISLAND.

"Chorus. What! wilt thou throw aside thy spear and shield,
To trust thyself unarmed 'mid savage foes?
Theseus. The gods themselves will hold me in their care.
Chorus. Tempt not the gods, lest thou become their sport.
Theseus. I worship all the gods, but also Fate.
Chorus. But Fate herself may clip thy thread of life.
Theseus. Then shall I dare both, gods and destiny."

EARLY next morning Ixtael arrived with a message from the king, urging us to seek shelter in the port; and promising immunity from harm for three months. As we had already made up our minds what course to adopt, Flick curtly informed the chief that we would berth in the pool before noon. Ixtael received the news in his usual stolid fashion, and if he was pleased at our rashness, he gave no hint of his pleasure by as much as a look. In common with his countrymen, he was devoid of all emotion; he seemed to feel neither sorrow nor joy, and accepted existence as a burden to be endured. I never came in contact with so unsatisfactory a being; he was more like a marble image than a man.
When we lifted anchor, he signified that he would pilot us through the passage of the chasm, which was exactly what Flick wanted. Ixtael looked around for the tiller—for the islanders steered in a primitive fashion—and was brought up short against the wheel. Captain Flick volunteered an explanation, but it was impossible to knock the idea of the mechanism into Ixtael's head, so our commander handled the spokes himself, and requested Ixtael to stand by and give directions. This method proved successful, and widened Flick's mind with new information regarding the entrance to the port.

When the negro heard the purr of the screws, and saw the smoke wreathing from the funnel, he showed himself to be nervous, and for the first time I saw an expression of fearful surprise flit across his stolid visage. However, the creature having no nerves to speak of, soon mastered his emotion, shouted to the canoes floating round the boat to get out of the road, and gave his orders to Flick. The Carmen swung easily towards the chasm, and slipped smoothly into its twilight atmosphere. As Flick had said, it was wide enough for two boats the size of ours to enter abreast. Towards the middle it grew somewhat narrower, and at the part where the iron gates were fixed, the sides approached so nearly as only to leave a tiny space between the boat and their blackness. I could touch
the rock on the port side by leaning a trifle over the taffrail.

Here the bleak rocks soared hugely in the gloom, and the water turned black under the keel of the ship. A trail of foam broke from her screws, and streamed through the narrow passage, causing the canoes which followed in our wake to rock ominously, much to the discomfort of their occupants. These yelled with fear as the waters boiled around them, and apparently ascribed the yeasty sea, on which they found themselves floating, to witchcraft. Ixtael kept his eyes ahead, and sang out orders to Flick in a rough voice; while our leader manoeuvred the steering gear with, what seemed to me, miraculous dexterity. Overhead a narrow blue zigzag roofed in the chasm; and I felt as though there were no escape from these tremendous depths. Even Harry, not easily moved, gave a sigh of relief when the passage widened out, and we steamed into the still pool, amid a glare of sunshine. We were in the port of Isk at last, and it was too late to retreat. Wise or rash, safe or dangerous, our boat had reached the heart of the island, and we were fully committed to the adventure.

The circular quay which fronted the town, and encircled half the cup of the port, was covered with people, all eagerly waiting to see the yacht. A
report of our intentions had been carried into the city by some of the canoes, and when the Carmen, looking huge in comparison with the flotilla, swung into the pool, a great gasp of wonder went up from the negroes. We could see on the terraces of the temple a group of priestesses, watching the—to them—wonderful sight, and I hoped and prayed that Bertha might be among them, so as to derive comfort from the near neighbourhood of her brother's boat. But, although I used a strong marine glass, I could not pick out her face; therefore I concluded that the crafty Basilea had confined her to a room for the time being. I had no leisure to remark on this to Harry, as he was busy with Flick arranging for the anchorage of the boat.

Intimating to Ixtael that the yacht would berth by the quay fronting the Temple of the Star, Flick turned her nose in that direction. Half-way across the pool, he paused, and shouted down to stop the engines.

"We'll lie out here, lads," he said rapidly. "I don't want the boat to touch land, as it may be difficult to prevent the negroes rushing aboard. What say you?"

We both agreed that it would be rash to trust the islanders so far, and in a few minutes the anchors dipped under, and the vessel swung to her moorings.
We lay almost in the centre of that dazzling eye of water. On the one side the smoking mountain, with the white temple, set like a jewel amid the woods clothing its base; on the other the rugged crack of the chasm, its depths black and uninviting, while round one semicircle ran a line of beetling cliffs, round the other the broad quay, the green line of the ridge dividing it from the plain of the palace, and between, the lines of black houses, intersected by regular streets. All this strange scene glowed in the strong sunlight, for the great orb now stood directly above, and rained down heat and radiance into that grim black hollow. Harry glanced around when the vessel swung to her anchor, and drew a long breath.

"A queer place, and unpleasant," he said thoughtfully. "Well, we're in; I only hope we'll be able to get out as easily. Where do you say Bertha is detained, Denis?"

"In yonder white temple," I replied, waving my hand; "and there also is the famous statue which Flick so much desires."

"If we can rescue Bertha, I don't care two cents about the statue," said Harry savagely; "but we may as well have a try for it, after all our trouble. I say, Flick," he added, raising his voice, "what's to do now? Going ashore?"
"Not yet, lad; we'll luncheon first, and find out the history of the island from Oxtail here."

"Ixtael!" said Harry, laughing at Flick's rendering of the word; "he doesn't look a likely person to tell anything."

"I'm going to feed him up, and give him wine, my boy. Then we'll see what he knows about the religious business of this island."

"Why do you want to talk theology to him?" asked I curiously.

"Well," said Flick smartly, "I guess I want to find out how that old Basilea runs the show."

"Ixtael may refuse to reveal the sacred mysteries," said I significantly.

"We'll see about that," replied Flick dryly. "When the wine's in, the wit's out, lad."

Now that we were in the port, our commander took the precaution to post two sentries, armed with cutlasses and revolvers, who constantly paced up and down the decks, so that none of the negroes could board the ship. These sentries were relieved every few hours; and the whole time we passed at Isk, this discipline was never relaxed. The king and his suite, Ixtael and his umbrella-bearer, visited the yacht; but, other than these, no inhabitant of the island was permitted to mount the gangway of the Carmen. We were too surrounded by dangers to be negligent, even in the slightest degree.
I discovered at luncheon that the Isk islanders had not reached the point of civilization necessary to enable them to sit in a chair and take their meals European fashion. Ixtael, who had glumly accepted Flick’s invitation to luncheon, sat cross-legged in a corner of the saloon, and ate with his fingers. However, he seemed to appreciate our bill of fare, and paid particular attention to the pale ale. Indeed, he drank so much of it, that he became slightly intoxicated, although he gave no sign, other than talking more than usual.

After luncheon we sat in the near neighbourhood of Ixtael, and Flick began to ask questions about the manners and customs and religious ceremonies of Isk. The chief, his tongue unloosened by strong drink, was less sulky than usual, and replied very amiably to our questions. Harry, having learned the barbaric tongue from Dosk and Flick, understood the man easily, but I, less accomplished, for it had not been my intention to join the expedition, followed him with some difficulty. However, I gathered the general drift of his remarks, and here report in my own fashion the description given by him of his land and fellow-countrymen.

“Many years ago, O great white chiefs,” said Ixtael, in his harsh voice, “our fathers came eastward to this isle from the Great Land.”
"Africa," explained Flick. "I thought as much."

"Our fathers," resumed Ixtael, "fled from the hosts who came on our country from the Dry Lands, far within the heart of the country. We were few—I speak of our fathers—and so, seeing no escape from flying arrows and deadly spears, we launched our boats, and departed towards the East. For many weeks, say the old chronicles, our fathers, with wives and babes, drifted on the sterile breast of the sea; then the Holy Snakes and the Steady Star, which shines overhead, guided the canoes to the smoking mountain. Thus was Isk populated by our sires."

"You see," said Flick, interrupting the chief, and turning to us, "he talks of snake worship and adoration of the Pole Star. Hence the sacred symbols tattooed on his breast. Do you still worship snake and star, in addition to the goddess?" he asked in the barbaric tongue.

"Nay, chief," replied Ixtael gloomily. "When the Lady Venus sent hither her servants, we turned from the worship of those things to adore her divinity. Yet, by the mouth of her priest Hesperus, she ordered that the snakes should coil round the isle, and that the star should shine over her head. But these are foolish things now," added Ixtael, shaking his head. "Lady Venus do we worship; eternal loveliness, and the fecundity of Nature. Venus has given us many
children, and we that were few are now a mighty nation, ruling this island and the girdling seas."

"Where ignorance is bliss," muttered Harry grimly. "These islanders are as conceited as the Chinese, and hardly as civilized. 'A mighty nation,' forsooth, this handful of black dwarfs, prisoned in an unconsidered geographical trifle."

"Everything is by comparison," said I mildly, "and these islanders, knowing nothing of Western civilization, save what stray facts have been picked up by the embassies to Cythera, naturally think themselves the salt of the earth."

"How many priestesses of Venus are there, Ixtael?" asked Flick.

"There are but ten," replied the negro; "of these Basilea is the wisest, and Myrtea is the fairest. They are all of the blood of Hesperus, and serve the goddess in virgin loveliness. No priestess can wed or bear children, but the royal daughters of Hesperus dedicate themselves to the service of the temple."

"A kind of nunnery," said Harry, raising his eyebrows; "the idea doesn't seem to fit in with the sensuality of Venus worship. And how many kings have you, Ixtael?"

"Of a truth the white chief is laughing at me," answered Ixtael angrily; "there is but one king—the fair and gracious Hesperus."
"But the two youths who stood behind him?"

"They are his brothers, and are permitted to live, lest the king die. All other males of the royal house are cast into the hollow of the smoking mountain when born."

"A bloodthirsty race," growled Roaring Tom.

"These are the laws of the sacred goddess, O chief. The daughters to the temple, the sons to the tomb; but three must be kept alive lest the royal race fail, and disaster fall on the isle."

"What disaster are you talking about?"

Ixtael lifted his hand and pointed upwards.

"Saw ye not the smoking mountain, O chief? Ever it smokes, and at times pours forth red flames, which make the island tremble. Were it roused, the wrath of the smoking mountain would overpower Isk. But, by the will of the goddess, we have been preserved from harm for many thousands of years. Her image is the visible sign of her word."

"What do you mean, Ixtael?" demanded Flick sharply.

"Who runs may read, white chief. The holy image of the goddess, brought long ago, from Cythera, by the first Hesperus, stands in the shadow of our great temple. While it remains there, the smoking mountain cannot hurt us, nor can woe come to Isk. But if that image is taken away from our island, then
will the wrath of the mountain bury Isk deep in the sea."

"Who says this?"

"Many have said it from the beginnings of time. The last who spoke was the high priestess Basilea. She is a prophetess, and is holy above all."

"Above the king!"

Ixtael had risen to his feet, and was now walking towards the cabin door; there he turned and fixed a piercing glance on the three of us.

"Ay, white men," he said solemnly, "above the king."

When he disappeared, Flick turned towards Harry and me with a frown.

"If the islanders believe that the safety of Isk depends upon the statue," said he, "the task of stealing it will be very difficult, unless——" and he looked at Harry.

"Well," said that young man, "unless what?"

"Unless we can make use of Basilea's power," replied Flick significantly.
CHAPTER XX.

A ROYAL VISIT.

"Scatter flowers, in fragrant showers,
Deck with flaunting flags the towers:
Let the people joyful be,
On this high occasion royal,
For here behold, in crown of gold,
Draped in purple, fold on fold;
Lo! the king in majesty
Smiles upon his subjects loyal."

AFTER that important conversation with Ixtael, we went ashore to explore the town. Jenner remained in charge of the boat, and he was cautioned by Flick against letting a negro set foot on the decks of the Carmen. We armed ourselves with revolvers, and took with us six men, whereby to provide against any treachery; although we were satisfied that, however much the negroes disliked us, they would respect the sacred truce proclaimed by Basilea. She was our sole protector against surrounding dangers, and our lives, so to speak, lay in the hollow of her hand. With feminine inconstancy she might change her mind, and then we might have to fight for our lives; but
I did not think she would alter existing circumstances until she had seen the original of the portrait. Our future mainly depended on the issue of the first interview between the high priestess and Harry Greenvile.

It was our intention to proceed to the Temple of the Star, as Harry wished to see Bertha, and I was also anxious to again speak with her on the important subject of her rescue. To this end Flick, Harry, and myself, with our half-dozen sailors, landed on the quay immediately below the fane, and advanced towards the avenue of palms, whence broad steps led upward. At the foot of these we found a double rank of negroes drawn up, with scowling faces and glittering spears. One who was in command, a replica of Ixtael for looks, advanced towards us as we approached, and forbade our advance.

"Basilea, the most holy servant of Venus, permits no strange foot to profane the sacred courts," he said grandiloquently.

Thereupon a conversation ensued between him and Flick, whence it appeared that preparations were being made for a festival to the goddess, and until it took place, in about three days, no male—not even the king—was allowed to enter the temple. This prohibition, which came from the subtle Basilea, rather dismayed us, and we looked at one another with some chagrin.
"There is evidently no chance of seeing Bertha until the end of the week," said Harry, looking savagely at the line of black dwarfs. "Hang it, Flick, why shouldn't we break through this crowd of pigmies?"

"What! and bring the whole town about our ears, lad? Where is your sense, Harry? We cannot act in this high-handed manner at present. We must accept the inevitable, and show all respect to the customs of the island."

"You are quite right, Flick," said I, anxious to quell Harry's impatience. "We must be foxes rather than lions. No doubt we will have plenty of fighting before long, so at present let us take advantage of Basilea's truce, and stroll round the town."

Since there was no help for it, Harry somewhat sulkily agreed to this course, and, leaving the negro guards to watch over their shrine, we returned to the quay to seek the principal portion of the town. As we moved on I could not forbear admiring the skill with which the black lava stones of the pavement were put together. The path was broad and smooth, and a facing of white stone ran round its margin where it encircled the pool. Besides our own yacht, the scarlet ship lay in the distance under the shadow of the cliffs facing the town, and she was the only craft of any size that I could see. Where the houses were
thickest several piers ran out a little distance, and round these were collected canoes and fishing-boats, all small and primitive-looking. The nautical appliances of Isk did not hint at any trade or connection with the outside world.

"I don't suppose these misanthropic niggers go beyond the coast of their own island," said I, as we walked along. "There seems to be no boat of any size in which they could cross the seas."

"Except the scarlet ship," replied Flick, glancing at that curious vessel, "and she is only used for sacerdotal and political business. As to trading with Africa, or with other islands, you know well enough, Sir Denis, that such could not possibly be the case. Connection with the mainland would soon have revealed the whereabouts of Isk to the civilized world."

"Such a revelation wouldn't be much good," interpolated Harry. "I am sure no civilized country would trouble itself about this dismal race."

"It might ignore the race, and take possession of the island."

"I don't see that. The island has no importance, either political or commercial. Isk is isolated from the rest of the world, and, so far as I am concerned, it will continue to remain so. Once we get Bertha away, I don't want to revisit it."

We had now reached the quay, which extended
before the town, and here we were joined by Ixtael and his umbrella-bearer. Indeed, he went nowhere without the umbrella, which, as I afterwards learned, was the sign of his authority. I have heard of the same custom prevailing in Africa, and I suppose the islanders brought it in the past from the mainland. Since he had broken bread with us, Ixtael seemed more amiable than usual, and he volunteered to take us through the town. He explained everything to us, and answered all our questions in the most good-natured manner. Indeed, for so taciturn a man, he had quite a flow of conversation on this occasion.

The city of Awazil was as dismal a place as well can be conceived. It was built on the hill which sloped up gently to the ridge before mentioned. A broad road led up from the principal pier to this ridge, overtopped it, and ran on through an avenue of palms to the king's palace. This was the road before described, which we had taken when we went to see Hesperus. On the pool-side slope it was a gloomy thoroughfare, with one-storey houses on either hand, built of the invariable black lava; but the pavement of the road was white, thereby showing that it was the highway to the palace. The sight of this white road sloping upward between black houses was singular in the extreme.

To right and left of the royal road lay the city, a
dense mass of tiny houses intersected by narrow lanes running at right angles. Many of the dwellings were mere shells, with no front wall, the whole being open to the street. These were shops, and herein, on low counters were collected the goods of the negro traders. The articles displayed for sale showed a comparatively advanced state of civilization. There were woollen cloths, dyed scarlet and black, or left white; elaborately chased silver ornaments; drinking vessels of pottery, painted with the sacred symbol of Venus, and many other things of the same class, none remarkable in any degree for beauty. In the market, a wide circular space at the foot of the hill, we saw fish, fruit, bread, and wine displayed for sale; and also various foods, of whose nature we were ignorant. The whole display reminded me of nothing so much as the account given by Prescott of ancient Mexico, although these island negroes were by no means so civilized as the Aztecs. Their advancement seemed to have been stunted in its development; but, in comparison with other black races, they were wonderfully civilized. In another thousand years or so, there would no doubt be a high state of civilization on the island. But this was not to be.

Through the streets moved a busy crowd, all intent on their various occupations. The islanders
never smiled, talked but little, and generally conducted themselves towards each other with scowling reserve. Even the children had caught the infection of taciturnity, and played in silence. The black city, the black faces, the absence of merriment, and the general restraint of one and all, impressed me most disagreeably. Beyond the ridge, in the smiling plain, in the white palace of the king, all was sweetness and light; here all was gloom and quiet. One would have thought that Awazil was a city populated by the souls of the lost. Why so dreary a race should have chosen a merry goddess like Venus for deity was more than I could understand.

"She was forced on them," replied Flick, to whom I imparted this notion; "it was the accident of Hesperus arriving with the statue of the goddess that turned these negroes to the worship of Aphrodite. He might have brought Jupiter or Vulcan, the latter of which would certainly have been more in keeping with the nature of these islanders. But I suppose they were impressed by the Greek beauty of Hesperus and his wife, by the matchless proportions of the statue, and so they left snake and star to adore the goddess of beauty. But to them I fancy she has lost her attributes, and is worshipped—as Ixtael plainly hinted—solely as the Venus of fecundity."

Silver, being very common in the island, was not
made use of by way of barter and exchange; but the money, as I may call it, used was turquoise stones. These were a rarity in the land, and accordingly, in the eyes of the negroes, they equalled our silver in value. Gold I saw none; and it did not appear to be known in Isk. The coins of silver given by Flick in exchange for food adorned the necks of several women, who admired the glitter and shape of the pieces. Many wore bracelets and tiaras of silver; and a few of the most wealthy adorned themselves with turquoise stones; but these, as I have said before, mainly played the part of money in the economy of Isk.

While we were thus exploring the town, and examining this unique civilization, the course of our wanderings led us into the royal road, at a part near the crest of the ridge. Anxious to look on a bright scene after the gloom of Awazil, and also desirous of pointing out the palace to Harry, we climbed up to the top. Before we reached it, a negro came running past with extraordinary swiftness, his white cloak streaming behind him, and a white wand which he carried pointed directly ahead. We wondered why the man in the king's livery should thus fly, when Ixtael uttered a guttural cry as he stood on the rising ground looking towards the palace.

"The king! The fair and royal Hesperus!" he
cried; and thereupon ran down the Avenue of Palms, through which we saw a body of men approaching.

Not knowing what the desertion of Ixtael and the coming of the king might mean, we drew close together, fearing an attack. Flick, as commander, in front, myself and Harry behind him, and our six men in a line at our backs. Our revolvers were all ready, and the sailors loosened their cutlasses; but there was no need for these preparations, as the king and his guard, on nearer view, proved to be entirely unarmed. The royal cortège was simplicity itself.

As a matter of fact, it was scarcely larger than our own company. The king was accompanied by his two brothers, and the three were clothed in white tunics, with sandals and cloaks—all after the Greek fashion of dress. Eight or nine negro guards in scarlet tunics with white cloaks followed, and these only bore wands of white wood. Never was there so simply dressed a king as Hesperus; beyond the silver circle on his head, and a light silver wand tipped with a cluster of turquoise stones which he carried, there was nothing to distinguish him from his brothers. The three young men were regal in mien, and as physically perfect as men could be. I never beheld three more splendid youths.

"Hail, strangers!" said the king, when he met us. "I hear many things of your vessel and her
wonders. These have I come to behold with my own eyes."

"We shall be delighted to show all to your majesty," replied Flick; "but first let me present to you one you have not seen before."

Hesperus fixed his eyes on Harry's handsome face and stalwart figure with a look of admiration. While not so perfect as the Greeks, my friend was much stronger and more bulky. The king was an Apollo for beauty; Harry a Hercules for strength.

"Art thou Greek?" he asked of Harry, in the Hellenic tongue; whereat Harry, not understanding him, glanced appealingly at Flick. Seeing this, the king repeated his question in the tongue of the isle.

"No, Hesperus," replied Flick, on his behalf, "my friend is English, like myself, and we come from a far isle in the north."

"It breeds good men, that isle," said Hesperus, looking from Harry to Flick—not a glance did he throw on my plain looks. "But come, strangers, lead me to your bark; and you, Fairhair, walk beside me."

Thus permitted, Harry walked next to Hesperus, who talked to him of many things in the barbaric tongue of the islanders, and asked many questions. When he learned that Bertha was the sister of Harry, he did not seem astonished, but remarked that he had guessed as much from the family likeness between
them. Whence I thought that Hesperus was shrewd in observation.

It would be wearisome to set down in detail the events of that afternoon. Hesperus, who seemed to have no fear, came on board the yacht with Ixtael and his two brothers. We refused to allow the negro guards to set foot on our decks, so they stood on the quay and kept watch on our boat till the return of the king. Indeed, I wondered that they, who were so jealous of their royal line, should permit their ruler and the sole remaining brothers to go on board a strange boat among strangers. But, as I afterwards learned, Basilea had ordered Hesperus to pay this visit, and she had assured him that he would come to no harm; also the iron gates of the chasm were closed, so that our boat could not pass through. Ignorant of our power in the matter of weapons, the negroes deemed that, prisoned as we were in the pool, they could destroy us at will. They would have done so long since, but for the restraining word of Basilea.

Hesperus was very gracious, and wondered greatly at the comfort of the boat, the like of which he had never seen before. He was still cold and stately towards us, and, indeed, he talked of our deaths in anything but a pleasant fashion. I do not think he feared death himself, and he thought we were likewise indifferent. The only touch of human feeling he
showed was in his conversation with Harry, to whom he seemed to have taken a great fancy.

"When your sister becomes my queen," said he frankly, "I shall ask Basilea to spare your life, and let you dwell with me. In truth, I am weary of these black dwarfs; and my brothers, not being my equals, cannot speak freely to me. You are different, stranger; you are frank, and free, and merry. If your sister is as blithe, a happy husband shall I be."

On hearing this speech, I felt very indignant, and, to own up, honestly, jealous. Hesperus was a far handsomer man than I, and, backed by the power of his kingship and of the hag Basilea, I feared lest he should induce Bertha to become his wife. But at once I put the thought away as unworthy, for I knew well that she loved me, and me only, and that not for the king and his fair face would she prove false to our engagement.

When the time came to bid adieu, which was at sundown, Hesperus shook hands with us all round in the English fashion. This he only did to Basilea, whom alone he regarded as his equal. We ought to have been flattered by this condescension; but I am afraid I for one was not. Jealousy, again, I regret to say.

"Farewell!" said Hesperus, as he departed, "in three days I shall meet you at the festival of the goddess, and we shall hear the will of the most holy Basilea."
CHAPTER XXI.

THE FESTIVAL OF VENUS.

"Hail, Queen Venus, goddess holy,
See us bending, silent, lowly,
    In thy dwelling, pure and fair;
From thine altar to the skies,
Curls the smoke of sacrifice,
    White wreaths in the sunny air.
We implore thee, we beseech thee,
That our chants of joy may reach thee;
We beseech thee, we implore thee,
As we humbly kneel before thee,
    Hear, O goddess—hear our prayer."

For the next two days we saw nothing of the king, and we were still debarred from entering the Temple of the Star. All this was the work of Basilea, as I afterwards learned; for, her fancy being taken by Harry's looks, she had devised certain plans to gain him, making use of her sacerdotal power to forward such schemes. Indeed, she was the most powerful person in the island; as, being the high priestess of Venus, she was believed to be greatly favoured by the goddess, and it was by favour of the divinity alone, so the inhabitants believed, that the volcano remained harmless. The islanders were
afraid of Venus, by reason of this volcano, which they held, after the Greek fashion, to be the workshop of her spouse, Vulcan. The common belief was, that were Venus to be offended, she would plead with her husband, and cause the volcano to overwhelm Isk, and bury it under the waves. With this visible terror constantly before their eyes, it may be guessed how dreaded was the goddess—how supreme was the high priestess. Hesperus ruled the island, it is true; but Basilea, by the power of superstition, ruled the king. And so, as I said before, she held our future in her grasp—for weal or woe.

Harry, with the flippancy of youth, was disposed to scoff at the fancy taken to his good looks by a woman old enough to be his mother; but both Flick and myself warned him against treating the matter lightly. The chance that Bertha had, carried away the portrait, the accident that Basilea had seen and fallen in love with the young man's looks; these had smoothed our path for us in no small degree. We advised him, should he come face to face with her, to be wary in his conduct, lest her love changing to hate, as is the way with some women, she should withdraw her protection, and doom us to destruction.

"Not that we will die without a fight for it, lad," said Flick gravely; "but it might happen that Basilea may change her mind before we can get your sister
aboard. In such a case it might go hard with us, for we cannot leave Isk without Miss Bertha; and should we be forced to storm the temple, there would be bloodshed, and loss of life."

"I don't think these negroes can fight much!" said Harry.

"On the contrary, I fancy they are perfect devils when roused," replied Flick. "It is not the quality, but the quantity I fear; we may be overwhelmed by numbers. And, after all, Harry," he said, resting his hand on the lad's shoulder, "is it not well to do our work as quietly as possible? For love of you Basilea may give up Bertha—she may give up even the statue—and, those aboard, we can blow up the iron gates with dynamite, and stand out to sea. Once away from this isle, and you need have no fear of Basilea."

"I hardly like to make use of her in the way you say, Flick. It seems dishonourable."

"You must act for our common safety, lad. Basilea is a tigress, and she will have no scruples with you. Smooth her down, and we escape, perhaps with both prizes. Treat her with contempt, and there may be trouble."

Although Flick talked sound sense, I quite saw Harry's side of the matter. It was no light thing for an honourable man to deliberately deceive a woman who had set her heart on him. With him, I admitted
that it was dishonourable; but in the straits to which we were reduced, I saw no other chance of accomplishing the twofold object of our expedition, and coming off with our lives. Needs must when the devil drives, as the proverb has it; therefore I added my urgings to those of Flick, so that in the end Harry promised to sacrifice his scruples, and make what use he could of Basilea. I was greatly cheered that he agreed to do so; although, honestly speaking, I feared he was too inexperienced in the ways of the sex to baffle the cunning Basilea. She was a woman armed with immense power, and subtle beyond all conception. I foresaw, then, that it would require all our dexterity to counteract her schemes, and escape from the island with our prizes; and, as events proved, my forebodings were true. In fighting the high priestess, we matched ourselves against no ordinary foe.

While waiting for a sight of Basilea and Bertha, the latter of whom I hoped to see after the festival, we made ourselves acquainted with the city and the neighbourhood about it. The land was admirably cultivated, and although the island was well populated—the number of people amounting in the aggregate to some fifty thousand—there was ample food for all. Food, indeed, was cheap in Isk, and I was amazed at the provisions which could be bought for a single blue stone. Hesperus had sent to each
of us a bag of these turquoises, so that we could buy anything we had a mind to; and, for the rest, he ordered that meat, fish, corn, and fruit should be given to us without payment in such quantities as we required. Indeed, throughout our sojourn on the island, Hesperus treated us more as honoured guests than as prisoners. But we were regarded as the latter, for the islanders thought we were at their mercy, through being shut up in the port. They did not know how useless, with the resources we had on board, were their iron gates to stay our yacht. A well-laid mine would shatter those gates, strong as they were, into a thousand pieces, though unfortunately—but that comes later on in the story; at present I have to speak of Myrtea, and of the festival of Venus.

On the morning of the third day, we heard the sounds of music in the dismal city of Awazil. For the first time since our experience of them, the islanders gave themselves up to pleasure, and made merry after a dreary fashion of their own. Their black cloaks were discarded, for, in honour of the goddess, they wore white garments over their scarlet tunics, and crowned themselves with flowers. When we went ashore, we actually saw some of them dancing, men and women, to the shrilling of pipes and the beating of drums, and oddly enough they looked, with their serious black faces, as they capered
solemnly to the sound of barbaric music. Wine there was in plenty, but not even wine could make them really merry. Like the English, they took their pleasures seriously, and amused themselves that day in a fashion which smacked of duty rather than of agreeable relaxation. So far as heartfelt joy was concerned, I considered the festival a failure; but, I have no doubt, they thought they were having a rollicking time.

Throughout that day the negroes feasted and danced and sang strange barbaric songs. The religious festival was to take place at night in the temple, when the king would be present. Then the doves sacred to the goddess would be slain, the sacred fire would be kindled on the altar, and the priestess, with loosened hair, would dance the sacred dance to the singing of the people. Wearyed out with the tumult on shore, we withdrew to the yacht, and kept our sailors aboard, lest, in the frenzy of the festival, trouble might come of their mingling with the crowd. We had no wish that accident should upset our plans, and bring a horde of fanatics about our ears.

On the quay we saw the people gazing at our ship; some even paddled themselves out into the pool in canoes, others swam like otters—for the islanders were as much at home in the water as on the land;
but none of them attempted to board the yacht, although we were ready for any attack. There was no need for fear, although we knew it not, for Basilea, for the furthering of her plans, had laid a taboo on the boat, and it was death for any votary of the goddess to touch even the side of the yacht. We three sat on deck after dinner, smoked our pipes, and talked of our plans; as the sunlight died out of the sky, the cup, wherein the town was built, filled with darkness, and myriad lights began to sparkle in the dark city.

The illumination of the temple immediately in front of us was the most splendid of all. Lamps of all hues were set on either side of the terraced staircases which rose to the fane itself. Lines of pale yellow fire enwreathed the many pillars of the building, and outlined the triangle of the pediment. At the summit of the temple a large globe of white fire gleamed like the moon—the moon which, even at that hour, was glimmering in pearly lustre behind the black cone of the mountain. Red lights flared fiercely along the quays, and the city itself flamed a many-coloured constellation of stars. The stars themselves, mellow in the purple sky, looked down calmly on the brilliance in the hollow, which for the moment was equal to their own.

A gong roared from the temple, followed by the
strident shrieking of trumpets. Then we saw the white-robed people streaming in thousands along the quay towards the great staircase. No voice was raised in song, not even a laugh or a cry could be heard; but, dominated by religious fear, that great multitude toiled upward in silence to the glimmering temple, which glittered like a jewel set in the blackness of the forests. And, as if adding to the illumination, a pale streak of fire played fitfully through the pillar of smoke that curled lazily from the mighty volcano. Despite our position, our fears, and anxiety, the scene fascinated us all, and we stood staring at it with delight and wonder, until the gong, rolling its hoarse music for the third time, summoned us to the rites of the goddess.

"Well," said I, as we rowed ashore, "I am fond of the classics, and I have studied them closely, but never did I expect to see an antique religious ceremony in honour of Venus."

"There are strange things done in far-off lands," replied Flick, with a shrug, "of which this is not the least strange. It will be something to talk about in Devon, if we escape."

"Ay, Flick—if!" said I bitterly, for I remembered how his desire to gain the statue had led to the kidnaping of Bertha, and to our imprisonment in this strange and undiscovered isle.
He said nothing in reply, knowing what was in my heart, but he addressed himself to Harry, who sat near him.

"Have you your revolver, lad?"

"Yes; so has Denis, and the men have theirs. With four men, and us three, all armed, there will be no danger, Flick."

The captain grunted his approval, and having instructed the two sailors left in charge of the boat to keep near to the quay, so that we might have the means to regain the ship in case of treachery, he climbed the staircase, with Harry on one side, myself on the other, and the four men behind. The stairs were white with worshippers pressing upward, but at the sound of our strange voices they parted like the waves of the sea, and we passed up easily between their ranks. Very queer we must have looked in the eyes of these black people, in our rough yachting suits and caps; and strange they looked in ours, with their dwarfish stature and sullen faces, whence all the joy of the festival had not been able to banish the look of sadness. To me the whole weird scene was like a dream, and I could hardly believe that I was awake and in the nineteenth century.

At the door of the temple there was a great blaze of torchlight, and a few steps in front of the throng
which crowded the portico stood a woman, tall and slender, clothed in white, and deeply veiled. In her hand she held a silver cup, encrusted with rough turquoise gems, and when we appeared she moved swiftly forward. At first, deceived by the height, I thought she was Bertha, but the moment she spoke I perceived my mistake. It was not Bertha, nor did I know the voice, but later on I guessed that she was Basilea. Like a true woman she betrayed herself when she came to Harry.

"Drink, stranger!" she said, holding out the cup to Flick. "The goddess welcomes you to her holy house. Drink."

Flick hesitated, thinking the cup might contain poisoned wine, whereupon she laughed in a jeering manner, and, slightly lifting her veil, sipped the beverage herself. Captain Flick grew red with shame, as he perceived that she sneered at his hesitation, and, seizing the cup, he drank some of its contents. Then it was presented to me, and I followed Flick's example. Lastly, the woman came to Harry, where he stood, noble and splendid, among the dwarfish crowd. She looked closely at his face, and I heard her draw a long breath; after which she bowed before him, and lifted the cup, slightly varying the speech of invitation.

"Drink, Adonis," she said sweetly. "Venus, thine
handmaiden, welcomes thee to thy dwelling, where thou wilt be the lord of her servants."

With a look of wonder at this strange address, Harry drank. Basilea then disappeared, the crowd parted, and we entered the great hall where the silvery veil hung before the statue of the goddess.

Here a surprise awaited us. The roof had been removed, and overhead glittered the star-gemmed sky, and the glory of the summer moon. By what mechanism this had been managed I cannot say, but assuredly the islanders of Isk were more civilized than any of us hitherto had believed. On the daïs stood Hesperus, robed in purple, with silver crown and sceptre; beside him his two brothers, in white; Ixtael in scarlet. The king did not look at us, nor did the rest of the crowd; but all eyes were fastened on the silver veil which, as it rustled in the night wind, shook out pearly lights under the cold radiance of moon and stars.

Scarcely had we taken our stand on the daïs by the king, where a place had been reserved for us, when low music was heard, the curtains at the side of the hall parted, and a train of maidens, some old, some middle-aged, a few young, swept in. These were the daughters of the royal house, sworn priestesses of Venus, and they came forward till they formed in a kneeling group before the shrine.
As they lifted their voices in a hymn, Basilea, with a garland of roses on her grey locks, appeared and cast incense on the altar. A thick smoke arose, and veiled the curtain hung before the shrine. When it cleared away, we saw that the silver veil had been drawn aside, and there, matchless, wonderful in her naked beauty, appeared the statue of Venus which Flick had come to carry away.
CHAPTER XXII.

BASILEA.

"Oh, none can tell the craft of womankind,
For where they set their fancies, there they work,
In subtle fashions, to encompass ends
Wherewith to aid the swift accomplishment
Of those same fancies which beguile their hearts."

FROM a remembrance of the tattooings on the breasts of the negroes, we had no difficulty in recognizing the statue of the goddess. A dove perched on the fingers of the left hand, and the right arm, raised aloft, pointed to a glittering silver star, which swung from the arched roof of the niche. A benign expression overspread the perfect face; and delicately swelling curves, suggestive of feminine loveliness and grace, outlined the perfect limbs and trunk. Life-size, of dazzling white marble, its beauty, as it glimmered palely in the radiance of the moonlight, drew from us all a unanimous murmur of admiration. If not wrought by the master-hand of Praxiteles, it was equal to any of his known works—say, the Venus of Cnidus; and, gazing on its gracious loveliness, I no
longer wondered that the negroes had turned from their sidereal and bestial worship to adore the superhuman splendour of the Cytherean deity. The statue was lovely beyond conception.

I glanced at Flick, who stood beside me, and noted that his face was purple with excitement, and his eyes were wide with admiration and amazement. He was doubtless counting on the large sum he would obtain in Europe for that marvellous work of the Greek sculptor; and, in fancy, he had already over-ridden all obstacles, and was steaming homeward with the statue in the hold of the yacht. But for the solemnity of the occasion I could have laughed at his expression; but it was dangerous to behave with such levity, and I turned away my eyes to look again on the ceremonial.

The whole of that immense hall was crowded with kneeling negroes, and strangely looked the black line of their faces intersecting the mass of white garments. The priestesses had risen to their feet, and stood on either side in two lines, with downcast eyes, and hands crossed on their breasts. Basilea ministered alone at the altar, throwing incense on the fire, so that white smoke should enwreath the fair limbs of the goddess. Then offerings of roses, of myrtles, of apples, and of doves were made—these last, a snow-white pair, being slain and placed on the fire
till they were consumed. During the sacrifice the maidens, in low sweet voices, sang hymns in praise of Cytheræa and her divinity. The scene was interesting, but I grew weary of its length, and it took me all my time to forbear from yawning. Afterwards the ten maidens danced in a solemn, stately fashion, to the monotonous singing of the people.

Then came the most interesting part of the ceremony, the part which first revealed to us the plans of Basilea. After the sacrifice had been made, the high priestess came forward with uplifted hands, and spoke to the people in a firm and commanding voice.

"Men and women of Isk," said she, with a swift glance at Harry to bespeak his attention, "last night the holy Venus came to me in a vision for the second time. In the past, she bade me tell you that the white strangers who should come to Isk should be received with kindess. Lo, the strangers have come hither as the goddess foretold, and kindly have ye treated them. Now, says Venus, the undying goddess, 'Mine are love, and marriage, and fruitful wives, and fair babes. And all in Isk may marry and be given in marriage save my priestesses who minister unto me. They alone are doomed to solitude and sanctity. So hath it been these thousand years. Now hath the holy goddess a desire that these things should end.' Listen! O men and women of
Isk. The spirit of the goddess will enter into yon
fair body of marble, and those cold lips shall speak
the will of the divinity."

A murmur of fear rose from those kneeling, and
I saw Hesperus look at Basilea with marked astonish-
ment. Whether he thought her inspired, or believed
that she was a trickster merely, I cannot say; but
he gave no further sign, and Basilea proceeded with
her conjurations. Again the music rose, and she,
bowing her head on her arms, flung herself prone
on the marble pavement before the shrine. When
the music ceased there was a dead silence, and in
the hush a low voice murmured from the perfect lips
of the statue.

"It is my will that the chief handmaiden of Venus
be no longer lonely, but shall choose her a lord from
the white strangers whom I have caused to be
brought hither. This is the word of Venus; it is holy."

Of course I saw at a glance that it was merely a
clever piece of ventriloquism; but the effect produced
on the credulous negroes and on the king, was one of
awe. A murmur of fear echoed to the stars, as the
worshippers rose to their feet. None thought of dis-
puting the word of the goddess. Thus Basilea made
the first step towards securing Harry for a husband.
I looked at him to note the effect of the oracle, but
he was gazing eagerly at a priestess near at hand.
She was scarcely more than a girl, with long tresses of black hair, and eyes darkly blue like the sea. In her soft white robes, with crossed hands, she stood amid her sisters, but I saw her glance up, no doubt feeling the intensity of Harry's gaze. Their eyes met, and a flood of colour rose in her cheeks. With a look of fear, she let her eyes fall, and began with the rest to intone the invocation to Venus. This ended, the music again swelled out, the silver veil fell over the beautiful statue, and two by two the priestesses moved towards the sanctuary.

I watched them as they passed, so closely that their robes brushed across our feet. The fair girl who had attracted Harry moved slowly along, and as she stood in a line with him, I noticed her hand creep out of the folds of her robe with a paper. Harry saw the action, and snatched the paper just in time to prevent Basilea seeing him, while the girl passed onward with a smile. The high priestess came last, and threw a look of longing on Harry as she disappeared between the curtains.

"What's that, Hal?" I asked in a whisper, as the temple emptied itself of worshippers. "Are you in love with that girl?"

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed, reddening. "I never saw her before; but I think she is the prettiest girl I ever set eyes on. I wonder who she is?"
"A priestess of Venus. But no doubt the paper
will tell you more."

While he glanced over it by the light of a burning
torch fastened to a pillar near at hand, I moved
forward with Flick to greet the king, who was
advancing at that moment with his two brothers.
Hesperus looked truly royal in his ceremonial dress,
and received both the captain and myself with affable
condescension.

"Truly the ways of the goddess are wonderful!" said
he with a smile. "Husbands she would have
for her handmaidens; and so she hath brought ye
across the untrodden sea."

"The goddess only spoke of one husband, O Hes-
perus."

"Ay, truly! But she named not the spouse. Is it
thee, dark one?" he said, turning to me, "or this great
white stranger who is of the sea? Nay, nay, if my
mind serves me truly, the holy Basilea has set her
heart upon Fairhair yonder."

"I am certain of that," cried Flick bluntly.
"Womanlike, she picks out the handsomest man of
us three."

"Speak not so, seaman," said Hesperus severely.
"The holy Basilea is guided in this, as in other
things, by the will of the undying goddess."

There was a sneer on the king's lips as he spoke,
and I then guessed that he knew the trick put upon the people by Basilea. Not that he meant to betray her, for the kingly and sacerdotal power were so interwoven, that the one could not exist without the other. Knowing the guile of the whole thing, Hesperus chose to accept the trickery of Basilea as the veritable will of the goddess, and I have no doubt he intended to wed Harry to that crafty old woman on the same day that he made Bertha queen of Isk. But, closely laid as were these plans, they were destined to be overturned, and in no pleasant way either. But the sequel to these events will be related in due season.

The king turned to speak to Flick about the festival, and Harry, with the open note in his hand, came up to where I was standing.

"It is from Bertha," he said brightly. "She tells me that we are to be permitted to see her to-morrow in the presence of Myrtea."

"Who is Myrtea?"

"That pretty girl who gave me the note. She is devoted to Bertha, and we can speak freely before her. At this interview Basilea will not be present, so we may be able to arrange some plan for Bertha's escape."

"Won't Myrtea betray us?" I asked doubtfully, for I believed in no one.
"No; Bertha says we can trust her implicitly, as she hates the high priestess and loves Bertha."

"Oh!" said I, a trifle dryly, "is it only Bertha she loves, or has this pretty girl also fallen in love with your too fascinating self?"

"Bertha doesn't say so," rejoined Harry awkwardly.

"The girl's eyes say so, at all events," I retorted.

"Take care, Harry. I foresee trouble. If Basilea is of a jealous disposition, she may make things hot for us."

"Oh, confound Basilea!"

"With all my heart. Although we have to thank her for our present safety. You must be careful, Harry—on her and on you all things hinge. If this Myrtea comes on the scene, she may bring destruction in her train. Remember, our lives, and the life of Bertha, depend upon your playing the part assigned by the goddess."

"I'll play the part up to a certain point," grumbled Harry, slipping the note into his pocket; "but I give you warning that I shan't marry that old hag."

"Many events may take place before that," said I dryly. "At present it is your business to keep things smooth, and forget Myrtea, at all events for the present."

"I'll do my best—since the need is so urgent," he said crossly; "but I don't like it."
"No doubt. However, here is Basilea, no longer a high priestess, but an elderly jealous woman. Play your part well, Harry, and remember what is at stake."

Basilea, now arrayed in black robes, entered the hall at this moment. She was really a fine-looking woman, although her features were cast in a somewhat masculine mould. What with her severe face and dignified gait, she looked a very queen, and Hesperus saluted her as his equal—which indeed she was, for did not this pair rule the island between them?—or rather, I should say, did not the woman rule; for in her experienced hands the king was no more than a child.

While her head governed her heart, Basilea was a match for the three of us, and had it not been for her mad infatuation for Harry, which obscured her judgment and warped her mind, I have no doubt things would have gone ill with us. As it was, her feminine nature placed her at a disadvantage, and we were able to escape her snares, and those of the islanders, but not without much difficulty. She was a clever woman, that high priestess, and one with whom I cared to have little to do.

"Stranger," she said, advancing towards Harry, and taking no notice of us, "heard you the will of the goddess?"
"Yes, Basilea! but what has that will to do with me?"

"Much! Thou art he whom the goddess hath given to her handmaiden."

Harry flushed up to the roots of his fair hair, and looked awkward. I was afraid lest he should say something likely to offend the woman, but he proved equal to the occasion.

"I am much honoured that the goddess should choose me," he said slowly; "but, if I am to be thy husband, Basilea, there are things which I would have you do."

"All that you wish shall be done, my lord. To-night I am weary, and would seek rest. To-morrow, if thou come hither, my knowledge and my power are at thy service."

"I would see my sister to-morrow."

"Ay! She is thy sister, as I guess by thy looks," said Basilea, gazing at him intently. "Truly the goddess has brought honour to your house. Thy sister to the king, and thou to me."

"What of my friends, Basilea?"

"The goddess will look to them," she said, casting a baleful look on us, and then passed out with severe dignity.

In the company of Hesperus we left the temple, and descended to the quay, where we found the boat
waiting. The illuminations were over, and all was dark, for the clouds had blotted out moon and stars. Only the coloured riding lights of the *Carmen* glimmered in the distance. The king left us on the quay, but before he departed, he shook hands with us, and commanded that we should come to the palace.

"Or if not all, at least thou, seaman," said he, looking at Flick. "I have much to say to thee, which may aid thee in the future. Fairhair," he added significantly, turning to Harry, "who seeks honey must expect stings."

The next moment he was gone, leaving us rather ominously impressed by his last words. In silence we rowed to the yacht, and clambered on deck. Flick was the first to speak.

"A woman to fight against," he said gloomily; "that is ill work, lads."
CHAPTER XXIII.

A FAIR MAIDEN.

"She is a maiden sweet and tender,
With smiling face and modest grace;
And homage to her charms I render,
Because I know she loves me so:
Her heart is free from care and guile;
With love, with love alone 'tis laden;
All sorrows fly before her smile,
And she is mine—that charming maiden."

The next day we split up into different sections.

Jenner stayed in charge of the boat with the majority of the men, and Flick gave a dozen or so permission to go ashore and amuse themselves, if such a thing as amusement were to be found in that dismal city. The captain himself departed for the palace with an escort of four sailors, to learn if possible what was in the mind of Hesperus, and with Harry I climbed up to the temple to see Bertha. I think that Harry also had it in his mind to converse with Myrtea.

After the speech of Basilea at the festival, we were quite assured as to our safety—at all events for the present; but Flick insisted that we should all carry revolvers.
"'Prevention is better than cure,'" he said significantly, as he picked up his own. "I have not the least doubt but that Basilea and Hesperus mean well, for their own ends. Still, there may be trouble, and it is as well to have the means of defence at hand."

With this admonition, Flick took his departure. We were all on the quay by this time, and Harry and I strolled into the avenue which led to the foot of the temple staircase. We saw the captain marching briskly townwards with his quartette of sailors at his heels, and I may here mention that they walked to the palace of Hesperus. There were no horses in Isk; and, indeed, with the exception of cows, goats, and fowls, there were no other animals in the island. These had all been imported from the mainland, as I afterwards learned, for Nature seemed to have left the isle unfinished. With the exception of a few song-birds and lizards, there was no wild life in plains or forests; everything had been prepared for the development of the animal kingdom, but Nature had stopped short at the vegetable. The original founders of Isk must often have regretted their land of plenty in Africa when they landed at Isk. At that time it must have been as sterile and inhospitable as the sea, whence they escaped.

"Well, Harry," said I, as we toiled up the stairs,
“we have now been a fortnight here, yet there seems to be no chance of our accomplishing our object. We can’t rescue Bertha; we can’t steal the statue.”

“So it seems, old chap; at all events, we can’t do it without a row.”

“I don’t want there to be a row,” said I, impatiently. “We are at a disadvantage. Less than half a hundred Englishmen against fifty thousand negroes! The odds are great.”

“So is the glory,” rejoined Harry, unconsciously quoting Henry V. at Agincourt; “besides, we have a ship full of modern weapons.”

“There is such a thing as a waiting game, Hal. You are all dash and fire—a modern Coeur de Lion; but you must not forget one thing: that should these negroes prison us on board the yacht, we may run short of provisions. They may camp on the quays, and prevent us from landing.”

“I don’t think such an idea would enter their heads,” replied Harry, who had a great contempt for the intellect of Isk.

“Perhaps not; but it might enter the head of Basilea.”

“So it might,” he assented thoughtfully. “She’s a dangerous old woman.”

“She is; and it is your task to render this tigress less dangerous by cutting her claws.”
“It’s a horrible thing for a man to make love to his grandmother,” said Harry, with a shudder. “I suppose I’ll see her to-day.”

“If you do, ask her for a map of the island.”

“Certainly; but for what reason?”

“I’ll tell you that when we are on board again. Bring the map with you if you can.”

This Harry promised to do, and as by this time we had arrived at the temple, we walked forward to the portico. Here we found a line of negroes, armed with spears, drawn up, and these refused to allow us to pass. Rather nonplussed, we waited the turn of events, and in a few minutes Myrtea appeared to conduct us into the shrine. She blushed deeply when she saw Harry, and the fire of her face was reflected in his own. It needed no seer to foretell that these young people were within a measurable distance of falling in love. No doubt they would have denied the imputation; but such denial is a true sign that Fate has settled the matter.

“The fair one awaits you,” said Myrtea, in the barbaric dialect, which sounded oddly from her pretty lips. “Follow me.”

The line of negroes divided, and we walked into the great hall, turned to the right, and, after passing through a corridor, we found ourselves in the small room where I had last seen Bertha. She was here
anxiously waiting our coming, and no one was present save Myrtea. With an exclamation of delight, she ran forward and kissed Harry, and afterwards paid the same attention to myself, in spite of the warning glance I cast on her. She saw my look, however, and taking Myrtea's hand, laughed gaily.

"It does not matter," she said, in the island tongue, so that the girl might understand. "Myrtea is my friend. She will not betray us."

Myrtea blushed again—she had a very pretty blush—and again her eyes sought those of Harry. What she saw therein caused her to redden still more; and he, satisfied with the effect produced, turned to speak to his sister.

"My dear Bertha, how glad I am to see you!" he said, kissing her again. "What a mercy it is we found you at Isk, and in such good company!" he added, with another glance at Myrtea.

"We can spare no time for idle talk, Hal," said I, interrupting him. "Every moment is precious, and we must think of some scheme whereby to rescue Bertha."

"That will be difficult," she said, shaking her head, with a serious look. "This temple is guarded night and day. And even if you could get me on board the yacht, how can you get the boat through the
chasm? Basilea says that the gates are constantly closed."

"Flick has arranged all that," said I quickly. "We intend to blow up the gates."

"When?"

"I don’t know. The captain is arranging some business with the king. I dare say he will propose some plan to-night. Are you afraid, Bertha?"

"I am afraid of Basilea," she replied, looking anxious. "Everything depends upon her—or upon the volcano."

"The volcano!" repeated Harry; "what about the volcano?"

"Ask Myrtea," said Bertha, looking at the girl; "she will tell you about Basilea’s strongest ally."

"Don’t quite understand," said Harry, with a stare; then, turning to Myrtea, he added in her own tongue, "What about the smoking mountain, Myrtea?"

"Ah, the great, the terrible mountain!" replied the girl solemnly. "Basilea controls its breathings at the bidding of the goddess. These many months it has shaken the isle and flamed with red fire. But that the high priestess keeps it quiet, Isk would sink in the sea."

"You see," explained Bertha, "there is every chance that the volcano may break out again."
Basilea knows this, and is using the knowledge to forward her own plans. That is why the people obey her so slavishly. If the volcano becomes active, I am afraid not one of us will escape alive."

"In that case, the sooner we get away from here the better," said I uneasily. "I tell you I don't—"

Before I could end my speech there was a low rumble below, and the floor heaved so violently as to cast us on the ground. It was an earthquake—the first I had experienced—and the sensation was just as though a wave had passed under the building. Then the ground began to tremble, and the pavement of the room was rent asunder. With one accord we staggered to our feet, and rushed out of the room. I held Bertha by the arm, and passed swiftly through the great hall, out on to the terrace. Thereon the priestesses were huddled together with every sign of terror and dismay; and the negro guards were lying prone in the porch, unable to move from sheer fear. Harry came after me with Myrtea, and on the terrace, amid the group of terrified women, I spoke to him.

"Now is our time, Harry! Let us take Bertha down to the yacht in the confusion."

"Right!" he said laconically, as we hurried Bertha towards the steps,
“I hope Basilea is not here,” she muttered, glancing round.

At that moment her arm was seized, and she was torn from my grasp. I turned to face Basilea, who looked terribly angry, and whose eyes flashed like sword-blades. By this time the ground had ceased to tremble, and the women were recovering from their terror. I made a step forward, but at a rapid gesture from Basilea the women closed round Bertha, bearing her backward.

“Do you dare to take away the Queen of Isk?” cried Basilea in a sharp voice. “Oh, daring one, hast no fear of death?”

“I wished to save her from the falling building,” said I, judging it diplomatic to tell a lie, since it would never have done to admit my real reason.

“You would take her from danger to danger,” cried the high priestess. “You would bear her to your devil-ship. Look! look!”

And truly, as she pointed downward to the pool, the sight was not reassuring. The subterranean forces had turned the waters of the port to the colour of milk, and they were seething and boiling like a witch’s cauldron. On that opalescent sea danced the black form of the yacht, tossed hither and thither, and straining at her cables as though she were in the grip of a storm. Both Harry and I rushed
forward to look on this startling sight, which threatened to destroy our means of flight; but with a taunting laugh Basilea waved us back.

"It is nought; it will pass," said she quickly. "In twenty hours the white will turn black again. The mountain will no longer shake the isle; for I have invoked the mighty Venus, and she has chained the monster which she released at my prayer."

"At your prayer!" we cried, disbelievingly.

"Ay!" she said calmly. "You were plotting destruction, and I prayed to the goddess to send a sign of the terrors which might befall. Fear, then, lest you die!"

Of course I recognized that Basilea, with the subtlety of her sex, had guessed that we were at Isk on an errand inimical to her religion; but I could not help admiring the dexterity with which she had made use of that unexpected earthquake. She noted my astonishment, and with a severe mien motioned that I should descend the stair; but Harry she detained by laying her hand on his arm. What took place between them I did not know, and it was only when Harry joined me half an hour later on the quay, that I learned her purpose.

"Basilea invites me to go daily to the temple," he said, half frowning, half laughing.

"To see Bertha?"
"To see her. I suppose the old thing wants to flirt. She threatens to let loose the terrors of the volcano if we attempt to take Bertha away. She's a wide-awake woman, Denis."

"I know; but we'll find a way to blind her, Hal."

"Oh, by the way, here's a map of the island," said Harry, producing a roll of linen from his pocket. "Basilea was reluctant to give it to me, but I managed to persuade her that it was required to make me acquainted with my future home."

"I'm glad you got it, at all events. Now there will be a chance of our forming some plan of escape."

"But what use is the map?"

"Every use. Flick wishes to find out the configuration of the east coast, so that he can lie off there, should he be forced to leave the pool."

"Oh, well, that all depends upon Basilea," yawned Harry. "But I say, Denis! isn't that Myrtea a little beauty?"

"I saw you thought as much, Harry. Be on your guard!"

"What! do you think Basilea will grow jealous and punish me?"

"No; but I think she will grow jealous and punish Myrtea!"

"Pooh! rubbish!" said Harry, rather perturbed. "What harm could she do to the girl?"
“Whatever harm enters her head,” I replied sharply. “She is supreme here, remember; so if you don’t want to get Myrtea into trouble, leave her alone and devote yourself to the old woman.”

“I wish another earthquake would come and swallow her up!”

“Very likely we’ll get more earthquakes than we bargain for,” replied I, looking at the still milky waters of the pool. “I don’t like the look of things at all, either above or below.”
CHAPTER XXIV.

WE ARRANGE OUR PLANS.

"Danger above,
Danger below,
Jealousy—love—
Bring nothing but woe;
Yet should we gain all,
We may retain all,
And so disdain all
Danger above and below."

We found Jenner in a state of justifiable alarm regarding the volcanic disturbance; and, indeed, both Harry and myself felt that the yacht was in a dangerous position. If the volcano became active—and it showed every sign of becoming so—the boat might be sunk by the stones hurled from the crater, buried in the rain of fine ashes, or swamped in the turbulence caused in the pool by the seismic disturbances. The crew were likewise alarmed, and looked constantly at the white peak crowned by the ominous masses of vapour, which were breathed from the entrails of the mountain. One and all anxiously
awaited the return of Captain Flick, to hear what he had to say on the matter.

Our leader arrived shortly before sunset, and said that the earthquake had shaken the plain on which the king's palace was built, passing away in an easterly direction towards the black reefs. The king had exhibited but little alarm, saying that these shocks were of frequent occurrence, but that while Venus was pleased with the islanders, no harm could come to Isk. In our turn we narrated to Flick how the waters of the pool had turned white; whereat he looked rather grave.

"I don't like the look of things, lads," he said gravely; "there seems to me a likelihood of a blow-up of that mountain. If we lie in this pool while that takes place, things may go hard with us. So if—— Well, Jenner, what is it?"

This last was to the mate who entered the cabin with a serious face.

"The men would like to speak to you, sir," said he respectfully.

Flick wheeled round and glared at the officer, his face purple with wrath. However, he had the sense to control his anger at what he conceived the crew's audacity, and answered in a jesting manner.

"I 'spose they are afraid of the volcano, Jenner?
Well, well! tell them to come aft. I'll be on deck in two minutes."

Jenner disappeared, and the captain looked at us in rather an anxious manner.

"We are likely to have trouble here, Harry. That volcano has frightened the men."

"I don't wonder at it, captain," said I quickly. "There is no doubt that our position is unsafe. You said as much just now yourself."

"Yes, to you two," replied Flick grimly; "but I don't intend to confess as much to the crew. They might mutiny unless I took the boat outside."

"What do you intend to do?"

"Why," said the captain, with a frown, "I'll stay here for another week, and if by that time I don't get Miss Bertha and the statue on board, I'll take the boat out through the chasm."

"But you won't desert Bertha?"

"No, lad—nor will I give up the statue; but I fancy we'll have to ship both on the eastern coast of the island; and a nasty place it is. I wish I had a map of the shore-line."

"I have one," said I, producing the linen roll from my pocket. "Harry got it from Basilea."

"Good!" cried Flick, eagerly unrolling the linen, and running his eye over the map. "This is just what I want. We must talk this over, lad. In the meantime, I shall see the men."
We all three went on deck, and found that a rather anxious-looking crew had assembled to lay their grievances before the captain. Flick looked at them calmly for a moment or so, and then spoke out, sharp and abrupt.

“Well, men,” said he concisely, “what is the trouble?”

The boatswain advanced on this invitation, scraped his foot, touched his forelock, and cast a look aloft at the mountain peak.

“It’s jest this way, sir,” said he reflectively. “That there volcarer’s looking nasty, an’ if it goes on as it did to-day, there won’t be much chanst of us getting ’ome agin. We arsk, sir, as you’ll sail this here boat out into the bay, so as we kin steam off if there’s trouble.”

“What you say is perfectly reasonable,” said Flick mildly. “Should the mountain become active, our position is not safe. But you must remember, men, that we came here to rescue Miss Greenville, and she is still a prisoner. I ask you to agree to stay in this pool for seven days, and during that time I don’t think there will be much chance of an eruption. In a few days I hope to have Miss Greenville on board the yacht; then, men, I will take her outside as you desire.”

“Seven days!” said the boatswain, again glancing
at the volcano. "An' you don't think, sir, as that there mountain 'ull give trouble?"

"No; honestly speaking, I don't think so," said Flick, following the gaze of the men. "The king told me that these earthquakes are frequent, but that no worse happens. The volcano has been in the state you see it for over a thousand years. So far as I can guess, it is likely to remain as it is for the next thousand."

The boatswain turned to look at his mates, and consulted with two of them in a low voice. This over, he again turned to the skipper and promised.

"We're willin', for seven days, sir," said he.

'Very good," said Flick, with a nod. "I am glad to find that you are reasonable."

He then dismissed the men, who retired amiably enough, and we returned to the saloon, to look at the map of the island and consider our plans. Within seven days we had to rescue Bertha and to gain the statue. At present both tasks seemed impossible, and I was anything but hopeful when I sat down at the table. Flick, however, was jubilant; so I guessed that he had some plan in his head, and was confident of its success.

"Well, lads," said Flick genially, "I must tell you why the king wished to see me. It seems that
Basilea has quite settled to make Harry there her husband——"

"Hang her impudence!" cried Harry angrily.

"By all means; but let me go on with my yarn. The king has taken a fancy to the yacht, and to myself, so he proposes that I should stay here as—well, I suppose you'll call it—admiral. He offers me a house, an income of those blue stones, and lands. All we have to do is to conform to the religion of Venus, and take Hesperus trips round the island."

"A very nice little scheme," said I dryly. "And what about me?"

"Oh, you are to stand in with me, of course. I don't exactly know what employment you'll be given, but it will be something pleasant, I've no doubt. So here we are set up for life," said Flick, with a grin. "Harry as the husband of Basilea, myself as admiral, and Sir Denis yonder will no doubt be appointed prime minister or general of the Isk army."

"And what was your answer to this generous offer?" said Harry.

"Oh! I said I would take a week to consider it."

"And in a week, Flick!"

"In a week, Sir Denis, we must save your future bride, and get the statue if we can. If I don't settle the business by that time, my name isn't Thomas Flick—that's all."
"What do you propose to do?"

Flick scribbled absently on the map with his pencil, and seemed to be considering his plans with regard to the rescue. Harry and I waited anxiously for his speech. It did not come for some time, but when it did, the irrelevance of it to the matter in hand puzzled us not a little.

"That Myrtea you spoke of," he said, addressing himself to Harry, "she's a nice girl."

"She's the prettiest girl I ever saw in my life," replied Harry promptly; "but what has she got to do with this conversation?"

"Just this, my lad. Through Myrtea you must rouse the jealousy of the old lady."

"For what reason?"

"Well," said Flick, with a drawl, "Basilea thinks that, backed by the king and the volcano, and all these superstitious dwarfs, she can do as she pleases. She has decided to marry you; and if she finds out that you are in love with Myrtea——"

"Which I am not," interpolated Harry, flushing.

"Which you are not—for the sake of argument. When she finds that out, I say, there will be trouble."

"I thought you didn't want trouble, Flick?"

"I want trouble of my own making, Sir Denis. If Basilea flares up at Harry, he can come aboard the
yacht and lie low. Then Basilea will come round.
She won't see Harry—she'll see me."

"And what will you do?"

"I'll stand her friend, and promise to deliver Harry
into her clutches, on condition that she lets Bertha
come on board and hands over that statue."

"She might do the first," said I grimly, "as a
jealous woman will do anything to gain her ends;
but the last—my dear Flick, the statue is her
religion!"

"Bah! she's got no religion, save what suits her
purpose. Do you think she believes in that rubbish
she talks of Venus controlling the mountain? It's all
said to frighten the people. If Harry can make her
jealous, I'll engage to do the rest. No doubt it will
take some talking to get her to fix up the statue
business, but at all events I'd like to try."

"It's not a bad idea," said Harry reflectively.
"And when we have Bertha and the statue on board?"

"Why, we'll track for home!"

"But the chasm—the iron gates?"

"I'll blow them up. This week I'm going to fix
up a charge of dynamite under them. Don't you
fear, Harry. The gates will be no hindrance."

"There's another thing," said I, after a pause; "if
Basilea becomes jealous of Myrtea, she may make
away with the poor girl."
"No," said Flick, sharply; "I'll give her to understand that such a thing is to be the third article in the agreement: Miss Bertha, the statue, and no harm to Myrtea."

"Well," said Harry, jumping up and looking very tall and straight, "it's a good plan, and may bring matters to a head; but as to mixing Myrtea up with it, I shall do no such thing."

"Why not, Harry?"

"Because I am a gentleman and a man of honour. I like Myrtea, and—and I shan't do it: that's why."

Captain Flick looked at him with a twinkle in his eyes. He agreed with Harry, I saw that plainly; but he wished to accomplish the object of his expedition, and he was prepared to make use of whatever means there was at hand. After all, Aunt Chrissy had not been far wrong when she had warned us against Captain Flick. The man was a born adventurer, and cared for neither danger nor honour, so that he secured the prize upon which he was bent. I, more scrupulous, sided silently with Harry, but I said nothing, neither did he; and Flick, after a surly glance at us both, smiled and turned the subject in a diplomatic manner.

"Well, if you won't do it, you won't," said he mildly; "I must think of some other plan, that's all. In the meantime, let us look at this map."
Rather astonished by the calm way in which he had taken Harry's refusal, I bent over the map of the island of Isk. It was an almost round blotch of land, with a great piece bitten out of it in the part where the semicircular bay ran up to the chasm. The peak itself was the only decently sized mountain on the isle; and from the ridge which dominated the town, wide plains stretched to the other side of the land. A low range of hills divided this plain in the centre, but there was a huge gap in the middle of the range.

"That gap," said Harry, laying his finger on it, "was made during an earthquake, so that the waters poured through it into the ocean beyond."

"Waters!" echoed Flick. "What are you talking about?"

"Why, Basilea told me. In the old days all that plain on which the king's palace stands was a lake, dammed by this range of hills. Beyond, the other plains were lower, and stretched to the coast and the black reefs. As I say, the earthquake many years ago—some thousand, in fact—split the hills in twain, and the waters of the lake ebbed away, leaving it as you see it now."

"Mud and sand mixed," muttered Flick. "So that is why the plain is so fertile. Well, where water has been, water will be, and I shouldn't be surprised if the ocean poured in through that gap again."
“It's not unlikely,” said I. “The whole island seems to me to be a thin crust over a well of seething fire. I only hope it won't gape, and let us down to roast with the rest of the population.”

“See these roads,” said Flick, pointing to red lines on the map; “they run all over the island to the distant villages. This royal thoroughfare, which begins at the pool and tops the ridge, runs straight across the island to the eastern coast. Failing the chasm, that is the road we must take the statue and Miss Bertha.”

“And what of the yacht?” asked Harry dryly.

“Oh, we'll sail her through the chasm at the end of seven days, and she will lie off the eastern coast till we want her.”

“It's a difficult task.”

“Very,” said Flick, coolly looking at him; “but you can make it easier by falling in with my plans. Then we can get the business done here, instead of lying off the eastern coast and negotiating a road which is sure to be dangerous.”

“I can't do it, Flick; as a man of honour, I can't,” said Harry abruptly, and left the cabin.

Flick looked after him and whistled.

“Sir Denis,” he said shortly, “I'll bet you that Harry loves Myrtlea, and, against his wish, he will make Basilea jealous.”
CHAPTER XXV.

TROUBLE.

"Love brings double
Joy to those who feel his power:
Love gives trouble,
   Ever for a marriage dower:
Love's a bubble,
   Breaking in the lover's bower;
Fire in stubble,
   Burning fiercer hour by hour."

For the rest of the week there was no trouble in connection with my attempt to rescue Bertha. It is true that Basilea became suspicious, and refused to let me visit the temple. I was thus reduced to corresponding with Bertha by letter, and Harry acted as postman to convey the epistles. Daily the high priestess fell deeper in love with Harry, and his very indifference seemed to add fuel to the flame. She insisted upon instructing him in the lore of the temple; and Harry rewarded himself for the dull hours he passed with his elderly admirer, by conversing for a few minutes with Myrtea, who was always in attendance on Bertha. I was not at all surprised when one day he confessed that he loved
the girl, although I feigned to disbelieve in the depth of his affection.

"'Little pot, soon hot,'" quoth I, when he made the confession. "You have only known the girl two weeks, so I fail to see how your love can have grown so suddenly."

"It is Jonah's gourd, Denis."

"A bad simile, Hal. That withered in a single night."

"My love for Myrtea will last for ever," cried Harry fondly. "I was never in love before, but now I candidly admit that I have lost my heart to this girl. When we return to England, you will have Bertha, Flick the statue, and I—I shall have Myrtea."

"Do you intend to marry her?" I asked, rather startled.

"Of course I do. Why else should I take her to England. You can have nothing to say against such a marriage."

"H'm! I hardly know if Myrtea is fit for a civilized life."

"Yes, she is. I am teaching her English, and she is willing to leave Isk with me."

"Already!" said I, doubtfully; "she must be easily influenced."

"Don't I tell you we love one another?" said Harry,
impatiently. "Love isn't a matter of custom, is it? If a man and a woman meet in that way, they either love one another or they do not. I met Myrtea, and she fell in love with me, and I with her. I am no fool, Denis. I know what I want, and it is my intention to marry this girl. Why shouldn't I? What have you to say against the match?"

"I? Nothing! It is a matter for your own consideration. But Bertha—"

"Bertha is very fond of Myrtea; she—she loves her."

"Oh!" said I dryly; "does she love her well enough to wish her for a sister-in-law?"

"I am sure she does."

"In that case there is no more to be said," I answered. "But a word of warning, Harry. Take care Basilea gains no hint of this passion of yours, or you may forward Flick's plans in spite of yourself."

"As to that, I don't care," he replied, determinedly. "Flick asked me to treat the girl unworthily—to gain her affections so that I might waken the jealousy of Basilea. This is different. I love Myrtea, and she loves me; so there is no deception or fraud about the matter. Should Basilea discover the truth, I do not mind. It is a matter of perfect indifference to me."
"It may not be to Myrtea!"

"Oh, her life will be safe," replied Harry, coolly; "not even Basilea can lay a finger on her to work harm. In spite of her cleverness and supremacy, that old woman is bound by certain laws, which even she dare not break, at the risk of death. If she does discover anything, she may order me out of the temple, and imprison Myrtea; but in that case, you, I, and Flick will storm the temple with the ship's company, and rescue both Bertha and Myrtea. Then we can steam through the chasm after blowing up the gates, and so homeward."

"What about the statue?"

"Flick must take his chance of that. If we can get it on board, well and good; if not, and the two girls are with us—why, we must escape as we can without it."

"You are set on carrying off Myrtea, Harry?"

"I am; and she is willing to come. I owe one good turn to Flick's expedition; it has gained me a charming wife."

The conversation dropped after that, and Harry left the yacht to pay his daily visit to Basilea, and afterwards to Bertha and Myrtea. I was lounging on the deck, in the hot sunshine, smoking an after-luncheon cigarette, and watching the grim black figures of the negroes moving through the grim black
town. The city suited the race; it was as dark, as
dismal, and as cruel-looking as its inhabitants, and
I hoped prayerfully that the end of the seven days
would see the Carmen moving through the chasm,
and standing out to sea, with the two girls on board.
I was anxious that Harry should be happy, and I
was longing to clasp Bertha once more in my
arms; but I must admit that I had small sympathy
with Flick’s project for stealing the statue of
Venus.

From a strictly honourable point of view, we were
in the wrong. What right had Flick, or any one
else, to thieve away a statue that had been in the
possession of these islanders for close on two
thousand years? Surely their ownership was sanc-
tified by time; and, moreover, as they firmly
believed that the volcano would sink the island were
the statue to disappear, it seemed cruel to rob them
of their palladium, and add to their terror of the
burning mountain. I did not like the negroes, who
were a dismal and, I believe, a cruel race; all the
same, it was none of our business to spoil their
religion, and take from them the visible symbol of
their worship. The more I thought of this, the more
unwarrantable it seemed, and I wished sincerely that
Harry had never agreed to lend the Carmen for that
freebooting excursion. However, it was too late to
alter matters; and the task having been begun, we had to go through with it.

On the highest terrace of the temple, I could see the line of negroes guarding the fane, their spear-points glittering in the strong sunlight. As I was gazing, the splash of oars fell on my ear; and I glanced over my shoulder to see a boat pulling from the chasm, and steering for the yacht with Flick on board. He had been absent the whole morning, examining the iron gates, and laying his mine. On the previous day Jenner and the electrical engineer had been attending to the work, and Captain Flick had been to see how it had been executed. He waved his cap as the boat swung alongside, and was soon on deck, blowing like a grampus from his late exertions.

"Here I am, Sir Denis," said he, "as hungry as a hunter. Luncheon over?"

"Yes. Harry wanted to get away to the temple, so he and I had luncheon early. Your meal is waiting for you."

We went below, and I smoked on the divan while Flick cut himself some cold meat, and prepared to gratify his very healthy appetite. I asked him how he had got on at the gulch.

"Oh, it's in first-rate trim," he replied. "The mine is ready, and I have the wires laid on to the
inner mouth of the chasm. All we have to do is to send a boat there and explode the mine. I guess there won't be much of those gates left when that's done."

"I'm afraid the explosion will make the negroes suspicious, Flick."

"Well, I don't know. They are ignorant of dynamite, so it is more than likely that they will put down the burst-up to some submarine disturbance. They put all untoward things down to the volcano, you know."

"I suppose it will be all right," I answered, leisurely filling my pipe; "and even if it isn't there won't be much trouble, as the yacht will be through the chasm before the niggers recover their presence of mind. They'll never catch us with those canoes of theirs."

"I hope we shall be able to carry out our plans in the pool," said Flick, after a pause. "I'd rather do that than fight our way across the isle, with your sweetheart and the statue."

"And Myrtea," I added.

"Myrtea! What has she got to do with it?" demanded Flick in astonishment.

"Well, it seems that she and Harry have fallen in love with one another, and she has agreed to fly with him when the boat leaves Isk."

"Humph! I thought as much; and I can't say that I'm sorry. She's a pretty lass; and, moreover,
this behaviour of Harry's will rouse the old woman's jealousy, and enable me to carry out my plan."

"So I told Harry. He is doing exactly what you proposed."

"Of course! I thought it would come to that," replied Flick, with a wink. "He's taken his own way about it, but it is just as efficacious as though he had fallen in with our wishes."

"I hope it will bring your plans to a head, Flick. You have only three days left, in which to carry them out."

"And after that I have to leave the pool," said the captain, nodding. "Well, I don't know; like Columbus, I may get the crew to extend the time. That mountain is quiet enough, anyhow."

"I mistrust that mountain intensely. The confounded thing may blow up when we least expect it."

"Quite so," replied Flick, coolly. "I asked Hesperus about it the other day. He said that the temple records say it was extinct for many hundreds of years. The last eruption took place shortly after the statue of the goddess was brought to Isk —when, I suppose, that island lake was drained. The next convulsion may bring back the waters."

"How long has the mountain been active?"

"About twenty years or so. Nothing very terrible! only earthquakes, and jets of fire from the crater.
But I've no doubt it is getting ready for a big explosion."

"Is it?" said I, with a shudder. "Then I hope we'll be out of the pool before that takes place. I have no wish to figure in a second version of 'The Last Days of Pompeii.'"

Roaring Tom laughed at this speech, and led the way on deck. I followed, and we made ourselves comfortable before resuming our conversation. With the exception of Harry, all the ship's company were on board, and, as the sequel proved, it was just as well that such was the case. The day was tremendously hot, and in that black hollow we simply steamed in the muggy heat. Not a breath of air stirred the trees on the mountain or the breast of the waters, and the jagged black cliffs stood up hard and grim against the soft blue sky. A heavy cloud of vapour veiled the peak of the mountain, and there was a sense of oppression in the atmosphere which made it difficult to breathe. I did not like the look of things at all.

"I wish we were well out of this, Flick," I said uneasily. "Seems to me as though Nature was making ready for trouble."

"Let us hope she'll keep things straight for the next few days; by that time I hope the old woman will fix up matters."
"She may fix them up to our disadvantage. There may be bloodshed."

"I don't care if there is," returned Flick, doggedly. "We have arms, and a cannon; we can defend ourselves, I suppose."

"I hope there will be no occasion to do so. Still, if Basilea grows jealous, as you wish her to become, she may let slip the dogs of war."

Flick shrugged his shoulders and turned the conversation. "What is the last news from the future Lady Evans?" he demanded.

"Much the same as usual. She is kindly treated. She is progressing in the language of the isle, which Myrtea is teaching her; and she is anxious to be delivered from so disagreeable a position."

"Has the king seen her again?"

"No. Nor will he see her until the marriage takes place. So I am afraid he will never set eyes on her in that case," I finished, dryly.

With an amused laugh the captain resumed his pipe. Hardly had he done so, when in the distance we heard the whip-like crack of a revolver. Starting to his feet, Flick looked inquiringly at me, while I mechanically turned my face towards the temple. There, on the high terrace, I saw the black line of negroes waver and break up into distinct groups. Another and clearer shot echoed through the still
air; then rose the shrieking of women, and the hoarse shouts of infuriated men. A gong bellowed from the depths of the fane.

“Harry is in trouble!” I cried, jumping up in great excitement.

“Here, lower away that boat!” roared Flick, fingering his Colt; “we must get ashore. Stand by, men. Soho!”

“Here’s Hal, captain, and the niggers at his heels.”

Even as I spoke the boat touched water. Flick and eight men dropped overside in a trice, and in less than two minutes the ash sweeps flashed regularly as the boat spun towards the quay. Revolver in hand, Harry was bounding at racing speed down the staircase, a crowd of negroes after him. The gong still thundered, and the townspeople crowding on the quay added their hoarse cries to those of the pursuers. As Harry dipped into the belt of foliage fringing the staircase, I heard his weapon crack twice, and a guttural cry of pain followed. Immediately afterwards he burst out of the wood, raced through the crowd, dispersing them right and left with the menace of his mien and revolver. On the verge of the quay a man tried to stop him, but stumbled and fell, together with Harry, into the water. The next moment my friend was striking out for the yacht under a rain of spears. Flick shouted, Harry turned, and in a few minutes he was safe on board the boat.
CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BATTLE OF THE POOL.

"Yes, this is war—the sport of kings and nations,
Who feign they wish to remedy abuses,
And ask God's blessing on those operations,
Which puts man's knowledge to the strangest uses;
But tho' the reason fits on all occasions,
The human brute lies 'neath those fine excuses:
That Berserk rage which calmer moods don't dream of,
Is but a necessary vent to let the steam off."

HARRY had no time to explain the reason of this sudden upset to Flick, for the negroes were already in pursuit, some swimming, others in canoes; and our men pulled hard for the yacht, so that we might gain the advantage. In a wonderfully short space of time, considering all things, Harry and Flick leaped on board, the boat was slung up to the davits, and the men, under the direction of Jenner, lined the bulwarks, to repel the attack which the negroes seemed bent on making. A crowd of canoes came rushing towards the boat, and the black heads of the swimmers bobbed like cocoanuts in the still water.
"Fire that gun over their heads, Jenner," cried Flick sharply. "It will give them a fright, and maybe stop the advance."

The caronade was slewed round by a dozen eager hands, so that its muzzle faced the woods masking the temple staircase. A jet of flame leaped forth; the ball ploughed its way, crashing through the trees, and the concussion which followed vibrated like thunder in that echoing hollow. With yells of fear the negroes on the quay rushed up the staircase, and into the woods; those making for the yacht paused a hundred yards away, paralyzed with astonishment, and then rowed and swam swiftly for the shore. We were certain that, sooner or later, they would renew the attack; but in the mean time we had gained breathing time, and both Flick and myself turned to Harry for an explanation.

"Why," said Harry, who was loading the empty barrels of his revolver, "it all comes from unconsciously carrying out your instructions, Flick."

"What! does Basilea know?"

"She knows that I love Myrtea, and caught me kissing the girl. The old fury tore Myrtea from my arms, and called on the negro-guard to spear me. I killed two and wounded another, and in the astonishment caused by the deaths, I broke through the crowd and ran down the steps, as you saw."
"Hang her!" said Flick, referring to the high priestess. "I didn't think she'd have recourse to arms. I'm afraid we're in a tight place now, lads."

"There's going to be a deuce of a row," replied Harry, amiably. "You should have seen Basilea's face; it was like that of a fiend. Hear that gong roaring; she's calling all the warriors to the temple, and I've no doubt she means to have me dead or alive."

"But Myrtea?"

"She's shut up in Bertha's room—at least, I saw the old hag push her in there. Oh, Myrtea is all right, so is Bertha. We shall have to gain our ends by fighting instead of in a peaceful manner. I'm not sorry."

"Yonder goes Ixtael up to the temple," said I, taking the glass from my eyes.

"He has, no doubt, gone to get instructions," cried Flick. "Basilea is dead on fighting, and I'll bet we'll have a lively afternoon. It's lucky we have provisions for three days on board—that is, fresh meat and vegetables. There's any quantity of tinned stuff for the homeward voyage. We must stand a siege, then storm the temple, and get Miss Greenville. Fortunately the mine is ready laid, and we can blow up the gates without much trouble."

He spoke loudly, and the men heard him.
Delighted at the chance of active work, and the near prospect of escaping from that perilous island, they gave a loud cheer, and we saw the black masses of negroes ashore shake to and fro, as though they feared the big gun was once more about to speak. I don't think the islanders liked the look of things by any means; I know we did not.

It was now about three o'clock in the afternoon, and there was light in the cup till close on seven. We had thus four hours of daylight in which to observe the behaviour of our enemies, and Flick gave orders that the search-light should be got ready for the night, so as to prevent the yacht being taken by surprise. We were in a dangerous position, imprisoned in that ghastly pool, shut in by iron gates, and surrounded by enemies, yet the spirits of all on board were wonderfully bright and cheerful. Hitherto the expedition had been decidedly tame, but now that there was a prospect of hard fighting, the blood of every man rose to fever-heat. I and Harry knew that the two girls were safe, and that it only remained to storm the temple and rescue them; but Flick rather lamented that this war had broken out to interfere with his plans concerning the statue.

"I'm afraid I shan't get it, after all!" he declared resentfully; "it will be quite impossible to lug that mass of marble down the staircase in the teeth of
thousands of islanders. I expect the whole population of Isk will flock hither to defend their temple, and exterminate us."

"Well, Flick," said I, consolingly, "if we rescue those two girls, we shall have achieved the principal object of our journey. You know I don't hold with your stealing the statue."

"Bah! I have no scruples of conscience. I intend to get that statue somehow; if needs be, at the point of the sword. Who would have thought Basilea would have cut up so rough? I've no doubt she means to resort to force."

"Perhaps not!" cried Harry, quickly. "Yonder comes Ixtael with a white flag. Perhaps she's going to forgive me killing those guards on condition that I marry her. I'll see her hanged before I do so."

"In that case we may as well get ready for the fray," said I, calmly.

Ixtael came down the staircase, attended by a formidable guard. I could see Basilea on the terrace, speaking a few words to him, and pointing to our ship, also to the volcano. It was easy to see that she was invoking the wrath of the goddess. The chief with five men got into a canoe, and pulled towards our boat, but he did not come on board. No doubt the noise of the cannon had frightened him, and he was doubtful of his reception. At all
events, he stayed the canoe at speaking distance, and made a concise little speech, which it was easy to guess had emanated from the keen brain of Basilea.

"Thus says the holy priestess of the goddess, and Hesperus the fair, the undying," shouted Ixtael in his barbaric lingo: "give up the fair-haired stranger, that he may be dealt with by the goddess whom he has insulted. If you yield him not at once we will fall upon you in our might, and utterly destroy you."

"And if we give up Fairhair, what then?" roared Flick.

"You and Darkhair will be slain; your companions will be sent to work in the mines, and your great ship will be given by the holy goddess to the king."

"Hang her impudence!" muttered Harry, fingerling his revolver. "I'd like to drop that man."

"No, no! he is under a flag of truce," returned Flick; then added aloud, "Go back to the priestess Basilea, and say that Fairhair will not be given up, nor will we be destroyed. If she does not send the English maiden and Myrtlea on board at once, we will blot out Isk, and ruin your nation."

Ixtael shouted tauntingly, and turning his canoe made for the quay. We saw him ascend the staircase and speak to Basilea; we saw her raise her arms again towards the volcano and speak with angry gestures. Then the negroes on the terrace rushed
down to join those already on the quay, and a horrible shriek of rage and anger went up from the crowd.

"War! war!" they yelled. "Let us slay these dogs!"

"Here they come!" cried Harry, whipping out his revolver. "Now for it."

The roaring of the temple gong had brought crowds of warriors from Awazil. These were armed with spears, shields, and clubs, all of the most primitive description. It seemed cruel to oppose guns and revolvers to such old-time weapons; but as our lives were at stake, we had no resource but to repel them by all the means in our power. Once they got possession of the yacht, and I trembled to think of the fate that might be ours. Judging from their scowling faces, the islanders knew no mercy.

News of the trouble had evidently been sent to the king, for we saw the white dresses of himself and his escort appear on the ridge. He reached the temple by another way, and stayed on the terrace with Basilea, watching the fight. Evidently his person was too sacred to be risked in battle, for Ixtael was the general leading the attack. It began almost at once.

Canoes shot out from all parts of the quays filled
with negroes, shouting hoarsely, and brandishing their short stabbing spears. I am sure in their own hearts they were greatly afraid of our guns; but, sustained by wrath and fanaticism, they came on to the attack at a good pace. In the expectation that we might negotiate the chasm that day as far as the iron gates, Flick had ordered the engineers to fire up, and when he saw the flotilla of canoes, surging closely packed towards the ship, he set the screws going. The Carmen swept round in a circle, and bore down heavily among the boats, upsetting them in all directions. The negroes took to the water like ducks, and swam round and round in the white froth of the screws, trying to clamber on board. Luckily, the movement of the yacht prevented their doing so.

Seeing these tactics, Flick steered the boat across the pool, towards the precipitous black cliffs which frowned opposite the town. Here there was no foothold, and we could fight like a man with his back to the wall, as by getting closely under the rocks, up to which there was deep water, our foes could not take us in the rear. The negroes yelled again as the yacht retreated, and followed both by rowing and swimming. When they came close enough, Flick fired the cannon, and a red lane was cut through the mass of boats and men. Nothing daunted, they still continued to advance, and then
the men opened fire with their rifles, picking off man after man, and tumbling them into the water.

The temple stairs and terraces were crowded with women, the quays with men, and boat after boat, crowded with warriors in scarlet tunics and black cloaks, came racing towards the yacht, till I thought there could not be a craft left in Awazil. By this time our blood was up, and we kept up a steady fire. The carronade spouted out red flame and grapeshot, making tremendous havoc among the closely-packed boats. Ixtael saw this, and shouted out his orders, so that in a few minutes the mass opened out, and the yacht was almost surrounded by scattered canoes. It was harder to pick off the men now, but we had the cliffs at our back, and could prevent the enemy taking us in the rear. The cracking of the rifles went on almost incessantly for two hours, and we managed to prevent the negroes boarding the ship. The water was strewn with wreckage, and a veil of smoke hung in the hollow, like that on the peak of the mountain.

Near at hand was the scarlet ship at her anchorage, and Ixtael sent a crowd of men on board this, hoping to bring the craft near enough to board us. Her decks were nearly level with our own, and if she came alongside the struggle would be a hand-to-hand one. Flick saw the danger, and when the red
Harry... rarely struck or fired without bringing down his man.
ship began to crawl towards the yacht, he fired the
carronade at a mark below her water-line. The shot
tore a hole in her side, and she heeled over slowly,
with a black mass of shrieking humanity clinging to
her red timbers. Still they strove to row towards
us, whereat Flick, ignoring the inhumanity of such
proceeding, put the yacht straight at their craft full
steam ahead. With a horrid crashing sound the
Carmen's bows met the red ship broadside; and
being but lightly put together for the purposes of
transportation, the pride of Isk crumbled up like
paper, and sank in a spinning whirlpool of her own
making. The Carmen steamed over the spot, where
the red ship had floated a moment or two before.
It was a cruel step, but necessary, and struck terror
into the hearts of the negroes. We were punished
for it, however, for as the red boat heeled over and
went down, crowds of negroes leaped on to our
decks. Those in the boats raised a yell when they
saw this, and pressed up closely in their canoes so
as to board the yacht. Half of us had to take to
cutlasses, while the rest fired steadily at the mass
seething round in the water below. Harry, with a
sword in one hand and a revolver in the other, went
to work systematically, and rarely struck or fired
without bringing down his man. We were confronted
by a crowd of savage black devils, and with their
spears and clubs they rushed recklessly on to the attack.

Again the screws were set going, and the yacht swung over the boats, smashing them up right and left. With Harry by my side, we drove back the negroes step by step to the bulwarks. The men used their rifles as clubs, and cleared the decks on all sides. Harry got a nasty stab in the arm, and more than one of our men fell wounded on the deck. But, what with the veil of smoke, the motion of the vessel rolling over the boats, and the excitement, I could not see what was going on. We fought inch by inch, and at last I found myself standing alone by the bulwarks, with the boat steaming towards the gap of the chasm. In the distance a wreck of boats and bodies showed where the fight had been.

"They've fled!" cried Flick, coming forward, grimy and savage. "I don't think they'll tackle us again to-night. We've lost three men."

"Thank God it's no worse!" I gasped; "and thank God the darkness is coming on!"
CHAPTER XXVII.

BASILEA'S EMBASSY.

"Behold, I come in humble guise,
To sue for peace, upon my knee;
Thou knowest love is seldom wise,
And turns at times to jealousy.
From all my loving sprang this hate;
I see my fault, alas! too late;
But give me back my heart's true mate,
And mercy, prythee, have on me."

WHILE the darkness was settling down the negroes drew off their forces, and retreated to the quay before the staircase. We had killed a great many of them, but what could we do in the midst of their thousands? We were but a handful against the whole population of Isk, and, trapped as we were in that pool, the outlook was anything but reassuring. The battle to-day had been a mere skirmish, as the warriors that fought had been hastily collected together—the garrison, as it were, of the city. To-morrow Basilea, acting through her puppet of a king, would summon the warriors from every village in the island, and then we should be overpowered by sheer numbers. Thousands hurling themselves
against us, animated by fanaticism, would soon overwhelm our small party.

We determined to hold a council of war, but, pending doing so, Flick moved the yacht back to the cliffs, so that we could only be attacked in one direction. The sheer rocks, rising out of deep water at our back, preserved us from any surprise, and we swept the whole circumference of the pool with our search-light. A cry of wonderment arose from the negroes who were camped on the quays, when the great sword of electric light came stabbing through the dark, and picking out their congregated masses. The city, the temple, the mountain, flashed out with the distinctness of a photograph, and not one canoe could put off without being sighted by our men.

These, refreshed by a hearty meal and an allowance of grog, had returned to their posts, with loaded revolvers and rifles. The dead men were decently buried as soon as we reached our anchorage, Flick reading the service over them, as the corpses were shot into the pool. The crew were in very good spirits, feeling elevated by their victory, and were quite willing to wait the decision of the three of us. I should say four, for when we descended to the saloon, Captain Flick ordered Jenner to come also. In the present emergency his advice might be useful.
We had washed after the fatigue and grime of the battle, and had changed our clothes. Now, after a good dinner, we all felt better, and were quite ready to discuss the future over a pipe. In a few minutes the council of war was in full swing.

"You see," explained Flick, quietly, "this move of Basilea's has taken me by surprise. I said she would cut up rough if she guessed that Harry was paying attention to Myrtea, but I did not think her jealousy would go so far as war. I thought I might talk her into giving up Bertha and the statue in exchange for Harry."

"Upon my word, that is kind of you, Flick!" cried Harry, with a laugh.

"Bah! you know what I mean, lad. I was only fooling her. Once Bertha and the statue were on board, and we would clear out."

"Well, and why can't we do that now?" said I anxiously. "Let us storm the temple, rescue Bertha and Myrtea; blow up the gates and get away before dawn."

"What about the statue?" asked Flick, obstinately.

"Oh, hang the statue! It has caused all the trouble. I want Bertha, Harry wants Myrtea——"

"And I want the statue," finished Flick, firmly. "If we storm the temple to-night, I'm going to have a try for it."
"By all means," said I, significantly; "but I warn you, Flick, that if we're not out of here by dawn, we shall have thousands of these devils on us. It was hard work to beat them off to-day; it will be harder to-morrow, when they come down in all their strength."

"Like a wolf on the fold—eh, Sir Denis?" said Flick, angrily. "Well, no doubt you are right. As I got Miss Greenvile into this scrape, it is my duty to get her out of it. I will storm the temple to-night, if you like."

"I approve of it, Flick. It's our only chance."

"What do you say, Harry?"

"I say, make the attempt to-night. I am afraid while Myrtea is in the power of that jealous woman."

"Jenner?"

"I'm with you, captain. And I can answer for the men. They are all wild to get away from Isk."

"Good!" said Flick, rising to his feet. "Then we will switch off the lights, and move across to our old anchorage. You, Sir Denis, will remain in charge of the boat with Jenner and twenty men. I shall take the rest and Harry. We'll have to fight our way up and down. But if the negroes try to stop us, as they undoubtedly will, open fire on them, and we'll slip back by a side quay. Keep the search-light on the steps till we descend, and on the negroes while we go
off into the darkness. It's a forlorn hope, but it may succeed."

"And the iron gates, sir?"

"We'll blow those up later on, Mr. Jenner," said Flick, going on deck. "The first thing is to rescue the ladies. I regret the statue," he added, with a sigh, "but I suppose I must put up with the loss. So far as that is concerned, the expedition is a failure."

In a few minutes the men were informed of our plans, and they were so delighted therewith that they got to their stations with the utmost alacrity. The search-light was switched off, and the screws of the yacht began to spin. Suddenly, before the vessel had moved her own length, we heard a voice hail us out of the darkness.

"It's Ixtael!" cried Harry, quickly; "I know his voice. By Jove! are they going to buck in again?"

The yacht stopped, and the search-light again flared out into the gloom, slowly sweeping from side to side of the pool. In the radiance near at hand we saw a canoe paddled by a single man, and containing a single woman. It came alongside, and Flick bent down to see if he could recognize the occupants.

"Ixtael and Basilea!" he said, heartily. "She's come to make terms. Harry, go to the end of the ship with Jenner, and don't show yourself."
"Why not, Flick?"

"I'll tell you afterwards. Go, quick—quick! I have a plan here which may save the lot of us."

Harry was rather puzzled by this sudden dismissal, but obeyed nevertheless, and slipped back into the gloom with Jenner, as Basilea climbed up the rope ladder slung over the side for her ascension. Suspecting treachery, Flick swept the quays with the light; but all seemed quiet, and neither boats nor swimmers appeared in the pool. Basilea guessed his suspicions, and smiled scornfully at these precautions.

"All is safe, stranger," she said quietly. "I come in peace, and me you can hold as a hostage lest harm should befall. Also Ixtael, the general of our warriors, is here."

"What do you want?" asked Roaring Tom, tartly. "More mischief, I suppose—as if you hadn't done enough already."

"I would see Fairhair."

"You can't! Anything you wish to say must be said to myself and my friend here."

"So be it," replied the woman, quietly; "let us go into the light."

Leaving Ixtael on deck with Jenner, who returned to keep an eye on him, we descended into the saloon. Basilea, whose grand face looked weary and worn, cast a careless glance around at the pretty little
cabin, but made no remark, although the evidences of civilization must have astonished her greatly. With a weary sigh, she threw off her white cloak, and, seating herself on the divan, surveyed the two of us long and earnestly. I bore her gaze with great equanimity, waiting for her to declare the object of her visit; but Flick was not so patient, and in a few minutes demanded roughly what she wanted. He considered that she was the cause of the trouble we had undergone that day, and was by no means inclined to receive this Ate with courtesy.

"You ask why I come, white chief?" she said bitterly. "It is not for justice, be sure. Did we not receive you kindly? Did we not give you the best in our isle? Ay, we acted so; but you have slain our folk, you have sunk our ship, you have insulted the holy goddess."

"Come, now, Basilea," said Flick, bluntly; "it was you who began the trouble. If you had not ordered Fairhair to be killed, he would not have slain your warriors. It was by your command that our boat was attacked this afternoon; and had we not possessed weapons of which you knew nothing, it might have gone hard with us. Look on both sides of the question, Basilea, and see who is to blame, you or us."
"You are cruel and evil-hearted men," she retorted, still looking at the matter from her point of view. "I love Fairhair, and by the will of the goddess he was given to me for spouse. What did I find, strangers? That he deceived me, he insulted the goddess, and gave his kisses to the fickle and faithless Myrtea."

"Was that a reason for bringing about this trouble?" demanded Flick impatiently.

"Ay; the holy Venus cannot be insulted with impunity. Fear you not the wrath of the goddess?"

"Not a bit. Our gods are not your gods, Basilea."

Basilea rose to her feet in horror, and made a sign to avert the vengeance of Venus.

"Rash one, would you die before your hour?" she said in a low voice. "You scoff at the goddess, you speak with contempt of her shrine; but know that below she is preparing her vengeance. The burning mountain is held peaceful only by her will. Were I to pray to her, and invoke her wrath, dire would be the rain of flame and ashes which would descend on you."

"And on Isk also, Basilea," said I, quickly. "If you punish us in that way, you punish the whole island. You will involve the just and unjust in a common ruin."

"It will come—it must come!" cried the high
priestess, prophetically. "But yesterday I ascended to the peak of the smoking hill. Fire flames in the cup, waves of molten lava roll in the hollow; all is prepared. A word from me, and those terrors would be unchained."

"Then I advise you to keep them tied up," said Flick, lightly; "that is, if you wish to preserve your temple from ruin. If Venus lets fly in that fashion, her own dwelling will be the first to smash up. I don't think much of a deity who cuts off her nose to spite her face."

"Beware! beware! These be awful words," said Basilea, again making the gesture. "But enough of such idle talk. The night wanes, and I would depart. Give me Fairhair to be my spouse, let him go hence with me, and to-morrow you can depart from Isk unharmed."

"And if we don't agree, Basilea?"

"Then will I unchain the terrors of the hill, and ye shall die."

"Rot!" muttered Flick, weary of this mystical talk. "See here, Basilea. If you try any more of these murdering games, I'll pound your temple and statue to marbles. I have weapons, of which you know nothing, which will blow up yonder shrine as high as the stars. There is no need to wait for the mountain to act. I can ruin the island myself."
For the first time Basilea paled, for after the exhibition of to-day, she was well aware that the islanders could not cope with us in the matter of destructive weapons. She looked helplessly at Flick, not knowing what to say or do. The religious terrors, which were so efficacious with the islanders, had no effect on him, and for the moment she was puzzled how to answer. Flick took the initiative.

"See here, Basilea," he said in a conciliating tone, "we both want something; you wish for Fairhair, I want—the statue of Venus."

"The statue of Venus!" she gasped, an expression of terror flitting across her face.

"The same," rejoined Roaring Tom, coolly. "You deliver it to me on board this boat, and I'll engage to hand you back Fairchild, to marry, if you choose."

Basilea stood looking at him as though she were turned into stone. The audacity of the demand appalled even her bold spirit; and seeing her thus mute, Flick pursued his speech. For obvious reasons I took no part in this highly interesting conversation.

"That's not all," resumed Flick, slowly. "My friend Darkhair is plighted to the maid you hold in your power as the future Queen of Isk. She must be allowed to go also. As regards Myrtea, you can do
as you please—either marry her to Fairchild, or throw her into the smoking mountain."

The priestess let a gleam of fierceness flicker across her face at the mention of Myrtea's name, and an idea seemed to strike her.

"Myrtea is imprisoned in the room of our future queen," she said quietly, "and awaits punishment when the marriage of Hesperus takes place."

"It must never take place," I broke in, impetuously.

"No," said Basilea, with an enigmatic smile; "it shall not take place. Give me Fairchild to-morrow," she added, turning to Flick, "and to-morrow you shall receive the statue of the goddess. But be quiet—be silent, lest we be torn to pieces by the populace for this sacrilege."

"You will give up the statue?" cried Flick, hardly believing his ears.

"Yes. To-morrow, at noon, a case shall be delivered to you. That case shall contain the holy statue."

"And Bertha—your future queen?"

"Come to the temple at night, Darkhair," she answered; "to-morrow night, when we worship Venus, at the new moon. Then you can take the maiden with you, and you can deliver Fairchild into my hands."
"Good," said Flick, cordially. "You promise to do this?"

Basilea looked at him steadily.

"I promise to do this," she said coldly, and, dropping the veil over her face, she moved swiftly towards the door.

We followed her on deck, and Flick laid his hand on her arm as she prepared to descend into the boat, where Ixtael already waited her.

"One moment, Basilea," he said quickly. "Will your men attack us to-morrow?"

"No! You are safe, white chief, till all is accomplished."

With a strange smile she dropped into the canoe, and the next instant it vanished out of the trail of light into the darkness. Harry, who had been on the watch, came forward.

"Is Myrtea safe?" he asked eagerly.

"She is safe," replied Flick, "and so are we. Basilea has agreed to set Bertha free to-morrow, and to give up the statue."

"The deuce she has! And her reward?"

"Is to be you. When she delivers the statue and Bertha, we deliver you into her hands."

"A game of bluff," said Harry, coolly. "Well, I suppose we must do our best to beat her. If I can I must rescue Myrtea, and we'll all sail away, leaving
Basilea lamenting like another Ariadne. What do you think, old Evans?"

"I think Basilea has some plan in her head," said I, gravely; "there's more trouble coming, I'm sure."

Neither Flick nor Harry believed me, but subsequent events proved that I was right.
CHAPTER XXVIII.

SCIENCE VERSUS NATURE.

"With all our knowledge, all our skill,
In bending Nature to our will,
How weak are we when she disdains
To longer wear our feeble chains!
She spurns our bonds, and rises grand,
To rain destruction on the land,
And places underneath her ban
The weakest of her creatures—Man."

Of course none of us believed in the vengeance of
the goddess, or that she could, by the mouth of
her servant Basilea, unchain the terrors of the burning
mountain. I am aware that such a remark will sound
unnecessary in the ears of civilized people; but we
were then undergoing such strange experiences among
this strange people, that even now, when I set it
down, it does not seem unnecessary to me. But the
curious part is, that the terrors threatened by the
high priestess began on that very night; and it was
peculiar, to say the least of it, that the mountain
should have verified so speedily the speech of Basilea.
One would have thought that Venus actually reigned
in Isk, and possessed the power of using the forces of the smoking hill to enforce the recognition of her divinity. At all events, towards the morning the trouble began, and till dawn we were seized with no small degree of panic. I write the word advisedly, and I challenge all who read this to scoff at the fears engendered by the convulsion of nature which occurred on that occasion.

We retired to rest, after a short discussion. Flick and Harry both believed that Basilea, blinded by love and jealousy, was prepared to act straightforwardly. I held a contrary opinion, for the strange smile with which she had agreed to Flick's proposition augured that she intended to play some trick. What the trick might be I knew not, but I went to bed with an uneasy conviction that Basilea had a card to play which would lose us the game. If we did lose it, the result would be anything but pleasant to all on board the yacht.

Towards dawn, as I have said, the trouble began. I was sound asleep, worn out by the fighting of the previous day, and the anxiety consequent on Basilea's visit. Suddenly I was shot clean out of my berth on to the floor, where I landed with a terrific thud. The yacht seemed to be standing on her head, and I felt the heave and swell of giant waves running under her, as though she were battling with the mighty
billows of the Atlantic. I guessed in a minute that we were in the grip of some submarine disturbance, and, without waiting a moment, I ran out into the saloon, and staggered up the companion in my night-gear. Flick was holding on to the weather-rigging, Harry clinging to the mast, both as lightly clad as I was; but the yacht was see-sawing and rolling as though she was in the midst of breakers. Nor was this all: overhead spread a strange red light from horizon to zenith, and from the mountain black wreaths of smoke coiled rapidly up to the lurid sky, blotting out the stars.

"Another earthquake," gasped Flick, as I plunged forward; "the boat's kicking properly. Hold on, Evans; here's another."

The yacht soared lightly on the ridge of a smooth billow, which, sweeping under her keel, slid into the gloom, and crashed like thunder against the steep sides of the cliffs. Jenner, with some of the men, came forward, looking rather afraid; but they were compelled to grip any support that was handy, to prevent themselves being dashed about the deck. Our boat twisted and kicked and turned like an eel, and the glow in the sky shed a ghastly light into the cup, which added to the horrors of the scene. We could hear the negroes yelling on shore, and saw lights flitting rapidly through the streets of Awazil.
From the temple came a strain of music. Doubtless Basilea and her priestesses were imploring the favour of the goddess.

"It's the dawn," cried Harry, pointing aloft to the red glow.

"Whoever saw the dawn in the west, you fool?" growled Flick. "It's the reflection from the burning mountain. I hope the island isn't going down."

Even as he spoke there came a strange booming sound from the far distance. It was like the roaring of billows on a rocky coast, and thereupon the yacht again began to kick. The waters of the pool glimmered white, for the same change had taken place in them as on a former occasion. We were spinning like a top in a milky sea, that heaved and rolled in smooth and foamless waves. The motion made me sick.

Still the roaring went on in the distance. Then began a series of crashes like thunder, which echoed and re-echoed in the hollow. At first it resembled the fall of a walled town; afterwards there followed a ripping and rending to which I can put no name, and, shut up in the boat, we spun and plunged, in the lurid gloom, till I thought I should have gone distracted. In the intervals of the crashing we could hear the howls of the negroes, and fitful snatches of the chants from the temple. Basilea and her maidens
held firmly to their task, but their orisons were worse than useless.

In the pandemonium of noise I still clung to the taffrail, thinking of Bertha. Should I ever see her again? Would she on land, and I at sea, be at once overwhelmed in this volcanic convulsion? I had no time to answer these questions, and very speedily I could scarcely think at all, for the continuous motion turned me deadly sick, and a sudden thickening in the atmosphere made my head ache like to split.

I never passed so frightful a night. I trust that I am not a coward, but the thought of Bertha shut up in the temple, and the belief that the yacht might at any moment go down into the milky sea, made me afraid. All the long hours, while the boat pitched and twisted, and the booming, crashing, and ripping continued, and the red glow deepened in the zenith, I prayed for the dawn that we might see what was going on. All of us, without exception, thought that Isk was sinking amid the fearful convulsion of nature.

At dawn the noises ceased as suddenly as they had begun, and the pool relapsed into its ordinary stillness. Also the red glare died out of the sky, so I presumed that the molten lava which had caused the reflection had sunk back into the entrails of the mountain. A thick column of smoke still rolled
upward, but the earth trembled no more, and our boat lay placidly on the glossy surface of the milky water—for it was still milky, as the sediment stirred up by the convulsion took some time to settle down again. Not a negro could we see on the quay, but the terraces and staircase of the temple were black with a dense multitude who were getting as close to the fane as possible, thinking, I presume, that the goddess would protect them from harm. Others were in the town, for therefrom we heard wailings at intervals. As the dawn slowly broadened, and the light spread over the sky, we found that all was quiet for the moment, and looked at each other with relief on our haggard faces.

"Something has gone wrong with the island," said Flick, as we sat at breakfast. "I guess we had better get the boat out to-day. I've told the men as much, and they are all delighted."

"Same here," said Harry, with a nod; "but what about Myrtea and Bertha?"

"We must go up to the temple and get them given up by Basilea," said I, decidedly; "we can't possibly leave the pool unless they are on board."

"Basilea won't give up the statue now, Flick," observed Harry. "You know the prophecy, that if the statue leaves Isk, the island will sink. After this racket she'll think twice before she parts with it."
"I don't fancy she is superstitious."

"Last night would make any one superstitious," said I with a shudder; "it was more like the day of judgment than anything else. Let us get the girls aboard, Flick, and leave the island."

"We will do so shortly," he answered, rising; "but first I'm going to berth off the town."

"What for?"

"I wish to climb the ridge, and look at the plain, Sir Denis. After that awful convulsion of last night I wouldn't be surprised to find some change."

We agreed to this, and returned to the deck. Our men, who were looking apprehensively from the milky pool to the ominous smoke of the mountain, were greatly relieved to be assured once more that we were shortly about to leave the island. I believe there would have been a mutiny, had not the skipper given this promise. Flick intended to move towards Awazil, and see from the ridge if any change had taken place in the formation of the island; afterwards he arranged to visit the chasm and blow up the gates, so that our boat could pass through. This done, we designed to seek the temple and demand Bertha and Myrtea. If Basilea refused to give them up willingly, we would take them by force. This was our programme, but it was altered by unforeseen circumstances.
In the spectral light of the morning, the yacht crept across the pool, and lay off shore, almost at the foot of the royal road. Here she swung at anchor a hundred yards away from the land, for although Flick believed that the negroes would not harm us until Basilea gave the signal, he was too wise a man not to take precautions. He preferred to remain on board himself, and sent Harry, myself, and a dozen men in the boat. We were all well armed, and walked warily up the road, looking for any lurking foe. But our fears were unfounded, for the negroes kept in their houses, and were too dominated by terror to think of attacking us. In safety we arrived at the swell of the ridge, and then the sight which met our eyes was so appalling that we were stricken dumb, and could only stare before us, amazed and filled with wondering alarm. The scene was one which was well calculated to astonish us.

Instead of a rich and fertile plain, covered with cornlands and forests; instead of the long palm avenue, and the glittering glory of the king's palace; instead of distant hills, of winding streams, we now beheld nothing but a broad waste of water. The convulsions of the mountain had undermined plains and hills; the subterranean forces had done their dread work, and the limitless ocean rolled its waves over the lands, as it had done thousands of years before,
ere Isk was called up from the depths. The turbid grey waters rolled to the very foot of the ridge, and only that slender bar of ground now divided the pool from the ocean. At least half the island had been submerged, and I dreaded to think how many villages and human beings had gone down in that terrible night. The catastrophe on so large a scale appalled us all, and struck a chill to the heart of each. We seemed to behold our own fate in that wondrous transformation.

With one consent we ran down the royal road, sprang into the boat, and rejoined the yacht. Flick looked at us in astonishment when we told our story, and then his face went white with horror.

"Great God!" he said, glancing at the volcano; "the whole east side of the island down? It's incredible!"

"Go and see for yourself, Flick!" gasped Harry, with an effort. "There is nothing to be seen but water; only the ridge divides it from this pool. The king's palace, the king himself, is down in the depths. It will be our fate shortly."

"For God's sake, let us get out of this hellish place!" I cried, and the men echoed my request. We were all sufficiently brave for ordinary matters, but this terrific convulsion of Nature turned us cold with fear. We could do nothing against the titanic forces of the Great Mother.
"We'll get," cried Flick, making up his mind on the spot, "the chasm first, the temple afterwards. We'll be outside in three hours, lads. Steam her for the gap, Jenner, and explode the mine."

The men flew to their posts, and in less time than it takes to write, the yacht was moving towards the chasm. I glanced back, and saw that the people on terraces and staircase were staring at our boat moving over the white surface of the pool. Flick steered himself, and with the utmost dexterity manoeuvred the yacht, so that she glided close to the shelf of rocks, whereon were arranged the electric wires communicating with the mine under the iron gates. Thence the chasm bent inward for some distance, until it widened out into a straight passage towards the sea; so that there was no danger of the yacht being hurt by the explosion, however terrific it might be. When we were close by the shelf, up to which came deep water, sufficient for the yacht to swim in, Jenner dropped over the side, and went to work on the wires. In a few moments there was a frightful explosion, which crashed like thunder in the hollow of the chasm; then silence. We could hear the yells of the negroes, who evidently thought the volcano had recommenced its pranks; and even at that distance I noted that the mass of humanity heaved convulsively right up the staircase from quay
to temple. Flick took no notice of the shouts, but ordered a boat out, that he might enter the chasm and see if the gates were sufficiently shattered to enable us to pass through. Harry and I saw the boat disappear into the narrow pass, propelled by the stalwart arms of four seamen, with Flick steering, and waited for his return to report that the passage was clear. Then we would go to the temple, force Basilea to yield up Bertha and Myrtea, and get away from the accursed isle as speedily as the screws of the Carmen could take us.

In half an hour the boat emerged from the gulch, and came alongside. Flick leaped on deck, while the men swung the craft up. There was that on his face which made Harry and I start. He was white, and in his eyes there was a look of terror. Never did I see so fearless a man as Flick so moved.

"What is up?" I cried, stepping forward. "Is the chasm clear? Can we get out?"

"We shall never get out," replied Flick, with a hollow groan. "The explosion has loosened the rocks above the gates, and caused them to block up the passage in their fall. We are shut up in this pool for ever!"
CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LAST FESTIVAL.

"The gods are dead,
The priests have fled,
The temple feels no more the tread
Of worshippers in garments red.
Thy god and mine
Hath fled the shrine,
And now in terror we all pine,
Because we miss the voice divine."

I

NEED hardly say that we were deeply dismayed by the intelligence that the chasm was closed up. The yacht was irrevocably imprisoned in the pool, unless we could get rid of the débris which blocked up the passage. I suggested to Flick that we should make another attempt to blow up the obstruction, but he shook his head sadly.

"It is impossible, Sir Denis," he said decisively. "Another explosion would only bring down more rocks and pile the barrier higher. You know that the gates were placed at the narrowest portion of the passage, and as the mine was exploded there, it did not take many rocks to shut up the channel."
The whole side of one cliff has fallen right across, and we might as well attempt to stop that mountain from smoking as to remove these tons of rubble and lava. No, lads, the boat will never leave the pool that way."

"Then how is she going to leave it at all?" asked Harry in dismay.

"I have thought of a plan," replied Flick coolly, "and I'm about to tell it to the crew."

"What is your plan?"

"We must haul the yacht over the ridge which divides the pool from the ocean. By letting in the water on those plains, the volcano has given us that one chance of escape."

"But, Flick, how the deuce can you get a ship of this size up an incline like that yonder?"

"It is difficult, I admit, Harry; but with ropes and the aid of the negroes we can do a lot. I think myself that the volcano has done its worst, so we may be safe here for some weeks. If we can't haul the boat over, I'll induce Basilea to order her niggers to cut a canal through from pool to ocean. The distance is nothing, and a thousand negroes at work would soon make a gap."

"But the negroes won't obey you!"

"They'll obey Basilea," replied Flick dryly, "and she'll obey me. Once I get that statue into my
possession, and I'll threaten to tell the negroes that she gave it, if she doesn't do as she's told. Oh! you bet I'm not yet at the end of my resources."

The captain's hopeful view of the future considerably encouraged Harry and myself. We urged Flick to explain his plans to the crew, so that they could be roused out of the despondency into which they had fallen. He agreed to do so at once, and Jenner was sent to summon the men aft. When they were all assembled, they looked very anxious and worried, for they felt that they were environed by dangers whence there was no escape. Flick gave them no time to question him, but got on his legs and addressed them in a bluff, hearty fashion, which carried conviction to their hearts. The substance of his speech was as follows:—

"See here, my lads, we're in a tight place," he began loudly; "our attempt to clear away the obstruction in the chasm has only brought down a few tons of rock to block it up in a worse fashion. Our boat came in that way, but she can never steam out in that direction; thus our retreat is cut off, and we are imprisoned in this pool. Now, lads," added Flick, pointing towards Awazil, "you know from the report of your mates and Sir Denis what happened during the night. The land beyond that ridge has sunk into the depths, and the waves roll over the
plains whercon stood the palace of Hesperus. I have little doubt but that the king and most of his subjects have perished. All that remains of the population of Isk are on the steps of the temple yonder, and lie hid in Awazil. Now, lads, the ocean rolls right to the foot of that ridge, so if we could get the yacht across that neck of land, we would be launched on the open sea, and thus be able to sail homeward. I may as well state that it is my conviction, and that of Sir Denis and Mr. Greenvile, that the volcano has done its worst, and that no more trouble will come from that quarter. We may be imprisoned here for some weeks, but, in the meantime, to escape we must make use of the negroes, either to haul the yacht across the isthmus, or to hew a canal so that we can steam through. That is my plan."

He paused a moment, took off his cap, and wiped his brow. The men were deeply interested—as well they might be, seeing it was a question of life and death—and seemed to approve of his idea, although they said nothing, and waited anxiously to hear how he proposed to enlist the services of the islanders that remained. This scheme Flick proceeded to explain.

"I see by your faces," continued Flick, "that you wonder how I can get these niggers to assist us. Well, I'll tell you, lads! The negroes believe that so
long as the statue of the goddess is safe, their island will be spared. In a way which I need not tell you, Basilea, the high priestess, has promised to hand over the statue to me this very day. When I have it in my possession, I shall tell the negroes that, if they do not help us to get out of this pool, either by hauling us over or by cutting a canal, I shall destroy their statue, and so what is left of the island of Isk will be delivered over by the goddess to the vengeance of the smoking mountain. You know these islanders—you know how superstitious they are; so you may guess that, sooner than lose their goddess, they will do as they are told. That is my plan, lads, and you may expect to see this boat afloat on the ocean beyond that ridge in a few weeks. Now you know what Sir Denis, Mr. Greenvile, and I have agreed on. I want to hear what you have to say."

The men looked at one another sheepishly, although they one and all wore an air of relief, but no one ventured to question the captain. At length, all eyes by one consent turned towards the mate, who accepted the position of spokesman, without a moment's hesitation.

"About the lady, sir—Miss Greenvile? Is she to stay in the temple?"

"No, Mr. Jenner. She is coming on board this very night. Sir Denis is going up to the temple to
fetch her, for Basilea has agreed that she can go. And, indeed," added Flick after a pause, "it would be no use these negroes keeping her now, for lack of a king to marry her to. Hesperus and his two brothers lie yonder, under the cold grey waters."

So it was settled, and the men returned to their various tasks with great contentment. It was now late in the morning, and Flick steered the yacht back to her old anchorage off the temple quay. We intended to have luncheon first, and afterwards to revisit the Temple of the Star, for the purpose of interviewing Basilea, and learning how she intended to smuggle the statue of the goddess on board. Flick was afraid lest she should have altered her mind, and lest, in despair at the destruction of the greater part of the island, she should urge the negroes to fall again on the yacht and slay us. But in the course of the next hour we found that she was ready to keep her part of the agreement, and, what is more, she gave us a proof of her intention.

While we were eating in the cabin, Jenner entered and informed us that Ixtael had come to see us with a message from Basilea. Flick ordered that he should be brought before us, and in a few minutes the chief descended, looking uglier and more sullen than ever. It was evident that he blamed us for the misfortunes which had befallen Isk, and, without
even a look of recognition, he recited the message of the high priestess as though he were saying a lesson.

"Thus says the servant of the most high goddess: Ye have come hither, and have brought evil in your train. The wrath of the mountain hath sunk half our isle in the sea, and hath drowned our king, and nearly all our people. Hence we would be quit of you, and I send hither, by the hand of Ixtael, that for which ye came. Seek what further ye require in the Temple of the Star, what time we worship the Holy One. Thou men of ill, who have worked us woe, go hence through the narrow pass, and depart to your own land, for while ye remain here the wrath of the goddess is heavy upon Isk."

Having finished, Ixtael turned on his heel with a scowl, and left the cabin. We followed, but not before Flick had warned us to say nothing about that which we desired to obtain.

"If those niggers find out that Basilea is parting with their palladium, they will kill us in their despair, and perhaps slay Miss Bertha; so say nothing of the statue, I beg of you."

At first we thought that Ixtael had brought the case containing the statue with him, but there was no boat left large enough to carry it, and he pointed to where it stood on the quay, a huge object covered
with black cloths. Flick made up his mind on the instant, and ran the Carmen close to the stone edge of the quay. Our men all had their rifles and cutlasses ready to repel any attack; but the negroes, grouped on the temple steps, made no movement. All the fire seemed to have gone out of them; they were overwhelmed by the magnitude of the disaster, which had cost them the largest and most fertile part of their island. In sullen silence they looked on from a distance, as a dozen of our sailors lifted the great square case across the gangway and transferred it to the yacht. When it was safely on board, and stowed in a corner of the deck, the boat slipped back to her former moorings. Thus we had accomplished the main object of our expedition, and Flick was satisfied; but it yet remained to rescue Bertha and Myrtea.

"So far we have succeeded," said Flick, gloating over the great case. "There is the statue, to gain which I have perilled my life."

"And the lives of others," I said bitterly. "Don't forget, Flick, that we have yet Bertha to rescue."

"And Myrtea," added Harry eagerly. "Shall we all go up to the temple this evening?"

"I cannot go," said Flick bluntly, "as I must stay on board and defend the boat, should the islanders attack her. You cannot go, Harry, lest Basilea should detain you when she releases your sister."
Sir Denis must go with half a dozen men, and bring the two girls on board."

"How shall I account for the absence of Harry?"

"Tell Basilea that he will be given up to her at dawn."

"Shall I ask her to let the negroes cut the canal through the ridge?"

"No. She would then guess that we were imprisoned here by the blocking up of the chasm; and if she found out that we were in her power, she might set what is left of the islanders on us. No, no! Get Miss Bertha and Myrtlea on board; then ask her to come at dawn to the boat. I'll make a bargain with her then."

"Mind, Flick, I won't go with her," cried Harry, who did not like the part he played in these schemes, necessary as it was to hoodwink our crafty enemy.

"Of course not. The possession of the statue will make Basilea and all her following my slaves. I, not she, will be invested with the powers of the goddess, and I'll make use of these superstitions to escape from this infernal trap."

Harry was very unwilling that I should go alone, lest I should be killed by the infuriated negroes at the bidding of Basilea; but, as she had fulfilled one part of the agreement, I felt sure that she would carry out the rest. Her sole desire was to gain Harry, and to that end she had, as she doubtless
thought, delivered over the isle to destruction. She had parted with the statue, on the preservation of which Isk depended. I had little doubt after that extreme step of her steadfast adherence to her game of treachery. These things I pointed out to Harry, and very unwillingly he consented that I should undertake the task alone, aided by half a dozen well-armed sailors.

The afternoon wore heavily away, and we kept watch on the negroes, strolling listlessly about the quays. Their placid life had been thrown out of gear, and those who did not lie moaning—men, women, and children—on the steps of the temple, stood on the top of the ridge looking over that shoreless sea, under whose waters their king, fellow-countrymen, and rich lands lay buried. I felt sorry for the agony of the poor creatures, although, whatever they might think, their misery was none of our working. Nature, who had wrapped them in luxury all these years, had turned traitress, and had brought these woes upon them. I foresaw the time when Isk would be no more than a name.

When the gong roared from the temple, I went on shore with my six men, armed to the teeth, and bent on rescuing Bertha, by force, if necessary. Flick had steam up, and the yacht brought me to the quay. When we landed, she backed out again into the
shadows of the night, but only a little distance, as Flick wished to be ready to take us on board in case Basilea changed her mind, and pursued the two girls with her vengeance. The people were still lying on the cold marble of the steps, but they made way for us to pass up, although they scowled and muttered as we ascended. But for the fear of the goddess, I have no doubt they would have torn us limb from limb.

As we arrived at the last terrace, and advanced towards the great doors of the fane, I felt the earth tremble, much to my dread; but the earthquake soon passed, and again the pavement under my feet was firm. I walked into the great hall, which was crowded with a sullen company, all having despair written on their black faces. The moon, brilliantly clear, poured down her light through the open roof, and I saw Basilea, Bertha, and the choir of priestesses standing before the silvery veil which hid the statue of the goddess. Alas! well I knew that the palladium of Isk was lost, that the niche was empty.

Bertha, who looked pale and terrified, stretched out her arms with a cry of joy as I entered, and the next moment I was holding her to my heart. Then I looked around for Myrtea, but could not see her.

"Courage, my love," I murmured to Bertha. "You
are safe now, and soon you will be on board the yacht. But Myrtea?"

"I know not where she is," whispered Bertha, clinging to me. "I have not seen her since that terrible earthquake, when half the isle sunk. Basilea took her away. I fear the worst."

"This will be bad news for Harry," said I in dismay, and turned to interrogate the high priestess, who watched us, haggard but calm.

"Where is Fairhair?" she demanded, before I could speak. "You have her; you have that for which you came. Give me the King of Isk."

"The King of Isk?"

"Yes, white stranger. Hesperus is dead; he is fathoms below the brine, and Isk has now no king, for the three of our royal house have perished. Give me Fairhair to wed, and we shall rule Isk as did the first Hesperus and his spouse—I, like the woman, to minister at the shrine of the goddess; he, like the Greek, to rule the isle. From us shall spring the royal race of the future. Give me Fairhair."

"He is on board the yacht," said I, quickly. "Come at dawn and take him."

"Ah!" she cried, with fury glancing in her eyes, "you would deceive me. Know you that I can kill you? that I—−"

She never finished her sentence. There was a
terrific roar, a crash like thunder, and the silver veil was rent from top to bottom. The people shrieked aloud when they saw that the niche was empty.

"Isk is lost! Isk is fallen!" they wailed. "The goddess hath departed from the shrine. Isk! Isk!"

Not heeding the earthquake, or the howling of the congregation who crowded to the doors, Basilea drew a knife and rushed on me. One of the sailors caught her arm, and she struck at him. As she did so, there was a second roar; a flare of fire reddened the sky, and moon and stars were blotted out by a thick cloud. Night rushed down on the temple, the earth heaved convulsively, and the great volcano high above spouted its crimson fire to the skies. The end of Isk was at hand.
CHAPTER XXX.

THE VOLCANO.

"From the depths of the earth,
Where the fire hath birth,
It flames to the skies,
Confounding the wise;
Who said, 'By the charm,
No danger can harm,
Nor terror be hurled
From the heart of the world.'
But lo, in a night,
The fire in its might
Jets fierce from earth's womb,
And consigns to the tomb
The just and unjust,
Till all are but dust."

The sudden gloom was so terrible that for a moment the clamour of terrified humanity was stilled. The bravest man was appalled by the suddenness and extent of the catastrophe. In that pause we heard the artillery of the now active volcano playing against the heavens, and the ground shook incessantly with the convulsions of the mountain. I could hardly stand, but, clinging to a pillar in the murky gloom, I clasped Bertha tightly to my breast. A moment afterwards the shrieks and struggles of the negro
population began again, and they hurled themselves confusedly towards the great doors of the fane, frantic to leave the temple of a divinity who could no longer protect them. Encircled by the six sailors I stood on the daïs, holding fast to Bertha, and so we were saved from the terrific crush going on below.

"Keep together, men—keep together!" I shouted, "and make for the quay below the staircase. Captain Flick will put in to take us off."

"And what am I to do with this 'ere tiger-cat, sir?" asked a sailor, who still held Basilea in his grip.

"Let her go—no, on second thoughts, don't. I do not wish a knife thrust in my back."

Here one of the men lighted a torch which he had seen fastened to a near pillar before the darkness fell, and the red flare lit up a space in the gloom. It fell on our white faces, on the ghastly countenance of Basilea, and revealed the wild disorder of the scene.

"Why did I not kill you, white man?" muttered Basilea. "The goddess might have accepted the sacrifice, and have averted these terrors."

"We will be killed, in any case, if we stay here," said Bertha, who still retained her presence of mind. "I know a way out by the back."

Leaving the tumult still going on in the shaking
hall, she dragged me through the curtains at the side, whence the procession of priestesses were wont to come. The sailors followed, forcing along Basilea in accordance with my instructions. I heard, between the crashes from the volcano, the muttered imprecations of the woman at the failure of her plans. Much as I wished to rescue Myrtea, I did not see how it could be done, as the danger of remaining in the temple was too great. Basilea had shut her up somewhere, and she refused to say a word. No doubt she was pleased that one at least of her enemies—for so she regarded the girl—should be punished.

Threading the narrow passages, Bertha led our little party out by a side door, and we found ourselves on a level space of ground, whence banks of green turf sloped gently to the verge of the grove lying 'twixt quay and temple. We had not got out a moment too soon, for hardly had we emerged before a shudder of the earth shook the fane to ruins. We heard the dull thud of falling pillars, the heartrending screams of those buried amid the ruins, and looked up to see zigzag flashes of red fire playing like lightning in the dusky heart of the smoke. The whistle of the yacht was shrieking shrilly to give us notice of her whereabouts; for, strain our eyes as we might, no glimpse could we catch of her in that pitchy darkness. I began to think that we were lost.
"Where is Myrtea—Myrtea?" I cried, gripping Basilea with my disengaged arm.

She gave a wild laugh of mingled triumph and terror, and pointed to the temple.

"She is in there, white man, buried under the stones of the shrine."

I recoiled aghast, and Bertha uttered a sob of sorrow for her friend, whereupon Basilea, wrenching herself free from those who held her, darted into the gloom and sprang over the high bank. Whether she meant to seek safety or to kill herself I do not know, but then and there she disappeared, and only once did I set eyes on her again. Then she received the reward of her treachery in dooming Myrtea to a cruel death.

Instinctively we moved forward to follow Basilea, but hardly had we taken a step when a wonderful thing happened. The earth under our feet yawned with a ripping noise, and a great volume of sulphurous smoke was belched forth. With a curse the men recoiled. I dragged Bertha back, and then—I was too terrified to notice how—the earth seemed to gape in all directions, and for safety our party scattered. I found myself under a tree alone with Bertha, and, losing her nerve after that last awful experience, she sobbed hysterically in my arms.
"My dear girl, don't give way," I implored her. "We may yet escape; and if not, at least we will die together."

Bertha kissed me with cold lips, and tried to control herself. I shouted to the men, but I suppose my voice could not be heard in the roar of the mountain, for I received no reply. It flashed across me that the sailors had been swallowed up in the chasms which opened everywhere, but I could be sure of nothing. I forgot the sailors, I forgot Myrtea, and the high priestess; all my energies were centred on getting to the quay, and saving myself and my future wife from a horrible death. Yet, at the moment, it did not seem to me that we could escape alive from that world of fire.

At that moment a thick dust began to fall through the gloom, and rendered the atmosphere so dense that we could hardly breathe. Fire flickered around us, and a poisonous vapour breathed from the cracks in the ground. I recognized that it was death to remain there longer. I dragged Bertha forward, and made an attempt to scramble down the hill. She was half insensible with the fumes, and could only gasp incoherently as I staggered forward like a drunken man. The tree, underneath which we had been standing, crashed to the ground, and I caught a glimpse of a tall white obelisk near at hand, sliding
into the earth as though it were being pushed down by a giant hand. Indeed, the whole mountain was heaving like the waves of the sea, and I felt terrified lest it should sink altogether, and leave the pair of us struggling with the waves.

Another step forward, and I was over the bank, rolling down with Bertha in my arms. The noises around were hellish, for the mountain bellowed like some titanic monster, as it hurled fire from its entrails. When I rose to my feet I cast a glimpse upward, and saw a lurid glow brighten the gloom. Immediately afterwards a great stone crashed beside us, followed by smaller projectiles, and dreading lest we should be crushed to death, I hastily caught up the insensible Bertha in my arms and reeled down the slope towards the sacred grove, hoping there to obtain shelter. As I advanced, a flare of light flamed redly before me, and I saw that the trees were on fire, amid a mist of steam hissing in jets from the ground. Nor was that the worst. Down the mountain seethed a molten river of lava, devouring all that came in its way: so broad, so swift, that I cried aloud, thinking we should be enveloped in the fiery stream before we could escape. Happily, the burning wood cast a glow through the misty atmosphere, and I saw a kind of stone road running to the right. This, I knew, led to the second last terrace of the staircase,
and with the strength of despair I ran along it, bearing Bertha in my arms. The strain on nerves and muscles was frightful in the extreme.

Hardly had I set foot on the causeway before the torrent of lava passed over the spot where we had lately been standing, and with a hiss burnt its way through the flaming grove. I hurried along as quickly as I was able with my burden, and, stumbling over dead bodies lying in all imaginable kinds of postures, I reached the staircase. Where the temple had been, a crater had opened, swallowing the whole building, and now great jets of yellow flame and volumes of smoke curled up from the gaps. A lurid glare slanted down the mighty marble stair, cumbered with the dead and the dying, but between us and the pool there hung a curtain of blinding dust, ejected from the mouth of the peak above.

The scream of the yacht’s whistle sounded at intervals, and comforted me greatly, as I knew the boat was yet safe, and would prove a haven of refuge could we reach it. Stumbling forward, I tripped over the body of a white man, and by his dress I knew it to be one of our sailors. The negroes, men, women, and children, were mostly lying dead or dying, while some, idiotic with terror, lay flat on the terrace mumbling useless prayers to Venus—Venus, who could not save her shrine from the fury of the burning
mountain. Down came hot rain as I descended, for the volcano was now spouting boiling water and liquid mud. I took off my coat and wrapped it round my own head and that of Bertha's, so that we might escape this horror; and still staggering, still stumbling, guided by the hand of God in that gloom lit by volcanic fires, I managed to gain the quay.

Here the dead were lying thick on the causeway, as I saw for one moment. The next down came a storm of hot dust, blotting out everything around. We gave ourselves up for lost, when a pencil of light stabbed through the gloom, and I heard the cannon of the yacht report in the intervals of noise. Flick had turned on the search-light, and had fired the gun, to let me know he was looking for us; and suddenly I saw the faint outline of the boat glimmer for a moment, then flit away behind the veil. The screws were going, but the boat was swinging round and round in that tempestuous sea, vainly looking for us, alive or dead. Even if we reached her, I had faint hope of safety, for were we not shut up in the pool? and failing the yacht being dragged down by the subterranean forces, there was every chance that she would be crushed by the projectiles hurled from the main crater. God alone could save us in this extremity.

When the yacht passed out of sight, I felt that we were lost. Worn out with the toil of that awful descent,
I sank down beside Bertha amid the dead, and I verily believe I should have lost consciousness had not an awful event taken place. The volcano sent up a solid pillar of flame, which dispelled the darkness in an instant. I saw the yacht steaming along under the cliffs, riding the turbid surges of a milk-white sea. The black town of Awazil stood out distinct in the glare; and as I gazed at it, a dark figure stood before me. It was Basilea.

"Good morrow, white man," she chuckled, with a distraught expression on her face. "Venus has loosed the powers of hell—of Hades. What use is your maiden to you now? All is gone—king, temple, country, statue—the world is ending."

Those yet alive near at hand caught up the dreadful cry, and it echoed to the stars, glimpses of which I caught through the wreaths of eddying smoke. Basilea, elevated on a pile of dead bodies, stood tossing her arms, when unexpectedly, the ground gaped and amid a burst of smoking flame she was swallowed up, without even a cry. Then the earth closed again, and shook violently, as if it relished its prey.

I had no time to think of her miserable fate, which, indeed, shortly might be our own, for we had no power to move from that spot, when in the red glare I espied the town of Awazil burst into flames.
It burned like a beacon all along the neck of land; till with a roar the flames seemed to strike the stars; and when I looked again the whole isthmus had gone down into the greedy sea. A terrific wave, white and fringed with flying spray, rolled in from the outer ocean, and burst bellowing over the place where the ridge had been, and spent its force in the pool. At that moment, with a sickening groan, the quay sank slowly downward. With the courage, born of despair, I gripped Bertha close to my breast and prepared for death. I saw, as in a dream, the yacht rise on a second giant billow, overtop it, tremble on the crest, and then slide down on the other side. The mighty wave swept towards the quay, grasped with fierce force, and enveloped us both in a whirl of spume and spray. We sank together like a stone.

But that the sting of the bitterly cold water roused Bertha from her faint, I do not know what I should have done to preserve her life and my own. The darkness reasserted itself, when Awazil sank in the tempestuous waves, and I found myself swimming vaguely in the gloom, supporting Bertha as I best could. Then God helped us, for by His direction my hand struck against an empty boat that was drifting about. By a superhuman effort I lifted Bertha over the gunwale, but the craft turned turtle
with her weight, and both of us clung despairingly to the streaming keel, drifting hither and thither in the whirl of waters. I deemed that the end had come.

Again the whistle of the yacht screamed through the gloom, and in answer I shouted as loudly as my exhausted strength permitted. Those on board must have heard me, for immediately afterwards the rays of the search-light picked us out. I saw the black hull of the yacht loom above us, I heard a shout, the drum of the screws, and caught a glimpse of a boat being lowered. Then I fainted, and knew no more.
CHAPTER XXXI.

AFTERWARDS.

"The past hath made the present—yea, the past,
So filled with woe and melancholy days,
Hath brought this peace to ease our weary souls;
So after storms, and battlings with the waves,
Some ship, all tempest-torn, may furl her sails
Within the haven of the tideless pool,
Wherefrom she ventured for strange merchandise."

I AWOKE from my swoon, to find myself lying on
the deck of the Carmen, with Harry beside me
applying restoratives. The roarings of the eruption
still continued, and the flare of the volcanic fires
lighted the gloom at intervals. Weak and confused
as I was, I felt that the yacht was moving, for the
throb of her screws beat into my aching head.
I opened my eyes to see Harry's face close to mine;
it was white and worn, and bore an expression of
intense misery. With a rush the cause of his sorrow
came back to my mind, and I caught him weakly by
the hand.

"Harry, I tried! I could not save her. Basilea!"
"I know—I know, old fellow," he said hurriedly.
"Don't talk yet; Bertha has told me all. Here, take a nip of this brandy."

The spirit put new life into me, and I sat up with an effort, aching all over. Luckily there were no bones broken, and with Harry's assistance I staggered to my feet.

"What of Bertha, Harry?"

"She is below, asleep. You have been insensible for over an hour, and I thought you were never coming to. Bertha wanted to watch beside you, but I made her lie down. Poor girl! she is quite worn out."

"I don't wonder at it," I murmured, remembering that terrible journey down to the quay, and the sinking of the island. "I thought we were lost."

"You would have been, only we found you out by the search-light. Another ten minutes and you would have gone under."

"What of the sailors who were with me to-night?"

"We saved three—got them off the quay—but the others are lost."

"And the island?"

"Seems to have sunk, all but the mountain itself."

"Where is Flick?"

"He is steering the yacht. Don't you feel she is moving?"

"Yes," said I, with a glance around; "but I can
see nothing in this darkness. Are we still in the pool?"

"No! That last convulsion sunk the ridge, and opened a passage for us."

"I saw the waves roll over that ridge, Harry. It was a mercy the boat did not go down."

"A mercy indeed, for which we must thank God, Denis," he said reverently. "I thought those gigantic billows would have dashed her against the cliffs. But for Flick’s skill in manoeuvring her, I have no doubt she would have been swamped."

"Are we now out of danger?"

"I think so. We are sailing over the plains whereon stood the palace of Hesperus. The searchlight is lighting up a path, and Flick himself is at the wheel. With God’s mercy we may avoid all reefs and gain the open sea. I am glad Bertha is safe."

"So am I; but oh, Harry, that fiend of a Basilea shut Myrtea up in the temple, and she was crushed under the ruins."

"Bertha told me," he said, turning away with a groan. "But Basilea has been punished for her evil doing. I could have wished her no more terrible death than that she met."

"I saw her swallowed up myself, Harry; and even in that terrible hour I felt glad that she had been so
rewarded for her treachery to that poor girl. Poor Myrtea!

“Don’t talk of her, Denis, or I shall go mad. Come and see Flick.”

We walked cautiously forward, and by the light of the lantern which Harry carried, I saw that the decks were inches thick with volcanic dust. It was like walking on a dusty road; and further on, part of the taffrail was smashed, where a stone hurled from the mountain had struck. Indeed, it was a wonder that the boat had not been sunk while rolling under that merciless rain of stones; the miracle was that she kept afloat at all. Surely, in those terrible hours, the hand of God was stretched out to save us.

Flick, looking bulky in a thick pea-jacket, was steering. His face wore an anxious expression as he looked up at my approach.

“Glad to see you have escaped, Sir Denis,” he said with a nod, “and still more pleased that Miss Bertha is safe.”

“Thank you, captain. Where are we now?”

“Nearing those black reefs, I guess. I’m in hopes that they have sunk with the rest of the island. I don’t want to get entangled among them in this darkness. But the dawn will soon be here.”

“What’s the time?”

“Close on five in the morning,” said Harry, glancing
at his watch by the light of the binnacle lamp. "Where is Jenner, Flick?"

"At the bows, looking after the light."

As the captain was indisposed to talk, by reason of his anxiety, I walked with Harry to where Jenner was attending to the search-light with the electrical engineer. Bertha was asleep, and I had no wish to disturb her. Moreover, I felt too excited and fretful to retire myself—at all events, till we were out of the circle of the eruption; so I fortified myself with another drink from Harry's flask, and remained on deck beside him.

It was a weird sight, that long ray of white light shining on the grey sea. Every now and then Jenner took soundings, and the comforting cry of "No bottom" echoed along the decks. All the men looked haggard by reason of their late experiences and the deaths of their comrades, and I saw that they were thankful for even this degree of safety. At all events, we had escaped from the pool by the way opened up by Providence, and as the yacht, at quarter speed, crept across the turbid waste, every stroke of the screws bore us further from danger. Yet we were still enveloped in the smoke and dust of the volcano; we had still the lava reefs to negotiate, unless they also had sunk; so it was not to be wondered at that every soul on board, with the exception of
Bertha, who was sound asleep, felt terribly anxious and strung up. It was the last episode of our adventurous expedition, and by no means the least exciting.

In another hour or so the gloom dispersed, the smoke thinned, and the sulphurous atmosphere grew lighter, so that we could smell the cold tang of the sea. We were now on the spot where the long-toothed reefs had ripped the waters to foam, but, to our heartfelt joy, there was no sign of them. The dawn was breaking, and in the clearer air there was now light enough to see our surroundings. The ocean was quite smooth, no line of foam betrayed hidden rocks, and by the time the sun leaped over the rim of the sea, we had passed the dangerous part, and were riding the deep waters of the Indian Ocean. Behind lay Isk, enveloped in black smoke streaked with pale fire, and we could hear the explosions faintly in the distance. But before us lay the broad breast of the main, the glitter of the rising sun, and safety from all perils. Then, and not till then, did Captain Flick resign the wheel into the hands of Jenner, and come forward to join Harry and me in congratulations on our miraculous escape. For the first time for many days I breathed freely.

"Well, lads," said Flick, grasping a hand of each of us, "here we are, where I never thought we'd be.
Bound for Plymouth, with the objects of our expedi-
tion accomplished. Sir Denis here has his future
bride, and I have the famous statue."

"But I have not Myrtea!" said Harry sadly.

"I’m truly sorry, lad—truly sorry; but there’s as
good fish in the sea as ever came out of it, and you’ll
no doubt meet the future Mrs. Greenvile in England."

"No," replied Harry decidedly, "I shall never
marry; I shall never love any one as I did Myrtea."

"You only knew her a few weeks," argued Flick
doubtfully, "so your love can’t have grown very
strong in that time."

"It was strong enough to last a lifetime, as you
shall see," replied the young man vehemently, and
he turned away to conceal his emotion.

The captain looked at him thoughtfully and shook
his head. Then he nodded to me, and stepped
briskly towards the great case which had been sent
on board by Basilea.

"Call some of the men, Sir Denis," he said, tapping
this with his hand.

"Are you going to have it open now?"

"Yes; and afterwards we’ll wash and brush up for
breakfast. But I must see the statue with my own
eyes before I eat a mouthful; for, between you and
me, Sir Denis, I rather mistrusted Basilea."

"You can’t, with that before your eyes," said I,
pointing to the case; "and when the silver veil was rent by the earthquake, the statue was gone."

"Ah!" exclaimed Flick, with a satisfied nod and a sigh of relief, "then it's in that case without a doubt. Come, men, get to work."

Harry came back, and stood beside us as we watched the sailors prising off the lid of the great box. It was secured by pegs of wood, so there was not much difficulty in removing it. Then we received a surprise.

"Great heavens!" cried Flick, who had pulled away the cloth which, as he thought, covered the statue of Venus; "it is Myrtea."

It was, indeed, the beautiful priestess with whom Harry was in love. She lay swathed in white linen, with her hands crossed on her bosom, and a look of quiet on her waxy face. With a cry of mingled horror and delight Harry flung himself on his knees before this coffin—for so it might be called—which contained his lost love.

"Is she—-is she dead?" he gasped.

Flick was too astonished to answer, and he could only stare helplessly at the silent figure. Seeing this, I stepped forward, and placed my hand on Myrtea's breast; her heart was beating faintly.

"She is not dead!" said I, gladly. "I think she has been drugged."
“Thank God!” cried Harry, the colour coming back to his face. “Oh, thank God for that!”

Aided by Flick, who had now recovered the use of his body, if not of his tongue, we took the girl out of the case and carried her down to the cabin. I woke Bertha, who could scarcely believe her eyes when she saw Myrtea lying on the divan in the saloon. She examined her closely, and then begged that she should be left to her.

“I believed she has been poisoned, as we were, by fumes from a lamp,” she said. “I have an antidote with me, which Basilea gave me. It was used on board the red ship to restore me to consciousness. You all go away, and in an hour come back. Myrtea will soon revive, Harry my dear, so don’t look so scared.”

We left the cabin, and once more sought the deck, with feelings better imagined than described. Flick looked at the joyous face of Harry, and bit his lip; then his face changed, and he shook the lad by the hand.

“I’ve lost the statue,” said Flick, swallowing his disappointment, “but you have your bride. I congratulate you. I—I—hang that Basilea!” he exclaimed, bursting out into vexed laughter. “She tricked me after all.”

“Her trick has turned out well for me,” cried
Harry gladly. "But why did she put Myrtea in that box instead of the statue?"

"I think I can guess," was my remark after reflection. "She knew that you loved Myrtea, and therefore she determined to get rid of her. She couldn't kill her, that being against the laws of Isk, both political and sacerdotal; so when Flick made a bid for the statue, she substituted Myrtea. She naturally thought that Flick would sail away in a hurry, without opening the case, and leave you in exchange as he promised to do. Thus Basilea would find herself delivered from a dangerous rival, and have you at her mercy. Also, she would still retain the statue, which she had no idea of giving up. The volcano rather spoilt her game, but you may be sure that is how she intended to play it."

"I dare say you are right, Sir Denis," remarked Flick gravely. "But you say the niche was empty. Where, then, did Basilea hide the statue?"

"In another part of the temple, no doubt. She may have thought you would find out the trick, and try to take the statue by force; so, to make things safe, she concealed the palladium of Isk elsewhere. I dare say it was swallowed up with the temple, and, instead of being on its way to Europe, the famous work of Praxiteles is now in the bowels of that volcano."

We never learned the truth, but it was agreed that
my explanation was the true one; and, indeed, I cannot see what other can be suggested. When Myrtea revived, she told us that Basilea shut her up in a cell with a small lamp, and then she lost consciousness, only reviving to find herself in the cabin of the yacht. I have no doubt that the high priestess poisoned the oil of the lamp, as Dosk had done at Cythera, and so she had carried out her wicked scheme. But it turned out other than she expected, for by this means she secured the safety of Myrtea, whom we could not have rescued had she been shut up in the temple at the time of the last convulsion.

Myrtea wept greatly at the news that the island had been destroyed and the temple swallowed up, but her eyes were soon dried by Harry, and by the time we arrived at the Cape she was as merry as any one on board. She had no kindred to regret, she was glad to be out of the power of Basilea, and she was deeply in love with Harry; so with these three reasons she had every right to be joyful. From the Cape we sent a cablegram to Aunt Chrissy, telling her that we were all safe, and had rescued Bertha. I can imagine the joy with which the old lady must have received that message, as she no doubt believed that we were dead.

The last we saw of Isk was a gaunt gray peak rising out of the sea, and crowned with smoke. The
whole of the island went down save the mountain itself, and I do not think a single human being was left alive. That dismal race, with their temple, their goddess, their strange superstitions and unique civilization now lie in the depths of the sea. The smoking mountain is their monument, and no king could have a more lordly memorial. Isk had passed away like the shadow of a dream.

"Well," said Flick, shortly after we left the Cape, "you, Sir Denis, have Miss Bertha, Harry has Myrtea, but I have nothing. The object of my expedition has failed—thanks to Basilea."

"Thanks to the volcano, rather!" retorted Harry. "Never mind, Flick; when we get home I'll make you a present of the Carmen."

"What!" cried Bertha sceptically; "will you give up travelling and stay at home?"

"Not altogether, my dear. I dare say Flick will sometimes take us voyages, and Myrtea will be shown the wonders of the Mediterranean. I shall still travel, but no more in savage places; the experiences of the island of Isk have proved too much for me. At all events, now our troubles are over I am content, as I have gained the sweetest wife in the world."

"And I have regained Bertha," said I, thankfully.

"And I—nothing," laughed Flick, with a nod.

"Don't say that, captain," I remarked. "You have
gained the glory and honour of being the leader of the strangest expedition of the nineteenth century. When I return, and we are all married and settled, I'll write a book of our adventures, and call it 'The Expedition of Captain Flick.'"

And, in ending these pages, I have fulfilled my promise.

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