

H. Rider Haggard

She: A History of Adventure

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Генри Райдер Хаггард
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Аннотация

She is the story of Cambridge professor Horace Holly and his ward Leo Vincey, and their journey to a lost kingdom in the African interior. The journey is triggered by a mysterious package left to Leo by his father, to be opened on his 25th birthday; the package contains an ancient shard of pottery and several documents, suggesting an ancient mystery about the Vincey family.

Holly and Leo eventually arrive in eastern Africa where they encounter a primitive race of natives and a mysterious white queen, Ayesha, who reigns as the all-powerful «She» or "She-who-must-be-obeyed".

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H. R. Haggard

She: A History of Adventure

IN EARTH AND SKIE AND SEA

STRANGE THYNGS THER BE

Doggerel couplet from the Sherd of Amenartas

*I inscribe this history to ANDREW LANG in token
of personal regard and of my sincere admiration for his
learning and his works*

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Introduction

In giving to the world the record of what, looked at as an adventure only, is I suppose one of the most wonderful and mysterious experiences ever undergone by mortal men, I feel it incumbent on me to explain what my exact connection with it is. And so I may as well say at once that I am not the narrator but only the editor of this extraordinary history, and then go on to tell how it found its way into my hands.

Some years ago I, the editor, was stopping with a friend, “*vir doctissimus et amicus meus*,” at a certain University, which for the purposes of this history we will call Cambridge, and was one day much struck with the appearance of two persons whom I saw going arm-in-arm down the street. One of these gentlemen was I think, without exception, the handsomest young fellow I have ever seen. He was very tall, very broad, and had a look of power and a grace of bearing that seemed as native to him as it is to a wild stag. In addition his face was almost without flaw – a good face as well as a beautiful one, and when he lifted his hat, which he did just then to a passing lady, I saw that his head was covered with little golden curls growing close to the scalp.

“Good gracious!” I said to my friend, with whom I was walking, “why, that fellow looks like a statue of Apollo come to life. What a splendid man he is!”

“Yes,” he answered, “he is the handsomest man in the

University, and one of the nicest too. They call him ‘the Greek god’; but look at the other one, he’s Vincey’s (that’s the god’s name) guardian, and supposed to be full of every kind of information. They call him ‘Charon.’” I looked, and found the older man quite as interesting in his way as the glorified specimen of humanity at his side. He appeared to be about forty years of age, and was I think as ugly as his companion was handsome. To begin with, he was shortish, rather bow-legged, very deep chested, and with unusually long arms. He had dark hair and small eyes, and the hair grew right down on his forehead, and his whiskers grew right up to his hair, so that there was uncommonly little of his countenance to be seen. Altogether he reminded me forcibly of a gorilla, and yet there was something very pleasing and genial about the man’s eye. I remember saying that I should like to know him.

“All right,” answered my friend, “nothing easier. I know Vincey; I’ll introduce you,” and he did, and for some minutes we stood chatting – about the Zulu people, I think, for I had just returned from the Cape at the time. Presently, however, a stoutish lady, whose name I do not remember, came along the pavement, accompanied by a pretty fair-haired girl, and these two Mr. Vincey, who clearly knew them well, at once joined, walking off in their company. I remember being rather amused because of the change in the expression of the elder man, whose name I discovered was Holly, when he saw the ladies advancing. He suddenly stopped short in his talk, cast a reproachful look at

his companion, and, with an abrupt nod to myself, turned and marched off alone across the street. I heard afterwards that he was popularly supposed to be as much afraid of a woman as most people are of a mad dog, which accounted for his precipitate retreat. I cannot say, however, that young Vincey showed much aversion to feminine society on this occasion. Indeed I remember laughing, and remarking to my friend at the time that he was not the sort of man whom it would be desirable to introduce to the lady one was going to marry, since it was exceedingly probable that the acquaintance would end in a transfer of her affections. He was altogether too good-looking, and, what is more, he had none of that consciousness and conceit about him which usually afflicts handsome men, and makes them deservedly disliked by their fellows.

That same evening my visit came to an end, and this was the last I saw or heard of “Charon” and “the Greek god” for many a long day. Indeed, I have never seen either of them from that hour to this, and do not think it probable that I shall. But a month ago I received a letter and two packets, one of manuscript, and on opening the first found that it was signed by “Horace Holly,” a name that at the moment was not familiar to me. It ran as follows:

—

“— College, Cambridge, May 1, 18—

“My dear Sir, — You will be surprised, considering the very slight nature of our acquaintance, to get a letter from me. Indeed, I think I had better begin by reminding you

that we once met, now some five years ago, when I and my ward Leo Vincey were introduced to you in the street at Cambridge. To be brief and come to my business. I have recently read with much interest a book of yours describing a Central African adventure. I take it that this book is partly true, and partly an effort of the imagination. However this may be, it has given me an idea. It happens, how you will see in the accompanying manuscript (which together with the Scarab, the 'Royal Son of the Sun,' and the original sherd, I am sending to you by hand), that my ward, or rather my adopted son Leo Vincey and myself have recently passed through a real African adventure, of a nature so much more marvellous than the one which you describe, that to tell the truth I am almost ashamed to submit it to you lest you should disbelieve my tale. You will see it stated in this manuscript that I, or rather we, had made up our minds not to make this history public during our joint lives. Nor should we alter our determination were it not for a circumstance which has recently arisen. We are for reasons that, after perusing this manuscript, you may be able to guess, going away again this time to Central Asia where, if anywhere upon this earth, wisdom is to be found, and we anticipate that our sojourn there will be a long one. Possibly we shall not return. Under these altered conditions it has become a question whether we are justified in withholding from the world an account of a phenomenon which we believe to be of unparalleled interest, merely because our private life is involved, or because we are afraid of ridicule and doubt being cast upon our statements. I hold one view about

this matter, and Leo holds another, and finally, after much discussion, we have come to a compromise, namely, to send the history to you, giving you full leave to publish it if you think fit, the only stipulation being that you shall disguise our real names, and as much concerning our personal identity as is consistent with the maintenance of the bona fides of the narrative.

“And now what am I to say further? I really do not know beyond once more repeating that everything is described in the accompanying manuscript exactly as it happened. As regards She herself I have nothing to add. Day by day we gave greater occasion to regret that we did not better avail ourselves of our opportunities to obtain more information from that marvellous woman. Who was she? How did she first come to the Caves of Kôr, and what was her real religion? We never ascertained, and now, alas! we never shall, at least not yet. These and many other questions arise in my mind, but what is the good of asking them now?”

“Will you undertake the task? We give you complete freedom, and as a reward you will, we believe, have the credit of presenting to the world the most wonderful history, as distinguished from romance, that its records can show. Read the manuscript (which I have copied out fairly for your benefit), and let me know.

“Believe me, very truly yours, “L. Horace Holly.”¹

“P. S. – Of course, if any profit results from the sale of

¹ This name is varied throughout in accordance with the writer’s request. – Editor.

the writing should you care to undertake its publication, you can do what you like with it, but if there is a loss I will leave instructions with my lawyers, Messrs. Geoffrey and Jordan, to meet it. We entrust the sherd, the scarab, and the parchments to your keeping, till such time as we demand them back again. – L.H.H.”

This letter, as may be imagined, astonished me considerably, but when I came to look at the MS., which the pressure of other work prevented me from doing for a fortnight, I was still more astonished, as I think the reader will be also, and at once made up my mind to press on with the matter. I wrote to this effect to Mr. Holly, but a week afterwards received a letter from that gentleman's lawyers, returning my own, with the information that their client and Mr. Leo Vincey had already left this country for Thibet, and they did not at present know their address.

Well, that is all I have to say. Of the history itself the reader must judge. I give it him, with the exception of a very few alterations, made with the object of concealing the identity of the actors from the general public, exactly as it came to me. Personally I have made up my mind to refrain from comments. At first I was inclined to believe that this history of a woman on whom, clothed in the majesty of her almost endless years, the shadow of Eternity itself lay like the dark wing of Night, was some gigantic allegory of which I could not catch the meaning. Then I thought that it might be a bold attempt to portray the possible results of practical immortality, informing the substance

of a mortal who yet drew her strength from Earth, and in whose human bosom passions yet rose and fell and beat as in the undying world around her the winds and the tides rise and fall and beat unceasingly. But as I went on I abandoned that idea also. To me the story seems to bear the stamp of truth upon its face. Its explanation I must leave to others, and with this slight preface, which circumstances make necessary, I introduce the world to Ayesha and the Caves of Kôr. – The Editor.

P. S. – There is on consideration one circumstance that, after a reperusal of this history, struck me with so much force that I cannot resist calling the attention of the reader to it. He will observe that so far as we are made acquainted with him there appears to be nothing in the character of Leo Vincey which in the opinion of most people would have been likely to attract an intellect so powerful as that of Ayesha. He is not even, at any rate to my view, particularly interesting. Indeed, one might imagine that Mr. Holly would under ordinary circumstances have easily outstripped him in the favour of She. Can it be that extremes meet, and that the very excess and splendour of her mind led her by means of some strange physical reaction to worship at the shrine of matter? Was that ancient Kallikrates nothing but a splendid animal loved for his hereditary Greek beauty? Or is the true explanation what I believe it to be – namely, that Ayesha, seeing further than we can see, perceived the germ and smouldering spark of greatness which lay hid within her lover's soul, and well knew that under the influence of her gift of life, watered by her wisdom, and shone upon with the sunshine of her presence,

it would bloom like a flower and flash out like a star, filling the world with light and fragrance?

Here also I am not able to answer, but must leave the reader to form his own judgment on the facts before him, as detailed by Mr. Holly in the following pages.

I

My Visitor

There are some events of which each circumstance and surrounding detail seems to be graven on the memory in such fashion that we cannot forget it, and so it is with the scene that I am about to describe. It rises as clearly before my mind at this moment as though it had happened but yesterday.

It was in this very month something over twenty years ago that I, Ludwig Horace Holly, was sitting one night in my rooms at Cambridge, grinding away at some mathematical work, I forget what. I was to go up for my fellowship within a week, and was expected by my tutor and my college generally to distinguish myself. At last, wearied out, I flung my book down, and, going to the mantelpiece, took down a pipe and filled it. There was a candle burning on the mantelpiece, and a long, narrow glass at the back of it; and as I was in the act of lighting the pipe I caught sight of my own countenance in the glass, and paused to reflect. The lighted match burnt away till it scorched my fingers, forcing me to drop it; but still I stood and stared at myself in the glass, and reflected.

“Well,” I said aloud, at last, “it is to be hoped that I shall be able to do something with the inside of my head, for I shall certainly never do anything by the help of the outside.”

This remark will doubtless strike anybody who reads it as being slightly obscure, but I was in reality alluding to my physical deficiencies. Most men of twenty-two are endowed at any rate with some share of the comeliness of youth, but to me even this was denied. Short, thick-set, and deep-chested almost to deformity, with long sinewy arms, heavy features, deep-set grey eyes, a low brow half overgrown with a mop of thick black hair, like a deserted clearing on which the forest had once more begun to encroach; such was my appearance nearly a quarter of a century ago, and such, with some modification, it is to this day. Like Cain, I was branded – branded by Nature with the stamp of abnormal ugliness, as I was gifted by Nature with iron and abnormal strength and considerable intellectual powers. So ugly was I that the spruce young men of my College, though they were proud enough of my feats of endurance and physical prowess, did not even care to be seen walking with me. Was it wonderful that I was misanthropic and sullen? Was it wonderful that I brooded and worked alone, and had no friends – at least, only one? I was set apart by Nature to live alone, and draw comfort from her breast, and hers only. Women hated the sight of me. Only a week before I had heard one call me a “monster” when she thought I was out of hearing, and say that I had converted her to the monkey theory. Once, indeed, a woman pretended to care for me, and I lavished all the pent-up affection of my nature upon her. Then money that was to have come to me went elsewhere, and she discarded me. I pleaded with her as I have never pleaded

with any living creature before or since, for I was caught by her sweet face, and loved her; and in the end by way of answer she took me to the glass, and stood side by side with me, and looked into it.

“Now,” she said, “if I am Beauty, who are you?” That was when I was only twenty.

And so I stood and stared, and felt a sort of grim satisfaction in the sense of my own loneliness; for I had neither father, nor mother, nor brother; and as I did so there came a knock at my door.

I listened before I went to open it, for it was nearly twelve o’clock at night, and I was in no mood to admit any stranger. I had but one friend in the College, or, indeed, in the world – perhaps it was he.

Just then the person outside the door coughed, and I hastened to open it, for I knew the cough.

A tall man of about thirty, with the remains of great personal beauty, came hurrying in, staggering beneath the weight of a massive iron box which he carried by a handle with his right hand. He placed the box upon the table, and then fell into an awful fit of coughing. He coughed and coughed till his face became quite purple, and at last he sank into a chair and began to spit up blood. I poured out some whisky into a tumbler, and gave it to him. He drank it, and seemed better; though his better was very bad indeed.

“Why did you keep me standing there in the cold?” he asked

pettishly. "You know the draughts are death to me."

"I did not know who it was," I answered. "You are a late visitor."

"Yes; and I verily believe it is my last visit," he answered, with a ghastly attempt at a smile. "I am done for, Holly. I am done for. I do not believe that I shall see to-morrow."

"Nonsense!" I said. "Let me go for a doctor."

He waved me back imperiously with his hand. "It is sober sense; but I want no doctors. I have studied medicine and I know all about it. No doctors can help me. My last hour has come! For a year past I have only lived by a miracle. Now listen to me as you have never listened to anybody before; for you will not have the opportunity of getting me to repeat my words. We have been friends for two years; now tell me how much do you know about me?"

"I know that you are rich, and have had a fancy to come to College long after the age that most men leave it. I know that you have been married, and that your wife died; and that you have been the best, indeed almost the only friend I ever had."

"Did you know that I have a son?"

"No."

"I have. He is five years old. He cost me his mother's life, and I have never been able to bear to look upon his face in consequence. Holly, if you will accept the trust, I am going to leave you that boy's sole guardian."

I sprang almost out of my chair. "*Me!*" I said.

“Yes, you. I have not studied you for two years for nothing. I have known for some time that I could not last, and since I realised the fact I have been searching for some one to whom I could confide the boy and this,” and he tapped the iron box. “You are the man, Holly; for, like a rugged tree, you are hard and sound at core. Listen; the boy will be the only representative of one of the most ancient families in the world, that is, so far as families can be traced. You will laugh at me when I say it, but one day it will be proved to you beyond a doubt, that my sixty-fifth or sixty-sixth lineal ancestor was an Egyptian priest of Isis, though he was himself of Grecian extraction, and was called Kallikrates.² His father was one of the Greek mercenaries raised by Hak-Hor, a Mendesian Pharaoh of the twenty-ninth dynasty, and his grandfather or great-grandfather, I believe, was that very Kallikrates mentioned by Herodotus.³ In or about the

² The Strong and Beautiful, or, more accurately, the Beautiful in strength.

³ The Kallikrates here referred to by my friend was a Spartan, spoken of by Herodotus (Herod. ix. 72) as being remarkable for his beauty. He fell at the glorious battle of Plataea (September 22, B. C. 479), when the Lacedaemonians and Athenians under Pausanias routed the Persians, putting nearly 300,000 of them to the sword. The following is a translation of the passage, “For Kallikrates died out of the battle, he came to the army the most beautiful man of the Greeks of that day – not only of the Lacedaemonians themselves, but of the other Greeks also. He when Pausanias was sacrificing was wounded in the side by an arrow; and then they fought, but on being carried off he regretted his death, and said to Arimnestus, a Plataean, that he did not grieve at dying for Greece, but at not having struck a blow, or, although he desired so to do, performed any deed worthy of himself.” This Kallikrates, who appears to have been as brave as he was beautiful, is subsequently mentioned by Herodotus as having

year 339 before Christ, just at the time of the final fall of the Pharaohs, this Kallikrates (the priest) broke his vows of celibacy and fled from Egypt with a Princess of Royal blood who had fallen in love with him, and was finally wrecked upon the coast of Africa, somewhere, as I believe, in the neighbourhood of where Delagoa Bay now is, or rather to the north of it, he and his wife being saved, and all the remainder of their company destroyed in one way or another. Here they endured great hardships, but were at last entertained by the mighty Queen of a savage people, a white woman of peculiar loveliness, who, under circumstances which I cannot enter into, but which you will one day learn, if you live, from the contents of the box, finally murdered my ancestor Kallikrates. His wife, however, escaped, how, I know not, to Athens, bearing a child with her, whom she named Tisisthenes, or the Mighty Avenger. Five hundred years or more afterwards, the family migrated to Rome under circumstances of which no trace remains, and here, probably with the idea of preserving the idea of vengeance which we find set out in the name of Tisisthenes, they appear to have pretty regularly assumed the cognomen of Vindex, or Avenger. Here, too, they remained for another five centuries or more, till about 770 A. D., when Charlemagne invaded Lombardy, where they were then settled, whereon the head of the family seems to have attached himself to the great Emperor, and to have returned with him

been buried among the ἱπῆρες, (young commanders), apart from the other Spartans and the Helots. – *L.H.H.*

across the Alps, and finally to have settled in Brittany. Eight generations later his lineal representative crossed to England in the reign of Edward the Confessor, and in the time of William the Conqueror was advanced to great honour and power. From that time to the present day I can trace my descent without a break. Not that the Vinceys – for that was the final corruption of the name after its bearers took root in English soil – have been particularly distinguished – they never came much to the fore. Sometimes they were soldiers, sometimes merchants, but on the whole they have preserved a dead level of respectability, and a still deader level of mediocrity. From the time of Charles II. till the beginning of the present century they were merchants. About 1790 my grandfather made a considerable fortune out of brewing, and retired. In 1821 he died, and my father succeeded him, and dissipated most of the money. Ten years ago he died also, leaving me a net income of about two thousand a year. Then it was that I undertook an expedition in connection with *that*,” and he pointed to the iron chest, “which ended disastrously enough. On my way back I travelled in the South of Europe, and finally reached Athens. There I met my beloved wife, who might well also have been called the ‘Beautiful,’ like my old Greek ancestor. There I married her, and there, a year afterwards, when my boy was born, she died.”

He paused a while, his head sunk upon his hand, and then continued – “My marriage had diverted me from a project which I cannot enter into now. I have no time, Holly – I have no time!

One day, if you accept my trust, you will learn all about it. After my wife's death I turned my mind to it again. But first it was necessary, or, at least, I conceived that it was necessary, that I should attain to a perfect knowledge of Eastern dialects, especially Arabic. It was to facilitate my studies that I came here. Very soon, however, my disease developed itself, and now there is an end of me." And as though to emphasise his words he burst into another terrible fit of coughing.

I gave him some more whisky, and after resting he went on – "I have never seen my boy, Leo, since he was a tiny baby. I never could bear to see him, but they tell me that he is a quick and handsome child. In this envelope," and he produced a letter from his pocket addressed to myself, "I have jotted down the course I wish followed in the boy's education. It is a somewhat peculiar one. At any rate, I could not entrust it to a stranger. Once more, will you undertake it?"

"I must first know what I am to undertake," I answered. "You are to undertake to have the boy, Leo, to live with you till he is twenty-five years of age – not to send him to school, remember. On his twenty-fifth birthday your guardianship will end, and you will then, with the keys that I give you now" (and he placed them on the table) "open the iron box, and let him see and read the contents, and say whether or no he is willing to undertake the quest. There is no obligation on him to do so. Now, as regards terms. My present income is two thousand two hundred a year. Half of that income I have secured to you by

will for life, contingently on your undertaking the guardianship – that is, one thousand a year remuneration to yourself, for you will have to give up your life to it, and one hundred a year to pay for the board of the boy. The rest is to accumulate till Leo is twenty-five, so that there may be a sum in hand should he wish to undertake the quest of which I spoke.”

“And suppose I were to die?” I asked.

“Then the boy must become a ward of Chancery and take his chance. Only be careful that the iron chest is passed on to him by your will. Listen, Holly, don’t refuse me. Believe me, this is to your advantage. You are not fit to mix with the world – it would only embitter you. In a few weeks you will become a Fellow of your College, and the income that you will derive from that combined with what I have left you will enable you to live a life of learned leisure, alternated with the sport of which you are so fond, such as will exactly suit you.”

He paused and looked at me anxiously, but I still hesitated. The charge seemed so very strange.

“For my sake, Holly. We have been good friends, and I have no time to make other arrangements.”

“Very well,” I said, “I will do it, provided there is nothing in this paper to make me change my mind,” and I touched the envelope he had put upon the table by the keys.

“Thank you, Holly, thank you. There is nothing at all. Swear to me by God that you will be a father to the boy, and follow my directions to the letter.”

"I swear it," I answered solemnly.

"Very well, remember that perhaps one day I shall ask for the account of your oath, for though I am dead and forgotten, yet I shall live. There is no such thing as death, Holly, only a change, and, as you may perhaps learn in time to come, I believe that even that change could under certain circumstances be indefinitely postponed," and again he broke into one of his dreadful fits of coughing.

"There," he said, "I must go, you have the chest, and my will will be found among my papers, under the authority of which the child will be handed over to you. You will be well paid, Holly, and I know that you are honest, but if you betray my trust, by Heaven, I will haunt you."

I said nothing, being, indeed, too bewildered to speak.

He held up the candle, and looked at his own face in the glass. It had been a beautiful face, but disease had wrecked it. "Food for the worms," he said. "Curious to think that in a few hours I shall be stiff and cold – the journey done, the little game played out. Ah me, Holly! life is not worth the trouble of life, except when one is in love – at least, mine has not been; but the boy Leo's may be if he has the courage and the faith. Good-bye, my friend!" and with a sudden access of tenderness he flung his arm about me and kissed me on the forehead, and then turned to go.

"Look here, Vincey," I said, "if you are as ill as you think, you had better let me fetch a doctor."

"No, no," he said earnestly. "Promise me that you won't. I am

going to die, and, like a poisoned rat, I wish to die alone.”

“I don’t believe that you are going to do anything of the sort,” I answered. He smiled, and, with the word “Remember” on his lips, was gone. As for myself, I sat down and rubbed my eyes, wondering if I had been asleep. As this supposition would not bear investigation I gave it up and began to think that Vincey must have been drinking. I knew that he was, and had been, very ill, but still it seemed impossible that he could be in such a condition as to be able to know for certain that he would not outlive the night. Had he been so near dissolution surely he would scarcely have been able to walk, and carry a heavy iron box with him. The whole story, on reflection, seemed to me utterly incredible, for I was not then old enough to be aware how many things happen in this world that the common sense of the average man would set down as so improbable as to be absolutely impossible. This is a fact that I have only recently mastered. Was it likely that a man would have a son five years of age whom he had never seen since he was a tiny infant? No. Was it likely that he could foretell his own death so accurately? No. Was it likely that he could trace his pedigree for more than three centuries before Christ, or that he would suddenly confide the absolute guardianship of his child, and leave half his fortune, to a college friend? Most certainly not. Clearly Vincey was either drunk or mad. That being so, what did it mean? and what was in the sealed iron chest?

The whole thing baffled and puzzled me to such an extent that at last I could stand it no longer, and determined to sleep over it.

So I jumped up, and having put the keys and the letter that Vincey had left away into my despatch-box, and stowed the iron chest in a large portmanteau, I turned in, and was soon fast asleep.

As it seemed to me, I had only been asleep for a few minutes when I was awakened by somebody calling me. I sat up and rubbed my eyes; it was broad daylight – eight o'clock, in fact.

“Why, what is the matter with you, John?” I asked of the gyp who waited on Vincey and myself. “You look as though you had seen a ghost!”

“Yes, sir, and so I have,” he answered, “leastways I’ve seen a corpse, which is worse. I’ve been in to call Mr. Vincey, as usual, and there he lies stark and dead!”

II

THE Years Roll By

As might be expected, poor Vincey's sudden death created a great stir in the College; but, as he was known to be very ill, and a satisfactory doctor's certificate was forthcoming, there was no inquest. They were not so particular about inquests in those days as they are now; indeed, they were generally disliked, because of the scandal. Under all these circumstances, being asked no questions, I did not feel called upon to volunteer any information about our interview on the night of Vinc-ey's decease, beyond saying that he had come into my rooms to see me, as he often did. On the day of the funeral a lawyer came down from London and followed my poor friend's remains to the grave, and then went back with his papers and effects, except, of course, the iron chest which had been left in my keeping. For a week after this I heard no more of the matter, and, indeed, my attention was amply occupied in other ways, for I was up for my Fellowship, a fact that had prevented me from attending the funeral or seeing the lawyer. At last, however, the examination was over, and I came back to my rooms and sank into an easy chair with a happy consciousness that I had got through it very fairly.

Soon, however, my thoughts, relieved of the pressure that had crushed them into a single groove during the last few days, turned

to the events of the night of poor Vincey's death, and again I asked myself what it all meant, and wondered if I should hear anything more of the matter, and if I did not, what it would be my duty to do with the curious iron chest. I sat there and thought and thought till I began to grow quite disturbed over the whole occurrence: the mysterious midnight visit, the prophecy of death so shortly to be fulfilled, the solemn oath that I had taken, and which Vincey had called on me to answer to in another world than this. Had the man committed suicide? It looked like it. And what was the quest of which he spoke? The circumstances were uncanny, so much so that, though I am by no means nervous, or apt to be alarmed at anything that may seem to cross the bounds of the natural, I grew afraid, and began to wish I had nothing to do with them. How much more do I wish it now, over twenty years afterwards!

As I sat and thought, there came a knock at the door, and a letter, in a big blue envelope, was brought in to me. I saw at a glance that it was a lawyer's letter, and an instinct told me that it was connected with my trust. The letter, which I still have, runs thus: —

“Sir, — Our client, the late M. L. Vincey, Esq., who died on the 9th instant in — College, Cambridge, has left behind him a Will, of which you will please find copy enclosed and of which we are the executors. Under this Will you will perceive that you take a life-interest in about half of the late Mr. Vincey's property, now invested in Consols, subject to your

acceptance of the guardianship of his only son, Leo Vincey, at present an infant, aged five. Had we not ourselves drawn up the document in question in obedience to Mr. Vincey's clear and precise instructions, both personal and written, and had he not then assured us that he had very good reasons for what he was doing, we are bound to tell you that its provisions seem to us of so unusual a nature, that we should have bound to call the attention of the Court of Chancery to them, in order that such steps might be taken as seemed desirable to it, either by contesting the capacity of the testator or otherwise, to safeguard the interests of the infant. As it is, knowing that the testator was a gentleman of the highest intelligence and acumen, and that he has absolutely no relations living to whom he could have confided the guardianship of the child, we do not feel justified in taking this course.

"Awaiting such instructions as you please to send us as regards the delivery of the infant and the payment of the proportion of the dividends due to you,

"We remain, Sir, faithfully yours,

"Geoffrey and Jordan.

"Horace L. Holly, Esq."

I put down the letter, and ran my eye through the Will, which appeared, from its utter unintelligibility, to have been drawn on the strictest legal principles. So far as I could discover, however, it exactly bore out what my friend Vincey had told me on the night of his death. So it was true after all. I must take the boy. Suddenly I remembered the letter which Vincey had left with the chest. I fetched and opened it. It only contained such directions as he had

already given to me as to opening the chest on Leo's twenty-fifth birthday, and laid down the outlines of the boy's education, which was to include Greek, the higher Mathematics, and *Arabic*. At the end there was a postscript to the effect that if the boy died under the age of twenty-five, which, however, he did not believe would be the case, I was to open the chest, and act on the information I obtained if I saw fit. If I did not see fit, I was to destroy all the contents. On no account was I to pass them on to a stranger.

As this letter added nothing material to my knowledge, and certainly raised no further objection in my mind to entering on the task I had promised my dead friend to undertake, there was only one course open to me – namely, to write to Messrs. Geoffrey and Jordan, and express my acceptance of the trust, stating that I should be willing to commence my guardianship of Leo in ten days' time. This done I went to the authorities of my college, and, having told them as much of the story as I considered desirable, which was not very much, after considerable difficulty succeeded in persuading them to stretch a point, and, in the event of my having obtained a fellowship, which I was pretty certain I had done, allow me to have the child to live with me. Their consent, however, was only granted on the condition that I vacated my rooms in college and took lodgings. This I did, and with some difficulty succeeded in obtaining very good apartments quite close to the college gates. The next thing was to find a nurse. And on this point I came to a determination. I would have no woman to lord it over me about the child, and

steal his affections from me. The boy was old enough to do without female assistance, so I set to work to hunt up a suitable male attendant. With some difficulty I succeeded in hiring a most respectable round-faced young man, who had been a helper in a hunting-stable, but who said that he was one of a family of seventeen and well-accustomed to the ways of children, and professed himself quite willing to undertake the charge of Master Leo when he arrived. Then, having taken the iron box to town, and with my own hands deposited it at my banker's, I bought some books upon the health and management of children and read them, first to myself, and then aloud to Job – that was the young man's name – and waited.

At length the child arrived in the charge of an elderly person, who wept bitterly at parting with him, and a beautiful boy he was. Indeed, I do not think that I ever saw such a perfect child before or since. His eyes were grey, his forehead was broad, and his face, even at that early age, clean cut as a cameo, without being pinched or thin. But perhaps his most attractive point was his hair, which was pure gold in colour and tightly curled over his shapely head. He cried a little when his nurse finally tore herself away and left him with us. Never shall I forget the scene. There he stood, with the sunlight from the window playing upon his golden curls, his fist screwed over one eye, whilst he took us in with the other. I was seated in a chair, and stretched out my hand to him to induce him to come to me, while Job, in the corner, was making a sort of clucking noise, which, arguing from his previous

experience, or from the analogy of the hen, he judged would have a soothing effect, and inspire confidence in the youthful mind, and running a wooden horse of peculiar hideousness backwards and forwards in a way that was little short of inane. This went on for some minutes, and then all of a sudden the lad stretched out both his little arms and ran to me.

“I like you,” he said: “you is ugly, but you is good.”

Ten minutes afterwards he was eating large slices of bread and butter, with every sign of satisfaction; Job wanted to put jam on to them, but I sternly reminded him of the excellent works that we had read, and forbade it.

In a very little while (for, as I expected, I got my fellowship) the boy became the favourite of the whole College – where, all orders and regulations to the contrary notwithstanding, he was continually in and out – a sort of chartered libertine, in whose favour all rules were relaxed. The offerings made at his shrine were simply without number, and I had serious difference of opinion with one old resident Fellow, now long dead, who was usually supposed to be the crustiest man in the University, and to abhor the sight of a child. And yet I discovered, when a frequently recurring fit of sickness had forced Job to keep a strict look-out, that this unprincipled old man was in the habit of enticing the boy to his rooms and there feeding him upon unlimited quantities of brandy-balls, and making him promise to say nothing about it. Job told him that he ought to be ashamed of himself, “at his age, too, when he might have been a grandfather if he had done

what was right,” by which Job understood had got married, and thence arose the row.

But I have no space to dwell upon those delightful years, around which memory still fondly hovers. One by one they went by, and as they passed we two grew dearer and yet more dear to each other. Few sons have been loved as I love Leo, and few fathers know the deep and continuous affection that Leo bears to me.

The child grew into the boy, and the boy into the young man, while one by one the remorseless years flew by, and as he grew and increased so did his beauty and the beauty of his mind grow with him. When he was about fifteen they used to call him Beauty about the College, and me they nicknamed the Beast. Beauty and the Beast was what they called us when we went out walking together, as we used to do every day. Once Leo attacked a great strapping butcher’s man, twice his size, because he sang it out after us, and thrashed him, too – thrashed him fairly. I walked on and pretended not to see, till the combat got too exciting, when I turned round and cheered him on to victory. It was the chaff of the College at the time, but I could not help it. Then when he was a little older the undergraduates found fresh names for us. They called me Charon, and Leo the Greek god! I will pass over my own appellation with the humble remark that I was never handsome, and did not grow more so as I grew older. As for his, there was no doubt about its fitness. Leo at twenty-one might have stood for a statue of the youthful Apollo. I never

saw anybody to touch him in looks, or anybody so absolutely unconscious of them. As for his mind, he was brilliant and keen-witted, but not a scholar. He had not the dulness necessary for that result. We followed out his father's instructions as regards his education strictly enough, and on the whole the results, especially in the matters of Greek and Arabic, were satisfactory. I learnt the latter language in order to help to teach it to him, but after five years of it he knew it as well as I did – almost as well as the professor who instructed us both. I always was a great sportsman – it is my one passion – and every autumn we went away somewhere shooting or fishing, sometimes to Scotland, sometimes to Norway, once even to Russia. I am a good shot, but even in this he learnt to excel me.

When Leo was eighteen I moved back into my rooms, and entered him at my own College, and at twenty-one he took his degree – a respectable degree, but not a very high one. Then it was that I, for the first time, told him something of his own story, and of the mystery that loomed ahead. Of course he was very curious about it, and of course I explained to him that his curiosity could not be gratified at present. After that, to pass the time away, I suggested that he should get himself called to the Bar; and this he did, reading at Cambridge, and only going up to London to eat his dinners.

I had only one trouble about him, and that was that every young woman who came across him, or, if not every one, nearly so, would insist on falling in love with him. Hence arose

difficulties which I need not enter into here, though they were troublesome enough at the time. On the whole, he behaved fairly well; I cannot say more than that.

And so the time went by till at last he reached his twenty-fifth birthday, at which date this strange and, in some ways, awful history really begins.

III

The Sherd of Amenartas

On the day preceding Leo's twenty-fifth birthday we both journeyed to London, and extracted the mysterious chest from the bank where I had deposited it twenty years before. It was, I remember, brought up by the same clerk who had taken it down. He perfectly remembered having hidden it away. Had he not done so, he said, he should have had difficulty in finding it, it was so covered up with cobwebs.

In the evening we returned with our precious burden to Cambridge, and I think that we might both of us have given away all the sleep we got that night and not have been much the poorer. At daybreak Leo arrived in my room in a dressing-gown, and suggested that we should at once proceed to business. I scouted the idea as showing an unworthy curiosity. The chest had waited twenty years, I said, so it could very well continue to wait until after breakfast. Accordingly at nine – an unusually sharp nine – we breakfasted; and so occupied was I with my own thoughts that I regret to state that I put a piece of bacon into Leo's tea in mistake for a lump of sugar. Job, too, to whom the contagion of excitement had, of course, spread, managed to break the handle off my Sèvres china tea-cup, the identical one I believe that Marat had been drinking from just before he was stabbed in his bath.

At last, however, breakfast was cleared away, and Job, at my request, fetched the chest, and placed it upon the table in a somewhat gingerly fashion, as though he mistrusted it. Then he prepared to leave the room.

“Stop a moment, Job,” I said. “If Mr. Leo has no objection, I should prefer to have an independent witness to this business, who can be relied upon to hold his tongue unless he is asked to speak.”

“Certainly, Uncle Horace,” answered Leo; for I had brought him up to call me uncle – though he varied the appellation somewhat disrespectfully by calling me “old fellow,” or even “my avuncular relative.”

Job touched his head, not having a hat on.

“Lock the door, Job,” I said, “and bring me my despatch-box.”

He obeyed, and from the box I took the keys that poor Vinceny, Leo’s father, had given me on the night of his death. There were three of them; the largest a comparatively modern key, the second an exceedingly ancient one, and the third entirely unlike anything of the sort that we had ever seen before, being fashioned apparently from a strip of solid silver, with a bar placed across to serve as a handle, and leaving some nicks cut in the edge of the bar. It was more like a model of an antediluvian railway key than anything else.

“Now are you both ready?” I said, as people do when they are going to fire a mine. There was no answer, so I took the big key, rubbed some salad oil into the wards, and after one or two bad

shots, for my hands were shaking, managed to fit it, and shoot the lock. Leo bent over and caught the massive lid in both his hands, and with an effort, for the hinges had rusted, forced it back. Its removal revealed another case covered with dust. This we extracted from the iron chest without any difficulty, and removed the accumulated filth of years from it with a clothes-brush.

It was, or appeared to be, of ebony, or some such close-grained black wood, and was bound in every direction with flat bands of iron. Its antiquity must have been extreme, for the dense heavy wood was in parts actually commencing to crumble from age.

“Now for it,” I said, inserting the second key.

Job and Leo bent forward in breathless silence. The key turned, and I flung back the lid, and uttered an exclamation, and no wonder, for inside the ebony case was a magnificent silver casket, about twelve inches square by eight high. It appeared to be of Egyptian workmanship, and the four legs were formed of Sphinxes, and the dome-shaped cover was also surmounted by a Sphinx. The casket was of course much tarnished and dented with age, but otherwise in fairly sound condition.

I drew it out and set it on the table, and then, in the midst of the most perfect silence, I inserted the strange-looking silver key, and pressed this way and that until at last the lock yielded, and the casket stood before us. It was filled to the brim with some brown shredded material, more like vegetable fibre than paper, the nature of which I have never been able to discover.

This I carefully removed to the depth of some three inches, when I came to a letter enclosed in an ordinary modern-looking envelope, and addressed in the handwriting of my dead friend Vincey.

“To my son Leo, should he live to open this casket.”

I handed the letter to Leo, who glanced at the envelope, and then put it down upon the table, making a motion to me to go on emptying the casket.

The next thing that I found was a parchment carefully rolled up. I unrolled it, and seeing that it was also in Vincey’s handwriting, and headed, “Translation of the Uncial Greek Writing on the Potsherd,” put it down by the letter. Then followed another ancient roll of parchment, that had become yellow and crinkled with the passage of years. This I also unrolled. It was likewise a translation of the same Greek original, but into black-letter Latin, which at the first glance from the style and character appeared to me to date from somewhere about the beginning of the sixteenth century. Immediately beneath this roll was something hard and heavy, wrapped up in yellow linen, and reposing upon another layer of the fibrous material. Slowly and carefully we unrolled the linen, exposing to view a very large but undoubtedly ancient potsherd of a dirty yellow colour! This potsherd had in my judgment, once been a part of an ordinary amphora of medium size. For the rest, it measured ten and a half inches in length by seven in width, was about a quarter of an inch thick, and densely covered on the convex side that lay towards

the bottom of the box with writing in the later uncial Greek character, faded here and there, but for the most part perfectly legible, the inscription having evidently been executed with the greatest care, and by means of a reed pen, such as the ancients often used. I must not forget to mention that in some remote age this wonderful fragment had been broken in two, and rejoined by means of cement and eight long rivets. Also there were numerous inscriptions on the inner side, but these were of the most erratic character, and had clearly been made by different hands and in many different ages, and of them, together with the writings on the parchments, I shall have to speak presently.



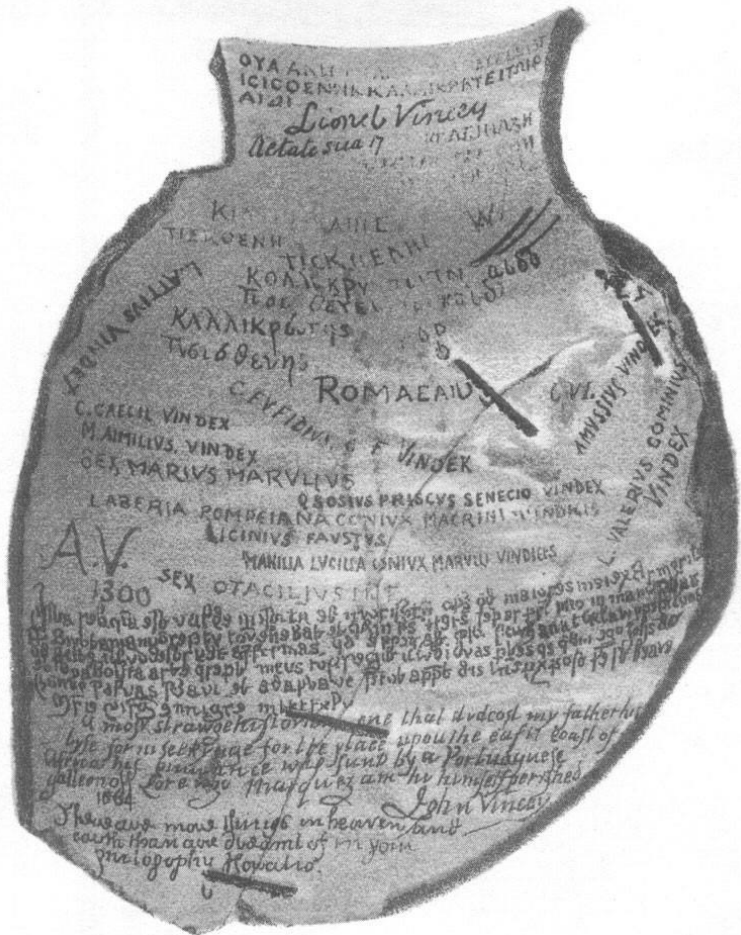
[plate 1]
FACSIMILE OF THE SHERD OF AMENARTAS

One 1/2 size

Greatest length of the original 10 1/2 inches

Greatest breadth 7 inches

Weight 11b 5 1/2 oz



[plate 2]

FACSIMILE OF THE SHERD OF AMENARTAS

One 1/2 size

“Is there anything more?” asked Leo, in a kind of excited whisper.

I groped about, and produced something hard, done up in a little linen bag. Out of the bag we took first a very beautiful miniature done upon ivory, and secondly, a small chocolate-coloured composition *scarabaeus*, marked thus: –



symbols which, we have since ascertained, mean “Suten se Ra,” which is being translated the “Royal Son of Ra or the Sun.” The miniature was a picture of Leo’s Greek mother – a lovely, dark-eyed creature. On the back of it was written, in poor Vincey’s handwriting, “My beloved wife.”

“That is all,” I said.

“Very well,” answered Leo, putting down the miniature, at which he had been gazing affectionately; “and now let us read the letter,” and without further ado he broke the seal, and read aloud as follows: – “My Son Leo, – When you open this, if you ever live to do so, you will have attained to manhood, and I shall have been long enough dead to be absolutely forgotten by nearly

all who knew me. Yet in reading it remember that I have been, and for anything you know may still be, and that in it, through this link of pen and paper, I stretch out my hand to you across the gulf of death, and my voice speaks to you from the silence of the grave. Though I am dead, and no memory of me remains in your mind, yet am I with you in this hour that you read. Since your birth to this day I have scarcely seen your face. Forgive me this. Your life supplanted the life of one whom I loved better than women are often loved, and the bitterness of it endureth yet. Had I lived I should in time have conquered this foolish feeling, but I am not destined to live. My sufferings, physical and mental, are more than I can bear, and when such small arrangements as I have to make for your future well-being are completed it is my intention to put a period to them. May God forgive me if I do wrong. At the best I could not live more than another year."

"So he killed himself," I exclaimed. "I thought so."

"And now," Leo went on, without replying, "enough of myself. What has to be said belongs to you who live, not to me, who am dead, and almost as much forgotten as though I had never been. Holly, my friend (to whom, if he will accept the trust, it is my intention to confide you), will have told you something of the extraordinary antiquity of your race. In the contents of this casket you will find sufficient to prove it. The strange legend that you will find inscribed by your remote ancestress upon the potsherd was communicated to me by my father on his deathbed, and took a strong hold in my imagination. When I was only

nineteen years of age I determined, as, to his misfortune, did one of our ancestors about the time of Elizabeth, to investigate its truth. Into all that befell me I cannot enter now. But this I saw with my own eyes. On the coast of Africa, in a hitherto unexplored region, some distance to the north of where the Zambesi falls into the sea, there is a headland, at the extremity of which a peak towers up, shaped like the head of a negro, similar to that of which the writing speaks. I landed there, and learnt from a wandering native, who had been cast out by his people because of some crime which he had committed, that far inland are great mountains, shaped like cups, and caves surrounded by measureless swamps. I learnt also that the people there speak a dialect of Arabic, and are ruled over by a *beautiful white woman* who is seldom seen by them, but who is reported to have power over all things living and dead. Two days after I had ascertained this the man died of fever contracted in crossing the swamps, and I was forced by want of provisions and by symptoms of an illness which afterwards prostrated me to take to my dhow again.

“Of the adventures that befell me after this I need not now speak. I was wrecked upon the coast of Madagascar, and rescued some months afterwards by an English ship that brought me to Aden, whence I started for England, intending to prosecute my search as soon as I had made sufficient preparations. On my way I stopped in Greece, and there, for ‘*Omnia vin-cit amor*,’ I met your beloved mother, and married her, and there you were born and she died. Then it was that my last illness seized me, and

I returned hither to die. But still I hoped against hope, and set myself to work to learn Arabic, with the intention, should I ever get better, of returning to the coast of Africa, and solving the mystery of which the tradition has lived so many centuries in our family. But I have not got better, and, so far as I am concerned, the story is at an end.

“For you, however, my son, it is not at an end, and to you I hand on these the results of my labour, together with the hereditary proofs of its origin. It is my intention to provide that they shall not be put into your hands until you have reached an age when you will be able to judge for yourself whether or no you will choose to investigate what, if it is true, must be the greatest mystery in the world, or to put it by as an idle fable, originating in the first place in a woman’s disordered brain.

“I do not believe that it is a fable; I believe that if it can only be re-discovered there is a spot where the vital forces of the world visibly exist. Life exists; why therefore should not the means of preserving it indefinitely exist also? But I have no wish to prejudice your mind about the matter. Read and judge for yourself. If you are inclined to undertake the search, I have so provided that you will not lack for means. If, on the other hand, you are satisfied that the whole thing is a chimera, then, I adjure you, destroy the potsherd and the writings, and let a cause of troubling be removed from our race for ever. Perhaps that will be wisest. The unknown is generally taken to be terrible, not as the proverb would infer, from the inherent superstition of man, but

because it so often *is* terrible. He who would tamper with the vast and secret forces that animate the world may well fall a victim to them. And if the end were attained, if at last you emerged from the trial ever beautiful and ever young, defying time and evil, and lifted above the natural decay of flesh and intellect, who shall say that the awesome change would prove a happy one? Choose, my son, and may the Power who rules all things, and who says ‘thus far shalt thou go, and thus much shalt thou learn,’ direct the choice to your own happiness and the happiness of the world, which, in the event of your success, you would one day certainly rule by the pure force of accumulated experience. – Farewell!”

Thus the letter, which was unsigned and undated, abruptly ended.

“What do you make of that, Uncle Holly,” said Leo, with a sort of gasp, as he replaced it on the table. “We have been looking for a mystery, and we certainly seem to have found one.”

“What do I make of it? Why, that your poor dear father was off his head, of course,” I answered, testily. “I guessed as much that night, twenty years ago, when he came into my room. You see he evidently hurried his own end, poor man. It is absolute balderdash.”

“That’s it, sir!” said Job, solemnly. Job was a most matter-offact specimen of a matter-of-fact class.

“Well, let’s see what the potsherd has to say, at any rate,” said Leo, taking up the translation in his father’s writing, and commencing to read:

– “I, Amenartas, of the Royal House of the Pharaohs of Egypt, wife of Kallikrates (the Beautiful in Strength), a Priest of Isis whom the gods cherish and the demons obey, being about to die, to my little son Tisis-thenes (the Mighty Avenger). I fled with thy father from Egypt in the days of Nectanebes,⁴ causing him through love to break the vows that he had vowed. We fled southward, across the waters, and we wandered for twice twelve moons on the coast of Libya (Africa) that looks towards the rising sun, where by a river is a great rock carven like the head of an Ethiopian. Four days on the water from the mouth of a mighty river were we cast away, and some were drowned and some died of sickness. But us wild men took through wastes and marshes, where the sea fowl hid the sky, bearing us ten days’ journey till we came to a hollow mountain, where a great city had been and fallen, and where there are caves of which no man hath seen the end; and they brought us to the Queen of the people who place pots upon the heads of strangers, who is a magician having a knowledge of all things, and life and loveliness that does not die. And she cast eyes of love upon thy father, Kal-likrates, and would have slain me, and taken him to husband, but he loved me and feared her, and would not. Then did she take us, and lead us by terrible ways, by means of dark magic, to where the great pit is, in the mouth of which the old philosopher lay dead, and showed to us the rolling Pillar of Life that dies not, whereof the voice is as the

⁴ Nekht-nebf, or Nectanebo II., the last native Pharaoh of Egypt, fled from Ochus to Ethiopia, B. C. 339. – Editor.

voice of thunder; and she did stand in the flames, and come forth unharmed, and yet more beautiful. Then did she swear to make thy father undying even as she is, if he would but slay me, and give himself to her, for me she could not slay because of the magic of my own people that I have, and that prevailed thus far against her. And he held his hand before his eyes to hide her beauty, and would not. Then in her rage did she smite him by her magic, and he died; but she wept over him, and bore him thence with lamentations: and being afraid, me she sent to the mouth of the great river where the ships come, and I was carried far away on the ships where I gave thee birth, and hither to Athens I came at last after many wanderings. Now I say to thee, my son, Tisisthenes, seek out the woman, and learn the secret of Life, and if thou mayest find a way slay her, because of thy father Kallikrates; and if thou dost fear or fail, this I say to all thy seed who come after thee, till at last a brave man be found among them who shall bathe in the fire and sit in the place of the Pharaohs. I speak of those things, that though they be past belief, yet I have known, and I lie not.”

“May the Lord forgive her for that,” groaned Job, who had been listening to this marvellous composition with his mouth open.

As for myself, I said nothing: my first idea being that my poor friend, being demented, had composed the whole thing, though it scarcely seemed likely that such a story could have been invented by anybody. It was too original. To solve my doubts I took up the potsherd and began to read

the close uncial Greek writing on it; and very good Greek of the period it is, considering that it came from the pen of an Egyptian born. Here is an exact transcript of it: –

ΑΜΕΝΑΡΤΑΣΤΟΥΒΑΣΙΛΙΚΟΥΓΕΝΟΥΣΤΟΥΑΙΓΥΠΤΙΟ

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ΙΤΡΕΦΟΥΣΙΤΑΔΕΔΑΙΜΟΝΙΑΥΠΟΤΑΣΣΕΤΑΙΗΔΗΤΕΛΕΥ
ΤΩΣΑΤΙΣΙΣΘΕΝΕΙΤΩΠΑΙΔΙΕΠ
ΙΣΤΕΛΛΕΙΤΑΔΕΣΥΝΕΦΥ
ΓΟΝΓΑΡΠΟΤΕΕΚΤΗΣΑΙΓΥΠΤΙΑΣΕΠΙΝΕΚΤΑΝΕΒΟΥΜΕ
ΤΑΤΟΥΣΟΥΠΑΤΡΟ
ΣΔΙΑΤΟΝΕΡΩΤΑΤΟΝΕΜΟΝΕΠΙΟΡΚ
ΗΣΑΝΤΟΣΦΥΓΟΝΤΕΣΔΕΠΡΟΣΝΟΤΟΝΔΙΑΠΟΝΤΙΟΙΚΑ
ΙΚΔΜΗΝΑ
ΣΚΑΤΑΤΑΠΑΡΑΘΑΛΑΣΣΙΑΤΗΣΛΙΒΥΗΣΤΑΠΡ
ΟΣΗΛΙΟΥΑΝΑΤΟΛΑΣΠΛΑΝΗΘΕΝΤΕΣΕΝΘΑΠΕΡΠΕΤΡ
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ΑΛΟΥΕ
ΚΠΕΣΟΝΤΕΣΟΙΜΕΝΚΑΤΕΠΟΝΤΙΣΘΗΜΕΝΟΙΔΕΝΟΣΩΙ
ΑΠΕΘΑΝΟΜΕΝΤΕΛΟΣΔΕΥΠΑΓΡΙΩΝΑΝ
ΘΡΩΠΩΝΕΦΕΡ
ΟΜΕΘΑΔΙΑΕΛΕΩΝΤΕΚΑΙΤΕΝΑΓΕΩΝΕΝΘΑΠΕΡΠΤΗΝ
ΝΠΛΗΘΟΣΑΠΟΚΡΥΠΤΕΙΤΟΝΟΥ
ΡΑΝΟΝΗΜΕΡΑΣΙΕΩΣ
ΗΛΘΟΜΕΝΕΙΣΚΟΙΛΟΝΤΙΟΡΟΣΕΝΘΑΠΟΤΕΜΕΓΑΛΗΜ
ΕΝΠΟΛΙΣΗΝΑΝΤΡΑΔΕΑΠ
ΕΙΡΟΝΑΗΓΑΓΟΝΔΕΩΣΒΑΣΙ

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 ΕΑΑΥΤΗΕΓΝΩΚΑΟΥΚΕΨΕΥΣΑΜΗΝ

The general convenience in reading, I have here accurately transcribed this inscription into the cursive character.

Ἀμενάρτας, τοῦ βασικοῦ γένους τοῦ Αἰγυπτίου,
 ἢ τοῦ Καλλικράτους Ἰσιδος ἱερέως, ἦν οἱ μὲν θεοὶ
 τρέφουσι τὰ δὲ δαιμονια ὑποτάσσεται, ἥδη τελευτῶσα
 Τισισθένει τῷ παιδὶ ἐπιστέλλει τάδε· συνέφυγον γάρ
 ποτε ἐκ τῆς Αἰγυπτίας ἐπὶ Νεκτανέβου μετὰ τοῦ
 σοῦ πατρός, διὰ τὸν ἔρωτα τὸν ἐμὸν ἐπιορκήσαντος.
 φυγόντες δὲ πρὸς νότον διαπόντιοι καὶ κ'δ' μῆνας
 κατὰ τὰ παραθαλάσσια τῆς Αἰβύης τὰ πρὸς ἡλίου

ἀνατολὰς πλανηθέντες, ἔνθαπερ πέτρα τις μελάλη, γλυπτόν ὁμοίωμα Αἰθίοπος κεφαλῆς, εἶτα ἡμέρας δ' ἀπὸ στόματος ποταμοῦ μεγάλου ἐκπεσόντες, οἱ μὲν κατεποντίσθημεν, οἱ δὲ νόσω ἀπεθάνομεν· τέλος δὲ ὑπ' ἀλρίων ἀνθρώπων ἐφερόμεθα διὰ ἐλέων τε καὶ τεναλέων ἔνθαπερ πτηνῶν πλῆθος ἀποκρύπτει τὸν οὐρανόν, ἡμέρας ἰ, ἕως ἡλθομεν εἰς κοῖλόν τι ὄρος, ἔνθα ποτὲ μεγάλη μὲν πόλις ἦν, ἄντρα δὲ ἀπείρονα· ἡγαγον δὲ ὥς βασιλείαν τὴν τῶν ξένους χύτραις στεφανούντων, ἣτις μαλεία μὲν ἐχρῆτο ἐπιστήμη δὲ πάντων καὶ δὴ καὶ κάλλος καὶ ῥώμην ἀλήρως ἦν· ἡ δὲ Καλλικράτους τοῦ πατρὸς ἐρασθεῖδα τὸ μὲν πρῶτον συνοικεῖν ἐβούλετο ἐμὲ δὲ ἀνελεῖν· ἔπειτα, ὥς οὐκ ἀνέπειθεν, ἐμὲ γὰρ ὑπερεφίλει καὶ τὴν ξένην ἐφοβεῖτο, ἀπήγαγεν ἡμᾶς ὑπὸ μαγείας καθ' ὁδοὺς σφαλερὰς ἔνθα τὸ βάραθρον τὸ μέγα, οὗ κατὰ στόμα ἔκειτο ὁ γέρων ὁ φιλόσοφος τεθνεώς, ἀφικομένοις δ' ἔδειξε φῶς τοῦ βίου εὐθύ, οἷον κίονα ἐλισσόμενον φώνην ἰέντα καθάπερ βροντῆς, εἶτα διὰ πυρὸς βεβηκυῖα ἀβλαβῆς καὶ ἔτι καλλίων αὐτὴ ἑαυτῆς ἐξεφάνη. ἐκ δὲ τούτων ὥμοσε καὶ τὸν σὸν πατέρα ἀθάνατον ἀποδειξείν, εἰ συνοικεῖν οἱ βούλοιτο ἐμὲ δε ἀνελεῖν, οὐ γὰρ οὖν αὐτὴ ἀνελεῖν ἴσχυεν ὑπὸ τῶν ἡμεδαπῶν ἦν καὶ αὐτὴ ἔχω μαγείας. ὁ δ' οὐδέν τι μᾶλλον ἤθελε, τῷ χειρε τῶν ὁμμάτων προίσχων ἵνα δὴ τὸ τῆς γυναικὸς κάλλος μὴ ὀρώῃ· ἔπειτα ὀργισθεῖσα κατεγοήτευσεν μὲν αὐτόν, ἀπολόμενον μέντοι κλάουσα καὶ ὀδυρμένη ἐκεῖθεν ἀπήνεγκεν, ἐμὲ δὲ φόβῳ ἀφῆκεν εἰς στόμα τοῦ μεγάλου ποταμοῦ τοῦ ναυσιπόρου, πόδδω δὲ ναυσίν, ἐφ' ὧνπερ πλέουσα ἔτεκόν σε,

ἀποπλεύσασα μόλις ποτὲ δεῦρο Ἀθηνάζε κατηγαγόν.
σὺ δέ, ὦ Τισίσθενες, ὦν ἐπιστέλλω μὴ ὀλιγώρει· δεῖ
γὰρ τὴν γυναῖκα ἀναζητεῖν ἣν πῶς τῷ βίου μυστήριον
ἀνεύρης, καὶ ἀναιρεῖν, ἣν που παρασχῇ, διὰ τὸν
πατέρα Καλλικράτους. εἰ δὲ φοβούμενος ἢ διὰ ἄλλο τι
αὐτὸς λείπει τοῦ ἔργου, πᾶσι τοῖς ὕστερον αὐτὸ τοῦτο
ἐπιστέλλω, ἕως ποτὲ ἀγαθὸς τις γενόμενος τῷ πυρὶ
λούσασθαι τολμήσει καὶ τὰ ἀριστεῖα ἔχων βασιλεῦσαι
τῶν ἀνθρώπων· ἄπιστα μὲν δὴ τὰ τοιαῦτα λέγω, ὅμως
δὲ ἂν αὐτὴ ἔγνωκα οὐκ ἐψευσάμην.

The English translation was, as I discovered on further investigation, and as the reader may easily see by comparison, both accurate and elegant.

Besides the uncial writing on the convex side of the sherd at the top, painted in dull red, on what had once been the lip of the amphora, was the cartouche already mentioned as being on the *scarabaeus*, which we had also found in the casket. The hieroglyphics or symbols, however, were reversed, just as though they had been pressed on wax. Whether this was the cartouche of the original Kallikrates,⁵ or of some Prince or Pharaoh from whom his wife Amenartas was descended, I am not sure, nor can I tell if it was drawn upon the sherd at the same time that the uncial Greek was inscribed, or copied on more recently from

⁵ The cartouche, if it be a true cartouche, cannot have been that of Kallikrates, as Mr. Holly suggests. Kallikrates was a priest and not entitled to a cartouche, which was the prerogative of Egyptian royalty, though he might have inscribed his name or title upon an *oval*. – *Editor*.

the Scarab by some other member of the family. Nor was this all. At the foot of the writing, painted in the same dull red, was the faint outline of a somewhat rude drawing of the head and shoulders of a Sphinx wearing two feathers, symbols of majesty, which, though common enough upon the effigies of sacred bulls and gods, I have never before met with on a Sphinx.

Also on the right-hand side of this surface of the sherd, painted obliquely in red on the space not covered by the uncial characters, and signed in blue paint, was the following quaint inscription: —

IN EARTH AND SKIE AND SEA
STRANGE THYNGES THER BE.
HOC FECIT
DOROTHEA VINCEY.

Perfectly bewildered, I turned the relic over. It was covered from top to bottom with notes and signatures in Greek, Latin, and English. The first in uncial Greek was by Tisisthenes, the son to whom the writing was addressed. It was, “I could not go. Tisisthenes to his son, Kallikrates.” Here it is in fac-simile with its cursive equivalent: —

ΟΥΚΑΝΔΥΝΑΙΜΗΝΠΟΡΕΥΕΘΑΙΤΙΣΙΘΕΝΗΣ

ΚΑΛΛΙΚΡΑΤΕΙΤΩΠΙΑΙΔΙ
οὐκ ἂν δυνάιμην πορεύεσθαι. Τισισθένης
Καλλικράτει τῷ παιδί.

This Kallikrates (probably, in the Greek fashion, so named after his grandfather) evidently made some attempt to start on

the quest, for his entry written in very faint and almost illegible uncial is, “I ceased from my going, the gods being against me. Kallikrates to his son.” Here it is also: –

ΤΩΝΘΕΩΝΑΝΤΙΣΤΑΝΤΩΝΕΠΑΥΣΑΜΗΝΤΗΣΠΟΡΕΙ
τῶν θεῶν ἀντιστάντων ἐπαυσάμην τῆς πορείας.
Καλλικράτης τῷ παιδί.

Between these two ancient writings, the second of which was inscribed upside down and was so faint and worn that, had it not been for the transcript of it executed by Vincey, I should scarcely have been able to read it, since, owing to its having been written on that portion of the tile which had, in the course of ages, undergone the most handling, it was nearly rubbed out – was the bold, modern-looking signature of one Lionel Vincey, “Ætate sua 17,” which was written thereon, I think, by Leo’s grandfather. To the right of this were the initials “J. B. V.,” and below came a variety of Greek signatures, in uncial and cursive character, and what appeared to be some carelessly executed repetitions of the sentence τῷ παιδί (to my son), showing that the relic was religiously passed on from generation to generation.

The next legible thing after the Greek signatures was the word “Romae, A.U.C.,” showing that the family had now migrated to Rome. Unfortunately, however, with the exception of its termination (evi) the date of their settlement there is for ever lost, for just where it had been placed a piece of the potsherd is broken away.

Then followed twelve Latin signatures, jotted about here and

there, wherever there was a space upon the tile suitable to their inscription. These signatures, with three exceptions only, ended with the name “Vindex” or “the Avenger,” which seems to have been adopted by the family after its migration to Rome as a kind of equivalent to the Greek “Tisisthenes,” which also means an avenger. Ultimately, as might be expected, this Latin cognomen of Vindex was transformed first into De Vincey, and then into the plain, modern Vincey. It is very curious to observe how the idea of revenge, inspired by an Egyptian who lived before the time of Christ, is thus, as it were, embalmed in an English family name.

A few of the Roman names inscribed upon the sherd I have actually since found mentioned in history and other records. They were, if I remember right,

MVSSIUS. VINDE
SEX. VARIUS MARVLLVS
C. FVFIDIUS. C. F. VINDE

and

LABERIA POMPEIANA. CONIVX. MACRINI.
VINDICIS

this last being, of course, the name of a Roman lady.

The following list, however, comprises all the Latin names upon the sherd: –

C. CAECILIUS VINDE
M. AIMILIUS VINDE

SEX. VARIVS. MARVLLVS
 Q. SOSIVS PRISCVS SENECIO VINDEK
 L. VALERIVS COMINIVS VINDEK
 SEX. OTACILIVS. M. F.
 L. ATTIVS. VINDEK
 MVSSIVS VINDEK
 C. FVFIDIVS. C. F. VINDEK
 LICINIVS FAVSTVS
 LABERIA POMPEIANA CONIVX MACRINI
 VINDICIS
 MANILIA LVCILLA CONIVX MARVLLI
 VINDICIS

After the Roman names there is evidently a gap of very many centuries. Nobody will ever know now what was the history of the relic during those dark ages, or how it came to have been preserved in the family. My poor friend Vincey had, it will be remembered, told me that his Roman ancestors finally settled in Lombardy, and when Charlemagne invaded it, returned with him across the Alps, and made their home in Brittany, whence they crossed to England in the reign of Edward the Confessor. How he knew this I am not aware, for there is no reference to Lombardy or Charlemagne upon the tile, though, as will presently be seen, there is a reference to Brittany. To continue: the next entries on the sherd, if I may except a long splash either of blood or red colouring matter of some sort, consist of two crosses drawn in red pigment, and probably representing Crusaders' swords, and a rather neat monogram ("D. V.") in scarlet and blue, perhaps

executed by that same Dorothea Vincey who wrote, or rather painted, the doggrel couplet. To the left of this, inscribed in faint blue, were the initials A. V., and after them a date, 1800.

Then came what was perhaps as curious an entry as anything upon this extraordinary relic of the past. It is executed in black letter, written over the crosses or Crusaders' swords, and dated fourteen hundred and forty-five. As the best plan will be to allow it to speak for itself, I here give the black-letter fac-simile, together with the original Latin without the contractions, from which it will be seen that the writer was a fair mediaeval Latinist. Also we discovered what is still more curious, an English version of the black-letter Latin. This, also written in black letter, we found inscribed on a second parchment that was in the coffer, apparently somewhat older in date than that on which was inscribed the mediaeval Latin translation of the uncial Greek of which I shall speak presently. This I also give in full.

Fac-simile of Black-Letter Inscription on the Sherd of Amenartas.

Ista reliq̃ia est valde mysticū et myrificu op̃s, q̃d maiores mei ex
Armorica ff Britannia mīore fecū cōbehebāt et q̃dm fcs clerics sēper
p̃ri meo in manu ferebat q̃d p̃itus illud destrueret affirmās q̃d effet ab
ipso sathana cōflatū prestigiola et dyabolica arte, q̃re p̃ter meus cōfregit
illud ī duas p̃tes q̃s q̃dm ego Joh̃s de Vireto salvas ferbavi et adaptavi
sicut apparet die lūe p̃r post fest beate M̃rie virg anni g̃re mccccxlv

*Expanded Version of the
above Black-Letter Inscription*

“Ista reliquia est valde mysticum et myrificum opus, quod majores mei ex Armorica, scilicet Britannia Minore, secum convehant; et et quidam sanctus clericus semper patri meo in manu ferebat quod penitus illud destrueret, affirmans quod esset ab ipso Sathana conflatum prestigiosa et dyabolica arte, quare pater meus confregit illud in duas partes, quas quidem ego Johannes de Vinceto salvas servavi et adaptavi sicut apparet die lune proximo post festum beate Marie Virginis anni gratie MCCCCXLV.”

*Fac-simile of the Old English Black-Letter Translation of the
above Latin Inscription from the Sherd of Amenartas found
inscribed upon a parchment.*

This rellike ys a ryghte mytfull worke & a marveylous þat whyche
myne aunceteres afore tyme dyd conveighe hider wth þ^{er} ffrom
Armoryke wh^{er} ys to feien Britayne þat lesse & a certayne holpe clerke
shoulde allweyes beare my ffadir on honde þat he owghte uttirly ffor to
ffruffe þat fame affirmynge þat yt was ffourmyd & confflatyd off fathanas
hym selfe by arte magike & dyvyllysshe wherefore my ffadir dyd take þat
fame & to brast yt yn tweyne but I, John de Vincet dyd save whool þat
tweye þtes therof & topecyd þ^{at} togydder agayne soe as yee se on þ^{at} depe
mondaye next ffollowynge after þat ffeeste of seynte Marye þat bleffed
byrgne yn þat peere of salvacoun ffowertene hundreth & ffyve & ffowrti.

Modernised Version of the above Black-Letter Translation

“Thys rellike ys a ryghte mistycall worke and a marvaylous, ye whyche myne aunceteres aforetyme dyd conveigh hider with them from Armoryke which ys to seien Britaine ye Lesse and a certayne holye clerke should allweyes beare my fadir on honde that he owghte uttirly for to frusshe ye same, affyr-mynge that yt was fourmed and conflatyed of Sathanas hym selfe by arte magike and dyvellysshe wherefore my fadir dyd take ye same and tobrast yt yn tweyne, but I, John de Vincey, dyd save whool ye tweye partes therof and topeecyd them to-gydder agayne soe as yee se, on this daye mondaye next fol-lowynge after ye feeste of Seynte Marye ye Blessed Vyrgyne yn ye yeere of Salvacioun fowertene hundreth and fyve and fowerti.”

The next and, save one, last entry was Elizabethan, and dated 1564. “A most strange historie, and one that did cost my father his life; for in seekynge for the place upon the east coast of Africa, his pinnance was sunk by a Portuguese galleon off Lorenzo Marquez, and he himself perished. – John Vincey.”

Then came the last entry, apparently, to judge by the style of writing, made by some representative of the family in the middle of the eighteenth century. It was a misquotation of the well-known lines in Hamlet, and ran thus: “There are more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy,

Horatio.”⁶

And now there remained but one more document to be examined – namely, the ancient black-letter transcription into mediaeval Latin of the uncial inscription on the sherd. As will be seen, this translation was executed and subscribed in the year 1495, by a certain “learned man,” Edmundus de Prato (Edmund Pratt) by name, licentiate in Canon Law, of Exeter College, Oxford, who had actually been a pupil of Grocyn, the first scholar who taught Greek in England. No doubt, on the fame of this new learning reaching his ears, the Vincey of the day, perhaps that same John de Vincey who years before had saved the relic from destruction and made the black-letter entry on the sherd in 1445, hurried off to Oxford to see if perchance it might avail to dissolve the secret of the mysterious inscription. Nor was he disappointed, for the learned Edmundus was equal to the task. Indeed his rendering is so excellent an example of mediaeval learning and latinity that, even at the risk of sating the learned reader with too many antiquities, I have made up my mind to give it in fac-simile, together with an expanded version for the benefit of those who find the contractions troublesome. The translation has several peculiarities on which this is not the

⁶ Another thing that makes me fix the date of this entry at the middle of the eighteenth century is that, curiously enough, I have an acting copy of “Hamlet,” written about 1740, in which these two lines are misquoted almost exactly in the same way, and I have little doubt but that the Vincey who wrote them on the potsherd heard them so misquoted at that date. Of course, the lines really run: –Thereare more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy. – L.H.H.

place to dwell, but I would in passing call the attention of scholars to the passage “duxerunt autem nos ad reginam *advenaslasaniscoronantium*,” which strikes me as a delightful rendering of the original, “ἤγαγον δὲ ὡς βασίλειαν τὴν τῶν ξένους χύτραις στεφανούντων.”

mediaeval Black-Letter Latin Translation of the Uncial Inscription on the Sherd of Amenartas

Amenartas e gen. reg. Egyptii uxor Callicratis sacerdos Iſidis quā dei ſobēt demonia attēdūt filiōl' ſuo Tiſiſtheni iā moribūda ita mādat: Effugi quōdā ex Egypto regnāte Nectanebo cū patre tuo, ppter mei amorē pejerato. Fugiētes autē v'ſus Notū trans mare et xxiiij mēſes p'r litora Libye v'ſus Oriētē errant ubi eſt petra quedā m̄gna ſculpta inſtar Ethioṗ capīt, deinde dies iiij ab oſt flum̄ m̄gni eiecti p'tim ſubmerſi ſumus p'tim morbo mortui ſum: in fine autē a ſeṗ hōibz portabamur p'r palud et vada. ubi abiū m'titudo celū obūbrat dies x. donec adveniim̄ ad cabū quēdā montē, ubi olim m̄gna urbs erat, caberne quoq̄ im̄eſe: durerūt autē nos ad reginā Advenaſtaſaniscoronātiū que magiṡ utebaṡ et peritia omniū reṡ et ſaltē pulcrit et vigore iſeſcibil' erat. Hec m̄gno patē tui amore p̄cuilſa p'mū q'dē q'dē ei cōnubiū michi mortē parabat. poſtea v'ro recuſāte Callicrate amore mei et timore regine affecto nos p'r magicā abduxit p'r vias horribil' ubi eſt puteus ille p̄fūdus, cuius iuxta aditū iacebat ſenioṗ philoſophi cadaver, et advēiētibz mōſtrabit flāmā Vite erectā, iſtar colonne volutātis, voces emittētē q̄ſi tonitrus: tūc p'r ignē ipetu nociuo expers trāſiit et iā ipa ſeſe formoſior viſa eſt.

Quibz ſaci iurabit ſe patrē tuū quoq̄ im̄ortalē oſtēſurā eſſe, ſi me prius occiſa regine cōtuberniū mallet; neq̄ enī ipſa me occidere valuit, ppter noſtratū m̄gicā cuius egomet p̄tem habeo. Ille vero nichil huius geṡ maluit, manibz ante ocul paffis ne mulieṡ formoſitatē adſpiceret: poſtea eū m̄gica p̄cuſſit arte, at mortuū efferebat t̄de cū ſletibz et bagitiū, me p'r timorē expulit ad oſtiū m̄gni flumiū beliuoli porro in nabe in qua te peperī, vix poſt dies huc Athenas invecta ſū. At tu, O Tiſiſtheṡ, ne q'd quorū mādō nauci ſac: neceſſe enī eſt mulierē exquirere ſi qua Vite myſteriū ipetres et vidicare, quātū in te eſt, patrē tuū Callicrat in regine morte. Sin timore ſeu aliq̄ cauſa rē reliquis iſectā, hoc ipſū oībz poſteṡ mādō, dū bonus q̄s inveniatur qui ignis labacrū nō p̄rhorreſcet et p̄tentia digṡ dōtabit hōiū.

Talia dico incredibilia q̄dē at mīſe ficta de rebz michi cognitīs.

Hec Grece ſcripta Latine reddidit vir doctus Edm̄ds de Prato, in Decretis Liſenciatus a Coll. Oxon: Oxon: doctiſſimi Graecni quondam

Expanded Version of the above Mediaeval Latin Translation

Amenartas, e genere regio Egyptii, uxor Callicratis, sacerdotis Isidis, quam dei fovent demonia attendunt, filiolo suo Tisistheni jam moribunda ita mandat: Effugi quodam ex Egypto, regnante Nectanebo, cum patre tuo, propter mei amorem pejerato. Fugientes autem versus Notum trans mare, et viginti quatuor menses per litora Libye versus Ori-entem errantes, ubi est petra quedam magna sculpta instar Ethiopis capitis, deinde dies quatuor ab ostio fluminis magni ejecti partim submersi sumus partim morbo mortui sumus: in fine autem a feris hominibus portabamur per paludes et vada, ubi avium multitudo celum obumbrat, dies decem, donec advenimus ad cavum quendam montem, ubi olim magna urbs erat, caverne quoque immense; duxerunt autem nos ad reginam Advenaslasaniscoronantium, que magicâ utebatur et peritiâ omnium rerum, et saltem pul-critudine et vigore insenescibilis erat. Hec magno patris tui amore perculsa, primum quidem ei connubium michi mortem parabat; postea vero, recusante Callicrate, amore mei et timore regine affecto, nos per magicam abduxit per vias horribiles ubi est puteus ille profundus, cujus juxta aditum jacebat senioris philosophi cadaver, et advenientibus mons-travit flammam Vite erectam, instar columnae voluntantis, voces emittentem quasi tonitrus: tunc per ignem impetu nocivo expers transiit et jam ipsa sese

formosior visa est.

Quibus factis juravit se patrem tuum quoque immortalem ostensuram esse, si me prius occisa regine contubernium mallet; neque enim ipsa me occidere valuit, propter nostratum magicam cujus egomet partem habeo. Ille vero nichil hujus generis malebat, manibus ante oculos passis, ne mulieris formositatem adspiceret: postea illum magica percussit arte, at mortuum efferebat inde cum fletibus et vagitibus, et me per timorem expulit ad ostium magni fluminis, velivoli, porro in nave, in qua te peperisti, vix post dies huc Athenas vecta sum. At tu, O Tisisthenes, ne quid quorum mando nauci fac: necesse enim est mulierem exquirere si qua Vite mysterium impetres et vindicare, quantum in te est, patrem tuum Callieratem in regine morte. Sin timore sue aliqua causa rem reliquis infectam, hoc ipsum omnibus posteris mando, dum bonus quis inveniatur qui ignis lavacrum non perhorrescet, et potentia dignus dominabitur hominum.

Talia dico incredibilia quidem at minime ficta de rebus michi cognitis.

Hec Grece scripta Latine reddidit vir doctus Edmundus de Prato, in Descretis Licenciatus, e Collegio Exoniensi Oxoniensi doctissimi Grocyni quondam e pupillis, Idibus Aprilis Anno Domini MCCCCLXXXV°.

“Well,” I said, when at length I had read out and carefully examined these writings and paragraphs, at least those of them that were still easily legible, “that is the conclusion of the whole matter, Leo, and now you can form your own opinion on it. I

have already formed mine.”

“And what is it?” he asked, in his quick way.

“It is this. I believe that potsherd to be perfectly genuine, and that, wonderful as it may seem, it has come down in your family from since the fourth century before Christ. The entries absolutely prove it, and therefore, however improbable it may seem, it must be accepted. But there I stop. That your remote ancestress, the Egyptian princess, or some scribe under her direction, wrote that which we see on the sherd I have no doubt, nor have I the slightest doubt but that her sufferings and the loss of her husband had turned her head, and that she was not right in her mind when she did write it.”

“How do you account for what my father saw and heard there?” asked Leo.

“Coincidence. No doubt there are bluffs on the coast of Africa that look something like a man’s head, and plenty of people who speak bastard Arabic. Also, I believe that there are lots of swamps. Another thing is, Leo, and I am sorry to say it, but I do not believe that your poor father was quite right when he wrote that letter. He had met with a great trouble, and also he had allowed this story to prey on his imagination, and he was a very imaginative man. Anyway, I believe that the whole thing is the most unmitigated rubbish. I know that there are curious things and forces in nature which we rarely meet with, and, when we do meet them, cannot understand. But until I see it with my own eyes, which I am not likely to, I never will believe that there is

any means of avoiding death, even for a time, or that there is or was a white sorceress living in the heart of an African swamp. It is bosh, my boy, all bosh! – What do you say, Job?”

“I say, sir, that it is a lie, and, if it is true, I hope Mr. Leo won’t meddle with no such things, for no good can’t come of it.”

“Perhaps you are both right,” said Leo, very quietly. “I express no opinion. But I say this. I am going to set the matter at rest once and for all, and if you won’t come with me I will go by myself.”

I looked at the young man, and saw that he meant what he said. When Leo means what he says he always puts on a curious look about the mouth. It has been a trick of his from a child. Now, as a matter of fact, I had no intention of allowing Leo to go anywhere by himself, for my own sake, if not for his. I was far too attached to him for that. I am not a man of many ties or affections. Circumstances have been against me in this respect, and men and women shrink from me, or at least, I fancy that they do, which comes to the same thing, thinking, perhaps, that my somewhat forbidding exterior is a key to my character. Rather than endure this, I have, to a great extent, secluded myself from the world, and cut myself off from those opportunities which with most men result in the formation of relations more or less intimate. Therefore Leo was all the world to me – brother, child, and friend – and until he wearied of me, where he went there I should go too. But, of course, it would not do to let him see how great a hold he had over me; so I cast about for some means whereby I might let myself down easy.

“Yes, I shall go, Uncle; and if I don’t find the ‘rolling Pillar of Life,’ at any rate I shall get some first-class shooting.”

Here was my opportunity, and I took it.

“Shooting?” I said. “Ah! yes; I never thought of that. It must be a very wild stretch of country, and full of big game. I have always wanted to kill a buffalo before I die. Do you know, my boy, I don’t believe in the quest, but I do believe in big game, and really on the whole, if, after thinking it over, you make up your mind to go, I will take a holiday, and come with you.”

“Ah,” said Leo, “I thought that you would not lose such a chance. But how about money? We shall want a good lot.”

“You need not trouble about that,” I answered. “There is all your income that has been accumulating for years, and besides that I have saved two-thirds of what your father left to me, as I consider, in trust for you. There is plenty of cash.”

“Very well, then, we may as well stow these things away and go up to town to see about our guns. By the way, Job, are you coming too? It’s time you began to see the world.”

“Well, sir,” answered Job, stolidly, “I don’t hold much with foreign parts, but if both you gentlemen are going you will want somebody to look after you, and I am not the man to stop behind after serving you for twenty years.”

“That’s right, Job,” said I. “You won’t find out anything wonderful, but you will get some good shooting. And now look here, both of you. I won’t have a word said to a living soul about this nonsense,” and I pointed to the potsherd. “If it got out, and

anything happened to me, my next of kin would dispute my will on the ground of insanity, and I should become the laughing stock of Cambridge.”

That day three months we were on the ocean, bound for Zanzibar.

IV

The Squall

How different is the scene that I have now to tell from that which has just been told! Gone are the quiet college rooms, gone the wind-swayed English elms, the cawing rooks, and the familiar volumes on the shelves, and in their place there rises a vision of the great calm ocean gleaming in shaded silver lights beneath the beams of the full African moon. A gentle breeze fills the huge sail of our dhow, and draws us through the water that ripples musically against her sides. Most of the men are sleeping forward, for it is near midnight, but a stout swarthy Arab, Mahomed by name, stands at the tiller, lazily steering by the stars. Three miles or more to our starboard is a low dim line. It is the Eastern shore of Central Africa. We are running to the southward, before the North East Monsoon, between the mainland and the reef that for hundreds of miles fringes this perilous coast. The night is quiet, so quiet that a whisper can be heard fore and aft the dhow; so quiet that a faint booming sound rolls across the water to us from the distant land.

The Arab at the tiller holds up his hand, and says one word: — “*Simba* (lion)!”

We all sit up and listen. Then it comes again, a slow, majestic sound, that thrills us to the marrow.

“To-morrow by ten o’clock,” I say, “we ought, if the Captain is not out in his reckoning, which I think very probable, to make this mysterious rock with a man’s head, and begin our shooting.”

“And begin our search for the ruined city and the Fire of Life,” corrected Leo, taking his pipe from his mouth, and laughing a little.

“Nonsense!” I answered. “You were airing your Arabic with that man at the tiller this afternoon. What did he tell you? He has been trading (slave-trading, probably) up and down these latitudes for half of his iniquitous life, and once landed on this very ‘man’ rock. Did he ever hear anything of the ruined city or the caves?”

“No,” answered Leo. “He says that the country is all swamp behind, and full of snakes, especially pythons, and game, and that no man lives there. But then there is a belt of swamp all along the East African coast, so that does not go for much.”

“Yes,” I said, “it does – it goes for malaria. You see what sort of an opinion these gentry have of the country. Not one of them will go with us. They think that we are mad, and upon my word I believe that they are right. If ever we see old England again I shall be astonished. However, it does not greatly matter to me at my age, but I am anxious for you, Leo, and for Job. It’s a Tom Fool’s business, my boy.”

“All right, Uncle Horace. So far as I am concerned, I am willing to take my chance. Look! What is that cloud?” and he pointed to a dark blotch upon the starry sky, some miles astern

of us.

“Go and ask the man at the tiller,” I said.

He rose, stretched his arms, and went. Presently he returned.

“He says it is a squall, but it will pass far on one side of us.” Just then Job came up, looking very stout and English in his shooting-suit of brown flannel, and with a sort of perplexed appearance upon his honest round face that had been very common with him since he got into these strange waters.

“Please, sir,” he said, touching his sun hat, which was stuck on to the back of his head in a somewhat ludicrous fashion, “as we have got all those guns and things in the whale-boat astern, to say nothing of the provisions in the lockers, I think it would be best if I got down and slept in her. I don’t like the looks” (here he dropped his voice to a portentous whisper) “of these black gentry; they have such a wonderful thievish way about them. Supposing now that some of them were to slip into the boat at night and cut the cable, and make off with her? That would be a pretty go, that would.”

The whale-boat, I may explain, was one specially built for us at Dundee, in Scotland. We had brought it with us, as we knew that this coast was a network of creeks, and that we might require something to navigate them with. She was a beautiful boat, thirty-feet in length, with a centre-board for sailing, copper-bottomed to keep the worm out of her, and full of water-tight compartments. The Captain of the dhow had told us that when we reached the rock, which he knew, and which appeared to be

identical with the one described upon the sherd and by Leo's father, he would probably not be able to run up to it on account of the shallows and breakers. Therefore we had employed three hours that very morning, whilst we were totally becalmed, the wind having dropped at sunrise, in transferring most of our goods and chattels to the whale-boat, and placing the guns, ammunition, and preserved provisions in the water-tight lockers specially prepared for them, so that when we did sight the fabled rock we should have nothing to do but step into the boat, and run her ashore. Another reason that induced us to take this precautionary step was that Arab captains are apt to run past the point that they are making, either from carelessness or owing to a mistake in its identity. Now, as sailors know, it is quite impossible for a dhow which is only rigged to run before the monsoon to beat back against it. Therefore we got our boat ready to row for the rock at any moment.

"Well, Job," I said, "perhaps it would be as well. There are lots of blankets there, only be careful to keep out of the moon, or it may turn your head or blind you."

"Lord, sir! I don't think it would much matter if it did; it is that turned already with the sight of these blackamoors and their filthy, thieving ways. They are only fit for muck, they are; and they smell bad enough for it already."

Job, it will be perceived, was no admirer of the manners and customs of our dark-skinned brothers.

Accordingly we hauled up the boat by the tow-rope till it was

right under the stern of the dhow, and Job bundled into her with all the grace of a falling sack of potatoes. Then we returned and sat down on the deck again, and smoked and talked in little gusts and jerks. The night was so lovely, and our brains were so full of suppressed excitement of one sort and another, that we did not feel inclined to turn in. For nearly an hour we sat thus, and then, I think, we both dozed off. At least I have a faint recollection of Leo sleepily explaining that the head was not a bad place to hit a buffalo, if you could catch him exactly between the horns, or send your bullet down his throat, or some nonsense of the sort.

Then I remember no more; till suddenly – a frightful roar of wind, a shriek of terror from the awakening crew, and a whip-like sting of water in our faces. Some of the men ran to let go the halyards and lower the sail, but the parrel jammed and the yard would not come down. I sprang to my feet and hung on to a rope. The sky aft was dark as pitch, but the moon still shone brightly ahead of us and lit up the blackness. Beneath its sheen a huge white-topped breaker, twenty feet high or more, was rushing on to us. It was on the break – the moon shone on its crest and tipped its foam with light. On it rushed beneath the inky sky, driven by the awful squall behind it. Suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, I saw the black shape of the whale-boat cast high into the air on the crest of the breaking wave. Then – a shock of water, a wild rush of boiling foam, and I was clinging for my life to the shroud, ay, swept straight out from it like a flag in a gale.

We were pooped.

The wave passed. It seemed to me that I was under water for minutes – really it was seconds. I looked forward. The blast had torn out the great sail, and high in the air it was fluttering away to leeward like a huge wounded bird. Then for a moment there was comparative calm, and in it I heard Job's voice yelling wildly, "Come here to the boat."

Bewildered and half-drowned as I was, I had the sense to rush aft. I felt the dhow sinking under me – she was full of water. Under her counter the whale-boat was tossing furiously, and I saw the Arab Mahomed, who had been steering, leap into her. I gave one desperate pull at the tow-rope to bring the boat alongside. Wildly I sprang also, Job caught me by the arm and I rolled into the bottom of the boat. Down went the dhow bodily, and as she did so Mahomed drew his curved knife and severed the fibre-rope by which we were fast to her, and in another second we were driving before the storm over the place where the dhow had been.

"Great God!" I shrieked, "where is Leo? *Leo! Leo!*"

"He's gone, sir, God help him!" roared Job into my ear; and such was the fury of the squall that his voice sounded like a whisper.

I wrung my hands in agony. Leo was drowned, and I was left alive to mourn him.

"Look out," yelled Job; "here comes another."

I turned; a second huge wave was overtaking us. I half hoped that it would drown me. With a curious fascination I watched its awful advent. The moon was nearly hidden now by the wreaths

of the rushing storm, but a little light still caught the crest of the devouring breaker. There was something dark on it – a piece of wreckage. It was on us now, and the boat was nearly full of water. But she was built in air-tight compartments – Heaven bless the man who invented them! – and lifted up through it like a swan. Through the foam and turmoil I saw the black thing on the wave hurrying right at me. I put out my right arm to ward it from me, and my hand closed on another arm, the wrist of which my fingers gripped like a vice. I am a very strong man, and had something to hold to, but my arm was nearly torn from its socket by the strain and weight of the floating body. Had the rush lasted another two seconds I might either have let go or gone with it. But it passed, leaving us up to our knees in water.

“Bail out! bail out!” shouted Job, suiting the action to the word.

But I could not bail just then, for as the moon went out and left us in total darkness, one faint, flying ray of light lit upon the face of the man I had gripped, who was now half lying, half floating in the bottom of the boat.

It was Leo. Leo brought back by the wave – back, dead or alive, from the very jaws of Death.

“Bail out! bail out!” yelled Job, “or we shall founder.”

I seized a large tin bowl with a handle to it, which was fixed under one of the seats, and the three of us bailed away for dear life. The furious tempest drove over and round us, flinging the boat this way and that, the wind and the storm wreaths and the

sheets of stinging spray blinded and bewildered us, but through it all we worked like demons with the wild exhilaration of despair, for even despair can exhilarate. One minute! three minutes! six minutes! The boat began to lighten, and no fresh wave swamped us. Five minutes more, and she was fairly clear. Then, suddenly, above the awful shriekings of the hurricane came a duller, deeper roar. Great Heavens! It was the voice of breakers!

At that moment the moon began to shine forth again – this time behind the path of the squall. Out far across the torn bosom of the ocean shot the ragged arrows of her light, and there, half a mile ahead of us, was a white line of foam, then a little space of open-mouthed blackness, and then another line of white. It was the breakers, and their roar grew clearer and yet more clear as we sped down upon them like a swallow. There they were, boiling up in snowy spouts of spray, smiting and gnashing together like the gleaming teeth of hell.

“Take the tiller, Mahomed!” I roared in Arabic. “We must try and shoot them.” At the same moment I seized an oar, and got it out, motioning to Job to do likewise.

Mahomed clambered aft, and got hold of the tiller, and with some difficulty Job, who had sometimes pulled a tub upon the homely Cam, got out his oar. In another minute the boat’s head was straight on to the ever-nearing foam, towards which she plunged and tore with the speed of a racehorse. Just in front of us the first line of breakers seemed a little thinner than to the right or left – there was a cap of rather deeper water. I turned

and pointed to it.

“Steer for your life, Mahomed!” I yelled. He was a skilful steersman, and well acquainted with the dangers of this most perilous coast, and I saw him grip the tiller, bend his heavy frame forward, and stare at the foaming terror till his big round eyes looked as though they would start out of his head. The send of the sea was driving the boat’s head round to starboard. If we struck the line of breakers fifty yards to starboard of the gap we must sink. It was a great field of twisting, spouting waves. Mahomed planted his foot against the seat before him, and, glancing at him, I saw his brown toes spread out like a hand with the weight he put upon them as he took the strain of the tiller. She came round a bit, but not enough. I roared to Job to back water, whilst I dragged and laboured at my oar. She answered now, and none too soon.

Heavens, we were in them! And then followed a couple of minutes of heart-breaking excitement such as I cannot hope to describe. All that I remember is a shrieking sea of foam, out of which the billows rose here, there, and everywhere like avenging ghosts from their ocean grave. Once we were turned right round, but either by chance, or through Mahomed’s skilful steering, the boat’s head came straight again before a breaker filled us. One more – a monster. We were through it or over it – more through than over – and then, with a wild yell of exultation from the Arab, we shot out into the comparative smooth water of the mouth of sea between the teeth-like lines of gnashing waves.

But we were nearly full of water again, and not more than half

a mile ahead was the second line of breakers. Again we set to and bailed furiously. Fortunately the storm had now quite gone by, and the moon shone brightly, revealing a rocky headland running half a mile or more out into the sea, of which this second line of breakers appeared to be a continuation. At any rate, they boiled around its foot. Probably the ridge that formed the headland ran out into the ocean, only at a lower level, and made the reef also. This headland was terminated by a curious peak that seemed not to be more than a mile away from us. Just as we got the boat pretty clear for the second time, Leo, to my immense relief, opened his eyes and remarked that the clothes had tumbled off the bed, and that he supposed it was time to get up for chapel. I told him to shut his eyes and keep quiet, which he did without in the slightest degree realizing the position. As for myself, his reference to chapel made me reflect, with a sort of sick longing, on my comfortable rooms at Cambridge. Why had I been such a fool as to leave them? This is a reflection that has several times recurred to me since, and with an ever-increasing force.

But now again we were drifting down on the breakers, though with lessened speed, for the wind had fallen, and only the current or the tide (it afterwards turned out to be the tide) was driving us.

Another minute, and with a sort of howl to Allah from the Arab, a pious ejaculation from myself, and something that was not pious from Job, we were in them. And then the whole scene, down to our final escape, repeated itself, only not quite so violently. Mahomed's skilful steering and the air-tight

compartments saved our lives. In five minutes we were through, and drifting – for we were too exhausted to do anything to help ourselves except keep her head straight – with the most startling rapidity round the headland which I have described.

Round we went with the tide, until we got well under the lee of the point, and then suddenly the speed slackened, we ceased to make way, and finally appeared to be in dead water. The storm had entirely passed, leaving a clean-washed sky behind it; the headland intercepted the heavy sea that had been occasioned by the squall, and the tide, which had been running so fiercely up the river (for we were now in the mouth of a river), was sluggish before it turned, so we floated quietly, and before the moon went down managed to bail out the boat thoroughly and get her a little ship-shape. Leo was sleeping profoundly, and on the whole I thought it wise not to wake him. It was true he was sleeping in wet clothes, but the night was now so warm that I thought (and so did Job) that they were not likely to injure a man of his unusually vigorous constitution. Besides, we had no dry ones at hand.

Presently the moon went down, and left us floating on the waters, now only heaving like some troubled woman's breast, with leisure to reflect upon all that we had gone through and all that we had escaped. Job stationed himself at the bow, Mahomed kept his post at the tiller, and I sat on a seat in the middle of the boat close to where Leo was lying.

The moon went slowly down in chastened loveliness; she departed like some sweet bride into her chamber, and long veil-

like shadows crept up the sky through which the stars peeped shyly out. Soon, however, they too began to pale before a splendour in the east, and then the quivering footsteps of the dawn came rushing across the new-born blue, and shook the high stars from their places. Quieter and yet more quiet grew the sea, quiet as the soft mist that brooded on her bosom, and covered up her troubling, as the illusive wreaths of sleep brood upon a pain-racked mind, causing it to forget its sorrow. From the east to the west sped the angels of the Dawn, from sea to sea, from mountain-top to mountain-top, scattering light with both their hands. On they sped out of the darkness, perfect, glorious, like spirits of the just breaking from the tomb; on, over the quiet sea, over the low coastline, and the swamps beyond, and the mountains above them; over those who slept in peace and those who woke in sorrow; over the evil and the good; over the living and the dead; over the wide world and all that breathes or has breathed thereon.

It was a wonderfully beautiful sight, and yet sad, perhaps, from the very excess of its beauty. The arising sun; the setting sun! There we have the symbol and the type of humanity, and all things with which humanity has to do. The symbol and the type, yes, and the earthly beginning, and the end also. And on that morning this came home to me with a peculiar force. The sun that rose to-day for us had set last night for eighteen of our fellow-voyagers! – had set everlastingly for eighteen whom we knew!

The dhow had gone down with them, they were tossing about

among the rocks and seaweed, so much human drift on the great ocean of Death! And we four were saved. But one day a sunrise will come when we shall be among those who are lost, and then others will watch those glorious rays, and grow sad in the midst of beauty, and dream of Death in the full glow of arising Life!

For this is the lot of man.

V

The Head of the Ethiopian

At length the heralds and forerunners of the royal sun had done their work, and, searching out the shadows, had caused them to flee away. Then up he came in glory from his ocean-bed, and flooded the earth with warmth and light. I sat there in the boat listening to the gentle lapping of the water and watched him rise, till presently the slight drift of the boat brought the odd-shaped rock, or peak, at the end of the promontory which we had weathered with so much peril, between me and the majestic sight, and blotted it from my view. I still continued, however, to stare at the rock, absently enough, till presently it became edged with the fire of the growing light behind it, and then I started, as well I might, for I perceived that the top of the peak, which was about eighty feet high by one hundred and fifty feet thick at its base, was shaped like a negro's head and face, whereon was stamped a most fiendish and terrifying expression. There was no doubt about it; there were the thick lips, the fat cheeks, and the squat nose standing out with startling clearness against the flaming background. There, too, was the round skull, washed into shape perhaps by thousands of years of wind and weather, and, to complete the resemblance, there was a scrubby growth of weeds or lichen upon it, which against the sun looked for all the world

like the wool on a colossal negro's head. It certainly was very odd; so odd that now I believe it is not a mere freak of nature but a gigantic monument fashioned, like the well-known Egyptian Sphinx, by a forgotten people out of a pile of rock that lent itself to their design, perhaps as an emblem of warning and defiance to any enemies who approached the harbour. Unfortunately we were never able to ascertain whether or not this was the case, inasmuch as the rock was difficult of access both from the land and the waterside, and we had other things to attend to. Myself, considering the matter by the light of what we afterwards saw, I believe that it was fashioned by man, but whether or not this is so, there it stands, and sullenly stares from age to age out across the changing sea – there it stood two thousand years and more ago, when Amenartas, the Egyptian princess, and the wife of Leo's remote ancestor Kallikrates, gazed upon its devilish face – and there I have no doubt it will still stand when as many centuries as are numbered between her day and our own are added to the year that bore us to oblivion.

“What do you think of that, Job?” I asked of our retainer, who was sitting on the edge of the boat, trying to get as much sunshine as possible, and generally looking uncommonly wretched, and I pointed to the fiery and demonical head.

“Oh Lord, sir,” answered Job, who now perceived the object for the first time, “I think that the old geneleman must have been sitting for his portrait on them rocks.”

I laughed, and the laugh woke up Leo.

“Hullo,” he said, “what’s the matter with me? I am all stiff – where is the dhow? Give me some brandy, please.”

“You may be thankful that you are not stiffer, my boy,” I answered. “The dhow is sunk, everybody on board her is drowned with the exception of us four, and your own life was only saved by a miracle”; and whilst Job, now that it was light enough, searched about in a locker for the brandy for which Leo asked, I told him the history of our night’s adventure.

“Great Heavens!” he said faintly; “and to think that we should have been chosen to live through it!”

By this time the brandy was forthcoming, and we all had a good pull at it, and thankful enough we were for it. Also the sun was beginning to get strength, and warm our chilled bones, for we had been wet through for five hours or more.

“Why,” said Leo, with a gasp as he put down the brandy bottle, “there is the head the writing talks of, the ‘rock carven like the head of an Ethiopian.’”

“Yes,” I said, “there it is.”

“Well, then,” he answered, “the whole thing is true.”

“I don’t see at all that that follows,” I answered. “We knew this head was here: your father saw it. Very likely it is not the same head that the writing talks of; or if it is, it proves nothing.”

Leo smiled at me in a superior way. “You are an unbelieving Jew, Uncle Horace,” he said. “Those who live will see.”

“Exactly so,” I answered, “and now perhaps you will observe that we are drifting across a sandbank into the mouth of the river.

Get hold of your oar, Job, and we will row in and see if we can find a place to land.”

The river mouth which we were entering did not appear to be a very wide one, though as yet the long banks of steaming mist that clung about its shores had not lifted sufficiently to enable us to see its exact measure. There was, as is the case with nearly every East African river, a considerable bar at the mouth, which, no doubt, when the wind was on shore and the tide running out, was absolutely impassable even for a boat drawing only a few inches. But as things were it was manageable enough, and we did not ship a cupful of water. In twenty minutes we were well across it, with but slight assistance from ourselves, and being carried by a strong though somewhat variable breeze well up the harbour. By this time the mist was being sucked up by the sun, which was getting uncomfortably hot, and we saw that the mouth of the little estuary was here about half a mile across, and that the banks were very marshy, and crowded with crocodiles lying about on the mud like logs. About a mile ahead of us, however, was what appeared to be a strip of firm land, and for this we steered. In another quarter of an hour we were there, and making the boat fast to a beautiful tree with broad shining leaves, and flowers of the magnolia species, only they were rose-coloured and not white,⁷ which hung over the water, we disembarked. This done we undressed, washed ourselves, and

⁷ There is a known species of magnolia with pink flowers. It is indigenous in Sikkim, and known as *Magnolia Campbellii*. – Editor.

spread our clothes, together with the contents of the boat, in the sun to dry, which they very quickly did. Then, taking shelter from the sun under some trees, we made a hearty breakfast off a "Paysandu" potted tongue, of which we had brought a good quantity with us, congratulating ourselves loudly on our good fortune in having loaded and provisioned the boat on the previous day before the hurricane destroyed the dhow. By the time that we had finished our meal our clothes were quite dry, and we hastened to get into them, feeling not a little refreshed. Indeed, with the exception of weariness and a few bruises, none of us were the worse for the terrifying adventure which had been fatal to all our companions. Leo, it is true, had been half-drowned, but that is no great matter to a vigorous young athlete of five-and-twenty.

After breakfast we started to look about us. We were on a strip of dry land about two hundred yards broad by five hundred long, bordered on one side by the river, and on the other three by endless desolate swamps, that stretched as far as the eye could reach. This strip of land was raised about twenty-five feet above the plain of the surrounding swamps and the river level: indeed it had every appearance of having been made by the hand of man.

"This place has been a wharf," said Leo, dogmatically.

"Nonsense," I answered. "Who would be stupid enough to build a wharf in the middle of these dreadful marshes in a country inhabited by savages – that is, if it is inhabited at all?"

"Perhaps it was not always marsh, and perhaps the people were

not always savage,” he said drily, looking down the steep bank, for we were standing by the river. “Look there,” he went on, pointing to a spot where the hurricane of the previous night had torn up one of the magnolia trees by the roots, which had grown on the extreme edge of the bank just where it sloped down to the water, and lifted a large cake of earth with them. “Is not that stonework? If not, it is very like it.”

“Nonsense,” I said again, but we clambered down to the spot, and got between the upturned roots and the bank.

“Well?” he said.

But I did not answer this time. I only whistled. For there, laid bare by the removal of the earth, was an undoubted facing of solid stone laid in large blocks and bound together with brown cement, so hard that I could make no impression on it with the file in my shooting-knife. Nor was this all; seeing something projecting through the soil at the bottom of the bared patch of walling, I removed the loose earth with my hands, and revealed a huge stone ring, a foot or more in diameter, and about three inches thick. This fairly staggered me.

“Looks rather like a wharf where good-sized vessels have been moored, does it not, Uncle Horace?” said Leo, with an excited grin.

I tried to say “Nonsense” again, but the word stuck in my throat – the ring spoke for itself. In some past age vessels *had* been moored there, and this stone wall was undoubtedly the remnant of a solidly constructed wharf. Probably the city to

which it had belonged lay buried beneath the swamp behind it.

“Begins to look as though there were something in the story after all, Uncle Horace,” said the exultant Leo; and reflecting on the mysterious negro’s head and the equally mysterious stonework, I made no direct reply.

“A country like Africa,” I said, “is sure to be full of the relics of long dead and forgotten civilisations. Nobody knows the age of the Egyptian civilisation, and very likely it had offshoots. Then there were the Babylonians and the Phoenicians, and the Persians, and all manner of people, all more or less civilised, to say nothing of the Jews whom everybody ‘wants’ nowadays. It is possible that they, or any one of them, may have had colonies or trading stations about here. Remember those buried Persian cities that the consul showed us at Kilwa.”⁸

“Quite so,” said Leo, “but that is not what you said before.” “Well, what is to be done now?” I asked, turning the conversation.

As no answer was forthcoming we walked to the edge of the swamp, and looked over it. It was apparently boundless, and vast

⁸ Near Kilwa, on the East Coast of Africa, about 400 miles south of Zanzibar, is a cliff which has been recently washed by the waves. On the top of this cliff are Persian tombs known to be at least seven centuries old by the dates still legible upon them. Beneath these tombs is a layer of *débris* representing a city. Farther down the cliff is a second layer representing an older city, and farther down still a third layer, the remains of yet another city of vast and unknown antiquity. Beneath the bottom city were recently found some specimens of glazed earthenware, such as are occasionally to be met with on that coast to this day. I believe that they are now in the possession of Sir John Kirk. — *Editor*.

flocks of every sort of waterfowl flew from its recesses, till it was sometimes difficult to see the sky. Now that the sun was getting high it drew thin sickly looking clouds of poisonous vapour from the surface of the marsh and from the scummy pools of stagnant water.

“Two things are clear to me,” I said, addressing my three companions, who stared at this spectacle in dismay: “first, that we can’t go across there” (I pointed to the swamp), “and, secondly, that if we stop here we shall certainly die of fever.”

“That’s as clear as a haystack, sir,” said Job.

“Very well, then; there are two alternatives before us. One is to’bout ship, and try and run for some port in the whaleboat, which would be a sufficiently risky proceeding, and the other to sail or row on up the river, and see where we come to.”

“I don’t know what you are going to do,” said Leo, setting his mouth, “but I am going up that river.”

Job turned up the whites of his eyes and groaned, and the Arab murmured “Allah,” and groaned also. As for me, I remarked sweetly that as we seemed to be between the devil and the deep sea, it did not much matter where we went. But in reality I was as anxious to proceed as Leo. The colossal negro’s head and the stone wharf had excited my curiosity to an extent of which I was secretly ashamed, and I was prepared to gratify it at any cost. Accordingly, having carefully fitted the mast, restowed the boat, and got out our rifles, we embarked. Fortunately the wind was blowing on shore from the ocean, so we were able to hoist the

sail. Indeed, we afterwards found out that as a general rule the wind set on shore from daybreak for some hours, and off shore again at sunset, and the explanation that I offer of this is, that when the earth is cooled by the dew and the night the hot air rises, and the draught rushes in from the sea till the sun has once more heated it through. At least that appeared to be the rule here.

Taking advantage of this favouring wind, we sailed merrily up the river for three or four hours. Once we came across a school of hippopotami, which rose, and bellowed dreadfully at us within ten or a dozen fathoms of the boat, much to Job's alarm, and, I will confess, to my own. These were the first hippopotami that we had ever seen, and, to judge by their insatiable curiosity, I should judge that we were the first white men that they had ever seen. Upon my word, I once or twice thought that they were coming into the boat to gratify it. Leo wanted to fire at them, but I dissuaded him, fearing the consequences. Also, we saw hundreds of crocodiles basking on the muddy banks, and thousands upon thousands of water-fowl. Some of these we shot, and among them was a wild goose, which, in addition to the sharp-curved spurs on its wings, had a spur about three-quarters of an inch long growing from the skull just between the eyes. We never shot another like it, so I do not know if it was a "sport" or a distinct species. In the latter case this incident may interest naturalists. Job named it the Unicorn Goose.

About midday the sun grew intensely hot, and the stench drawn up by it from the marshes which the river drains

was something too awful, and caused us instantly to swallow precautionary doses of quinine. Shortly afterwards the breeze died away altogether, and as rowing our heavy boat against stream in the heat was out of the question, we were thankful enough to get under the shade of a group of trees – a species of willow – that grew by the edge of the river, and lie there and gasp till at length the approach of sunset put a period to our miseries. Seeing what appeared to be an open space of water straight ahead of us, we determined to row there before settling what to do for the night. Just as we were about to loosen the boat, however, a beautiful waterbuck, with great horns curving forward, and a white stripe across the rump, came down to the river to drink, without perceiving us hidden away within fifty yards under the willows. Leo was the first to catch sight of it, and, being an ardent sportsman, thirsting for the blood of big game, about which he had been dreaming for months, he instantly stiffened all over, and pointed like a setter dog. Seeing what was the matter, I handed him his express rifle, at the same time taking my own.

“Now then,” I whispered, “mind you don’t miss.”

“Miss!” he whispered back contemptuously; “I could not miss it if I tried.”

He lifted the rifle, and the roan-coloured buck, having drunk his fill, raised his head and looked out across the river. He was standing right against the sunset sky on a little eminence, or ridge of ground, which ran across the swamp, evidently a favourite path for game, and there was something very beautiful about him.

Indeed, I do not think that if I live to a hundred I shall ever forget that desolate and yet most fascinating scene; it is stamped upon my memory. To the right and left were wide stretches of lonely death-breeding swamp, unbroken and unrelieved so far as the eye could reach, except here and there by ponds of black and peaty water that, mirror-like, flashed up the red rays of the setting sun. Behind us and before stretched the vista of the sluggish river, ending in glimpses of a reed-fringed lagoon, on the surface of which the long lights of the evening played as the faint breeze stirred the shadows. To the west loomed the huge red ball of the sinking sun, now vanishing down the vapoury horizon, and filling the great heaven, high across whose arch the cranes and wildfowl streamed in line, square, and triangle, with flashes of flying gold and the lurid stain of blood. And then ourselves – three modern Englishmen in a modern English boat – seeming to jar upon and look out of tone with that measureless desolation; and in front of us the noble buck limned out upon a background of ruddy sky.

Bang! Away he goes with a mighty bound. Leo has missed him. *Bang!* right under him again. Now for a shot. I must have one, though he is going like an arrow, and a hundred yards away and more. By Jove! over and over and over! “Well, I think I’ve wiped your eye there, Master Leo,” I say, struggling against the ungenerous exultation that in such a supreme moment of one’s existence will rise in the best-mannered sportsman’s breast.

“Confound you, yes,” growled Leo; and then, with that quick smile that is one of his charms lighting up his handsome face like

a ray of light, "I beg your pardon, old fellow. I congratulate you; it was a lovely shot, and mine were vile."

We got out of the boat and ran to the buck, which was shot through the spine and stone dead. It took us a quarter of an hour or more to clean it and cut off as much of the best meat as we could carry, and, having packed this away, we had barely light enough to row up into the lagoon-like space, into which, there being a hollow in the swamp, the river here expanded. Just as the light vanished we cast anchor about thirty fathoms from the edge of the lake. We did not dare to go ashore, not knowing if we should find dry ground to camp on, and greatly fearing the poisonous exhalations from the marsh, from which we thought we should be freer on the water. So we lighted a lantern, and made our evening meal off another potted tongue in the best fashion that we could, and then prepared to go to sleep, only, however, to find that sleep was impossible. For, whether they were attracted by the lantern, or by the unaccustomed smell of a white man for which they had been waiting for the last thousand years or so, I know not; but certainly we were presently attacked by tens of thousands of the most blood-thirsty, pertinacious, and huge mosquitoes that I ever saw or read of. In clouds they came, and pinged and buzzed and bit till we were nearly mad. Tobacco smoke only seemed to stir them into a merrier and more active life, till at length we were driven to covering ourselves with blankets, head and all, and sitting to slowly stew and continually scratch and swear beneath them. And as we sat, suddenly rolling

out like thunder through the silence came the deep roar of a lion, and then of a second lion, moving among the reeds within sixty yards of us.

“I say,” said Leo, sticking his head out from under his blanket, “lucky we ain’t on the bank, eh, Avuncular?” (Leo sometimes addressed me in this disrespectful way.) “Curse it! a mosquito has bitten me on the nose,” and the head vanished again.

Shortly after this the moon came up, and notwithstanding every variety of roar that echoed over the water to us from the lions on the banks, we began, thinking ourselves perfectly secure, to gradually doze off.

I do not quite know what it was that made me poke my head out of the friendly shelter of the blanket, perhaps because I found that the mosquitoes were biting right through it. Anyhow, as I did so I heard Job whisper, in a frightened voice –

“Oh, my stars, look there!”

Instantly we all of us looked, and this was what we saw in the moonlight. Near the shore were two wide and ever-widening circles of concentric rings rippling away across the surface of the water, and in the heart and centre of the circles were two dark moving objects.

“What is it?” asked I.

“It is those damned lions, sir,” answered Job, in a tone which was an odd mixture of a sense of personal injury, habitual respect, and acknowledged fear, “and they are swimming here to *heat* us,” he added, nervously picking up an “h” in his agitation.

I looked again: there was no doubt about it; I could catch the glare of their ferocious eyes. Attracted either by the smell of the newly killed waterbuck meat or of ourselves, the hungry beasts were actually storming our position.

Leo already had his rifle in his hand. I called to him to wait till they were nearer, and meanwhile grabbed my own. Some fifteen feet from us the water shallowed on a bank to the depth of about fifteen inches, and presently the first of them – it was the lioness – got on to it, shook herself, and roared. At that moment Leo fired, the bullet went right down her open mouth and out at the back of her neck, and down she dropped, with a splash, dead. The other lion – a full-grown male – was some two paces behind her. At this second he got his forepaws on to the bank, when a strange thing happened. There was a rush and disturbance of the water, such as one sees in a pond in England when a pike takes a little fish, only a thousand times fiercer and larger, and suddenly the lion gave a most terrific snarling roar and sprang forward on to the bank, dragging something black with him.

“Allah!” shouted Mahomed, “a crocodile has got him by the leg!” and sure enough he had. We could see the long snout with its gleaming lines of teeth and the reptile body behind it.

And then followed an extraordinary scene indeed. The lion managed to get well on to the bank, the crocodile half standing and half swimming, still nipping his hind leg. He roared till the air quivered with the sound, and then, with a savage, shrieking snarl, turned round and clawed hold of the crocodile’s head. The

crocodile shifted his grip, having, as we afterwards discovered, had one of his eyes torn out, and slightly turned over; instantly the lion got him by the throat and held on, and then over and over they rolled upon the bank struggling hideously. It was impossible to follow their movements, but when next we got a clear view the tables had turned, for the crocodile, whose head seemed to be a mass of gore, had got the lion's body in his iron jaws just above the hips, and was squeezing him and shaking him to and fro. For his part, the tortured brute, roaring in agony, was clawing and biting madly at his enemy's scaly head, and fixing his great hind claws in the crocodile's, comparatively speaking, soft throat, ripping it open as one would rip a glove.

Then, all of a sudden, the end came. The lion's head fell forward on the crocodile's back, and with an awful groan he died, and the crocodile, after standing for a minute motionless, slowly rolled over on to his side, his jaws still fixed across the carcass of the lion, which, we afterwards found, he had bitten almost in halves.

This duel to the death was a wonderful and a shocking sight, and one that I suppose few men have seen – and thus it ended.

When it was all over, leaving Mahomed to keep a look out, we managed to spend the rest of the night as quietly as the mosquitoes would allow.

VI

An Early Christian Ceremony

Next morning, at the earliest light of dawn, we rose, performed such ablutions as circumstances would allow, and generally made ready to start. I am bound to say that when there was sufficient light to enable us to see each other's faces I, for one, burst out into a roar of laughter. Job's fat and comfortable countenance was swollen out to nearly twice its natural size from mosquito bites, and Leo's condition was not much better. Indeed, of the three I had come off much the best, probably owing to the toughness of my dark skin, and to the fact that a good deal of it was covered by hair, for since we had started from England I had allowed my naturally luxuriant beard to grow at its own sweet will. But the other two were, comparatively speaking, clean shaved, which of course gave the enemy a larger extent of open country to operate on, though in Mahomed's case the mosquitoes, recognising the taste of a true believer, would not touch him at any price. How often, I wonder, during the next week or so did we wish that we were fla-voured like an Arab!

By the time that we had done laughing as heartily as our swollen lips would allow, it was daylight, and the morning breeze was coming up from the sea, cutting lanes through the dense marsh mists, and here and there rolling them before it in great

balls of fleecy vapour. So we set our sail, and having first taken a look at the two dead lions and the alligator, which we were of course unable to skin, being destitute of means of curing the pelts, we started, and, sailing through the lagoon, followed the course of the river on the farther side. At midday, when the breeze dropped, we were fortunate enough to find a convenient piece of dry land on which to camp and light a fire, and here we cooked two wild-ducks and some of the waterbuck's flesh – not in a very appetising way, it is true, but still sufficiently. The rest of the buck's flesh we cut into strips and hung in the sun to dry into "biltong," as, I believe, the South African Dutch call flesh thus prepared. On this welcome patch of dry land we stopped till the following dawn, and, as before, spent the night in warfare with the mosquitoes, but without other troubles. The next day or two passed in similar fashion, and without noticeable adventures, except that we shot a specimen of a peculiarly graceful hornless buck, and saw many varieties of water-lily in full bloom, some of them blue and of exquisite beauty, though few of the flowers were perfect, owing to the prevalence of a white water-maggot with a green head that fed upon them.

It was on the fifth day of our journey, when we had travelled, so far as we could reckon, about one hundred and thirty-five to a hundred and forty miles westwards from the coast, that the first event of any real importance occurred. On that morning the usual wind failed us about eleven o'clock, and after pulling a little way we were forced to halt, more or less exhausted, at

what appeared to be the junction of our stream with another of a uniform width of about fifty feet. Some trees grew near at hand – the only trees in all this country were along the banks of the river, and under these we rested, and then, the land being fairly dry just here, walked a little way along the edge of the river to prospect, and shoot a few waterfowl for food. Before we had gone fifty yards we perceived that all hopes of getting further up the stream in the whale-boat were at an end, for not two hundred yards above where we had stopped were a succession of shallows and mudbanks, with not six inches of water over them. It was a watery *cul de sac*.

Turning back, we walked some way along the banks of the other river, and soon came to the conclusion, from various indications, that it was not a river at all, but an ancient canal, like the one which is to be seen above Mombasa, on the Zanzibar coast, connecting the Tana River with the Ozy, in such a way as to enable the shipping coming down the Tana to cross to the Ozy, and reach the sea by it, and thus avoid the very dangerous bar that blocks the mouth of the Tana. The canal before us had evidently been dug out by man at some remote period of the world's history, and the results of his digging still remained in the shape of the raised banks that had no doubt once formed towing-paths. Except here and there, where they had been hollowed out by the water or fallen in, these banks of stiff binding clay were at a uniform distance from each other, and the depth of the stream also appeared to be uniform. Current there was little or none,

and, as a consequence, the surface of the canal was choked with vegetable growth, intersected by little paths of clear water, made, I suppose, by the constant passage of waterfowl, iguanas, and other vermin. Now, as it was evident that we could not proceed up the river, it became equally evident that we must either try the canal or else return to the sea. We could not stop where we were, to be baked by the sun and eaten up by the mosquitoes, till we died of fever in that dreary marsh.

“Well, I suppose that we must try it,” I said; and the others assented in their various ways – Leo, as though it were the best joke in the world; Job, in respectful disgust; and Mahomed, with an invocation to the Prophet, and a comprehensive curse upon all unbelievers and their ways of thought and travel.

Accordingly, as soon as the sun got low, having little or nothing more to hope for from our friendly wind, we started. For the first hour or so we managed to row the boat, though with great labour; but after that the weeds got too thick to allow of it, and we were obliged to resort to the primitive and most exhausting resource of towing her. For two hours we laboured, Mahomed, Job, and I, who was supposed to be strong enough to pull against the two of them, on the bank, while Leo sat in the bow of the boat, and brushed away the weeds which collected round the cutwater with Mahomed’s sword. At dark we halted for some hours to rest and enjoy the mosquitoes, but about midnight we went on again, taking advantage of the comparative cool of the night. At dawn we rested for three hours, and then

started once more, and laboured on till about ten o'clock, when a thunderstorm, accompanied by a deluge of rain, overtook us, and we spent the next six hours practically under water.

I do not know that there is any necessity for me to describe the next four days of our voyage in detail, further than to say that they were, on the whole, the most miserable that I ever spent in my life, forming one monotonous record of heavy labour, heat, misery, and mosquitoes. All that dreary way we passed through a region of almost endless swamp, and I can only attribute our escape from fever and death to the constant doses of quinine and purgatives which we took, and the unceasing toil which we were forced to undergo. On the third day of our journey up the canal we had sighted a round hill that loomed dimly through the vapours of the marsh, and on the evening of the fourth night, when we camped, this hill seemed to be within five-and-twenty or thirty miles of us. We were by now utterly exhausted, and felt as though our blistered hands could not pull the boat a yard farther, and that the best thing that we could do would be to lie down and die in that dreadful wilderness of swamp. It was an awful position, and one in which I trust no other white man will ever be placed; and as I threw myself down in the boat to sleep the sleep of utter exhaustion, I bitterly cursed my folly in ever having been a party to such a mad undertaking, which could, I saw, only end in our death in this ghastly land. I thought, I remember, as I slowly sank into a doze, of what the appearance of the boat and her unhappy crew would be in two or three months' time from

that night. There she would lie, with gaping seams and half filled with foetid water, which, when the mist-laden wind stirred her, would wash backwards and forwards through our mouldering bones, and that would be the end of her, and of those in her who would follow after myths and seek out the secrets of Nature.

Already I seemed to hear the water rippling against the desiccated bones and rattling them together, rolling my skull against Mahomed's, and his against mine, till at last Mahomed's stood straight up upon its vertebrae, and glared at me through its empty eyeholes, and cursed me with its grinning jaws, because I, a dog of a Christian, disturbed the last sleep of a true believer. I opened my eyes, and shuddered at the horrid dream, and then shuddered again at something that was not a dream, for two great eyes were gleaming down at me through the misty darkness. I struggled up, and in my terror and confusion shrieked, and shrieked again, so that the others sprang up too, reeling, and drunken with sleep and fear. And then all of a sudden there was a flash of cold steel, and a great spear was held against my throat, and behind it other spears gleamed cruelly.

"Peace," said a voice, speaking in Arabic, or rather in some dialect into which Arabic entered very largely; "who are ye who come hither swimming on the water? Speak or ye die," and the steel pressed sharply against my throat, sending a cold chill through me.

"We are travellers, and have come hither by chance," I answered in my best Arabic, which appeared to be understood,

for the man turned his head, and, addressing a tall form that towered up in the background, said, "Father, shall we slay?"

"What is the colour of the men?" said a deep voice in answer.

"White is their colour."

"Slay not," was the reply. "Four suns since was the word brought to me from '*She-who-must-be-obeyed*,' 'White men come; if white men come, slay them not.' Let them be brought to the house of '*She-who-must-be-obeyed*.' Bring forth the men, and let that which they have with them be brought forth also."

"Come," said the man, half leading and half dragging me from the boat, and as he did so I perceived other men doing the same kind office to my companions.

On the bank were gathered a company of some fifty men. In that light all I could make out was that they were armed with huge spears, were very tall, and strongly built, comparatively light in colour, and nude, save for a leopard skin tied round the middle.

Presently Leo and Job were bundled out and placed beside me.

"What on earth is up?" said Leo, rubbing his eyes.

"Oh, Lord! sir, here's a rum go," ejaculated Job; and just at that moment a disturbance ensued, and Mahomed came tumbling between us, followed by a shadowy form with an uplifted spear.

"Allah! Allah!" howled Mahomed, feeling that he had little to hope from man, "protect me! protect me!"

"Father, it is a black one," said a voice. "What said '*She-who-must-be-obeyed*' about the black one?"

“She said naught; but slay him not. Come hither, my son.” The man advanced, and the tall shadowy form bent forward and whispered something.

“Yes, yes,” said the other, and chuckled in a rather bloodcurdling tone.

“Are the three white men there?” asked the form.

“Yes, they are there.”

“Then bring up that which is made ready for them, and let the men take all that can be brought from the thing which floats.”

Hardly had he spoken when men came running up, carrying on their shoulders neither more nor less than palanquins – four bearers and two spare men to a palanquin – and in these it was promptly indicated we were expected to stow ourselves.

“Well!” said Leo, “it is a blessing to find anybody to carry us after having to carry ourselves so long.”

Leo always takes a cheerful view of things.

There being no help for it, after seeing the others into theirs I tumbled into my own litter, and very comfortable I found it. It appeared to be manufactured of cloth woven from grass-fibre, which stretched and yielded to every motion of the body, and, being bound top and bottom to the bearing pole, gave a grateful support to the head and neck.

Scarcely had I settled myself when, accompanying their steps with a monotonous song, the bearers started at a swinging trot. For half an hour or so I lay still, reflecting on the very remarkable experiences that we were going through, and wondering if any

of my eminently respectable fossil friends down at Cambridge would believe me if I were to be miraculously set at the familiar dinner-table for the purpose of relating them. I do not want to convey any disrespectful notion or slight when I call those good and learned men fossils, but my experience is that people are apt to fossilise even at a University if they follow the same paths too persistently. I was getting fossilised myself, but of late my stock of ideas has been very much enlarged. Well, I lay and reflected, and wondered what on earth would be the end of it all, till at last I ceased to wonder, and went to sleep.

I suppose I must have slept for seven or eight hours, getting the first real rest that I had had since the night before the loss of the dhow, for when I woke the sun was high in the heavens. We were still journeying on at a pace of about four miles an hour. Peeping out through the mist-like curtains of the litter, which were ingeniously fixed to the bearing pole, I perceived to my infinite relief that we had passed out of the region of eternal swamp, and were now travelling over swelling grassy plains towards a cup-shaped hill. Whether or not it was the same hill that we had seen from the canal I do not know, and have never since been able to discover, for, as we afterwards found out, these people will give little information upon such points. Next I glanced at the men who were bearing me. They were of a magnificent build, few of them being under six feet in height, and yellowish in colour. Generally their appearance had a good deal in common with that of the East African Somali,

only their hair was not frizzed up, but hung in thick black locks upon their shoulders. Their features were aquiline, and in many cases exceedingly handsome, the teeth being especially regular and beautiful. But notwithstanding their beauty, it struck me that, on the whole, I had never seen a more evil-looking set of faces. There was an aspect of cold and sullen cruelty stamped upon them that revolted me, and which in some cases was almost uncanny in its intensity.

Another thing that struck me about them was that they never seemed to smile. Sometimes they sang the monotonous song of which I have spoken, but when they were not singing they remained almost perfectly silent, and the light of a laugh never came to brighten their sombre and evil countenances. Of what race could these people be? Their language was a bastard Arabic, and yet they were not Arabs; I was quite sure of that. For one thing they were too dark, or rather yellow. I could not say why, but I know that their appearance filled me with a sick fear of which I felt ashamed. While I was still wondering another litter came up alongside of mine. In it – for the curtains were drawn – sat an old man, clothed in a whitish robe, made apparently from coarse linen, that hung loosely about him, who, I at once jumped to the conclusion, was the shadowy figure that had stood on the bank and been addressed as “Father.” He was a wonderful-looking old man, with a snowy beard, so long that the ends of it hung over the sides of the litter, and he had a hooked nose, above which flashed out a pair of eyes as keen as a snake’s, while his

whole countenance was instinct with a look of wise and sardonic humour impossible to describe on paper.

“Art thou awake, stranger?” he said in a deep and low voice.

“Surely, my father,” I answered courteously, feeling certain that I should do well to conciliate this ancient Mammon of Unrighteousness.

He stroked his beautiful white beard, and smiled faintly.

“From whatever country thou camest,” he said, “and by the way it must be from one where somewhat of our language is known, they teach their children courtesy there, my stranger son. And now wherefore comest thou unto this land, which scarce an alien foot has pressed from the time that man knoweth? Art thou and those with thee weary of life?”

“We came to find new things,” I answered boldly. “We are tired of the old things; we have come up out of the sea to know that which is unknown. We are of a brave race who fear not death, my very much respected father – that is, if we can get a little information before we die.”

“Humph!” said the old gentleman, “that may be true; it is rash to contradict, otherwise I should say that thou wast lying, my son. However, I dare to say that *‘She-who-must-be-obeyed’* will meet thy wishes in the matter.”

“Who is *‘She-who-must-be-obeyed’*?” I asked, curiously.

The old man glanced at the bearers, and then answered, with a little smile that somehow sent my blood to my heart – “Surely, my stranger son, thou wilt learn soon enough, if it be her pleasure

to see thee at all in the flesh.”

“In the flesh?” I answered. “What may my father wish to convey?”

But the old man only laughed a dreadful laugh, and made no reply.

“What is the name of my father’s people?” I asked.

“The name of my people is Amahagger” (the People of the Rocks).

“And if a son might ask, what is the name of my father?”

“My name is Billali.”

“And whither go we, my father?”

“That shalt thou see,” and at a sign from him his bearers started forward at a run till they reached the litter in which Job was reposing (with one leg hanging over the side). Apparently, however, he could not make much out of Job, for presently I saw his bearers trot forward to Leo’s litter.

And after that, as nothing fresh occurred, I yielded to the pleasant swaying motion of the litter, and went to sleep again. I was dreadfully tired. When I woke I found that we were passing through a rocky defile of a lava formation with precipitous sides, in which grew many beautiful trees and flowering shrubs.

Presently this defile took a turn, and a lovely sight unfolded itself to my eyes. Before us was a vast cup of green from four to six miles in extent, in the shape of a Roman amphitheatre. The sides of this great cup were rocky, and clothed with bush, but the centre was of the richest meadow land, studded with single

trees of magnificent growth, and watered by meandering brooks. On this rich plain grazed herds of goats and cattle, but I saw no sheep. At first I could not imagine what this strange spot could be, but presently it flashed upon me that it must represent the crater of some long-extinct volcano which had afterwards been a lake, and was ultimately drained in some unexplained way. And here I may state that from my subsequent experience of this and a much larger, but otherwise similar spot, which I shall have occasion to describe by-and-by, I have every reason to believe that this conclusion was correct. What puzzled me, however, was, that although there were people moving about herding the goats and cattle, I saw no signs of any human habitation. Where did they all live? I wondered. My curiosity was soon destined to be gratified. Turning to the left the string of litters followed the cliffy sides of the crater for a distance of about half a mile, or perhaps a little less, and then halted. Seeing the old gentleman, my adopted "father," Billali, emerge from his litter, I did the same, and so did Leo and Job. The first thing I saw was our wretched Arab companion, Mahomed, lying exhausted on the ground. It appeared that he had not been provided with a litter, but had been forced to run the entire distance, and, as he was already quite worn out when we started, his condition now was one of great prostration.

On looking round we discovered that the place where we had halted was a platform in front of the mouth of a great cave, and piled upon this platform were the entire contents of the

whale-boat, even down to the oars and sail. Round the cave stood groups of the men who had escorted us, and other men of a similar stamp. They were all tall and all handsome, though they varied in their degree of darkness of skin, some being as dark as Mahomed, and some as yellow as a Chinese. They were naked, except for the leopard-skin round the waist, and each of them carried a huge spear.

There were also some women among them, who, instead of the leopard-skin, wore a tanned hide of a small red buck, something like that of the oribé, only rather darker in colour. These women were, as a class, exceedingly good-looking, with large, dark eyes, well-cut features, and a thick bush of curling hair – not crisped like a negro's – ranging from black to chestnut in hue, with all shades of intermediate colour. Some, but very few of them, wore a yellowish linen garment, such as I have described as worn by Billali, but this, as we afterwards discovered, was a mark of rank, rather than an attempt at clothing. For the rest, their appearance was not quite so terrifying as that of the men, and they sometimes, though rarely, smiled. As soon as we had alighted they gathered round us and examined us with curiosity, but without excitement. Leo's tall, athletic form and clear-cut Grecian face, however, evidently excited their attention, and when he politely lifted his hat to them, and showed his curling yellow hair, there was a slight murmur of admiration. Nor did it stop there; for, after regarding him critically from head to foot, the handsomest of the young women – one wearing a robe, and

with hair of a shade between brown and chestnut – deliberately advanced to him, and, in a way that would have been winning had it not been so determined, quietly put her arm round his neck, bent forward, and kissed him on the lips.

I gave a gasp, expecting to see Leo instantly speared; and Job ejaculated, “The hussy – well, I never!” As for Leo, he looked slightly astonished; and then, remarking that we had clearly got into a country where they followed the customs of the early Christians, deliberately returned the embrace.

Again I gasped, thinking that something would happen; but, to my surprise, though some of the young women showed traces of vexation, the older ones and the men only smiled slightly. When we came to understand the customs of this extraordinary people the mystery was explained. It then appeared that, in direct opposition to the habits of almost every other savage race in the world, women among the Amahagger are not only upon terms of perfect equality with the men, but are not held to them by any binding ties. Descent is traced only through the line of the mother, and while individuals are as proud of a long and superior female ancestry as we are of our families in Europe, they never pay attention to, or even acknowledge, any man as their father, even when their male parentage is perfectly well known. There is but one titular male parent of each tribe, or, as they call it, “Household,” and he is its elected and immediate ruler, with the title of “Father.” For instance, the man Billali was the father of this “household,” which consisted of about

seven thousand individuals all told, and no other man was ever called by that name. When a woman took a fancy to a man she signified her preference by advancing and embracing him publicly, in the same way that this handsome and exceedingly prompt young lady, who was called Ustane, had embraced Leo. If he kissed her back it was a token that he accepted her, and the arrangement continued until one of them wearied of it. I am bound, however, to say that the change of husbands was not nearly so frequently as might have been expected. Nor did quarrels arise out of it, at least among the men, who, when their wives deserted them in favour of a rival, accepted the whole thing much as we accept the income-tax or our marriage laws, as something not to be disputed, and as tending to the good of the community, however disagreeable they may in particular instances prove to the individual.

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