ROBERT MICHAEL BALLANTYNE

BLOWN TO BITS: THE LONELY MAN OF RAKATA, THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO

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Содержание

R. M. Ballantyne
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Chapter One
The Play Commences

Blown to bits; bits so inconceivably, so ineffably, so "microscopically" small that—but let us not anticipate.

About the darkest hour of a very dark night, in the year 1883, a large brig lay becalmed on the Indian Ocean, not far from that region of the Eastern world which is associated in some minds with spices, volcanoes, coffee, and piratical junks, namely, the Malay Archipelago.

Two men slowly paced the brig's quarterdeck for some time in silence, as if the elemental quietude which prevailed above and below had infected them. Both men were broad, and apparently strong. One of them was tall; the other short. More than this the feeble light of the binnacle-lamp failed to reveal.

"Father," said the tall man to the short one, "I do like to hear the gentle pattering of the reef-points on the sails; it is so suggestive of peace and rest. Doesn't it strike you so?"

"Can't say it does, lad," replied the short man, in a voice which, naturally mellow and hearty, had been rendered nautically harsh and gruff by years of persistent roaring in the teeth of wind and weather. "More suggestive to me of lost time and lee-way."

The son laughed lightly, a pleasant, kindly, soft laugh, in keeping with the scene and hour.

"Why, father," he resumed after a brief pause, "you are so sternly practical that you drive all the sentiment out of a fellow. I had almost risen to the regions of poetry just now, under the pleasant influences of nature."

"Glad I got hold of 'ee, lad, before you rose," growled the captain of the brig—for such the short man was. "When a young fellow like you gets up into the clouds o' poetry, he's like a man in a balloon—scarce knows how he got there; doesn't know very well how he's to get down, an' has no more idea where he's goin' to, or what he's drivin' at, than the man in the moon. Take my advice, lad, an' get out o' poetical regions as fast as ye can. It don't suit a young fellow who has got to do duty as first mate of his father's brig and push his way in the world as a seaman. When I sent you to school an' made you a far better scholar than myself, I had no notion they was goin' to teach you poetry."

The captain delivered the last word with an emphasis which was meant to convey the idea of profound but not ill-natured scorn.

"Why, father," returned the young man, in a tone which plainly told of a gleeful laugh within him, which was as yet restrained, "it was not school that put poetry into me—if indeed there be any in me at all."

"What was it, then?"

"It was mother," returned the youth, promptly, "and surely you don't object to poetry in *her*."

"Object!" cried the captain, as though speaking in the teeth of a Nor'wester. "Of course not. But then, Nigel, poetry in your mother *is* poetry, an' she can *do* it, lad—screeds of it—equal to anything that Dibdin, or, or,—that other fellow, you know, I forget his name—ever put pen to—why, your mother is herself a poem! neatly made up, rounded off at the corners, French-polished and all shipshape. Ha! you needn't go an' shelter yourself under *her* wings, wi' your inflated, up in the clouds, reef-point patterin', balloon-like nonsense."

"Well, well, father, don't get so hot about it; I won't offend again. Besides, I'm quite content to take a very low place so long as you give mother her right position. We won't disagree about that, but I suspect that we differ considerably about the other matter you mentioned."

"What other matter?" demanded the sire.

"My doing duty as first mate," answered the son. "It must be quite evident to you by this time, I should think, that I am not cut out for a sailor. After all your trouble, and my own efforts during this long voyage round the Cape, I'm no better than an amateur. I told you that a youth taken fresh from college, without any previous experience of the sea except in boats, could not be licked into shape in so short a time. It is absurd to call me first mate of the *Sunshine*. That is in reality Mr Moor's position—"

"No, it isn't, Nigel, my son," interrupted the captain, firmly. "Mr Moor is *second* mate. *I* say so, an' if I, the skipper and owner o' this brig, don't know it, I'd like to know who does! Now, look here, lad. You've always had a bad habit of underratin' yourself an' contradictin' your father. I'm an old salt, you know, an' I tell 'ee that for the time you've bin at sea, an' the opportunities you've had, you're a sort o' walkin' miracle. You're no more an ammytoor than I am, and another voyage or two will make you quite fit to work your way all over the ocean, an' finally to take command o' this here brig, an' let your old father stay at home wi'—wi'—"

"With the Poetess," suggested Nigel.

"Just so—wi' the equal o' Dibdin, not to mention the other fellow. Now it seems to me—. How's 'er head?"

The captain suddenly changed the subject here.

Nigel, who chanced to be standing next the binnacle, stooped to examine the compass, and the flood of light from its lamp revealed a smooth but manly and handsome face which seemed quite to harmonise with the cheery voice that belonged to it.

"Nor'-east-and-by-east," he said.

"Are 'ee sure, lad?"

"Your doubting me, father, does not correspond with your lately expressed opinion of my seamanship; does it?"

"Let me see," returned the captain, taking no notice of the remark, and stooping to look at the compass with a critical eye.

The flood of light, in this case, revealed a visage in which good-nature had evidently struggled for years against the virulent opposition of wind and weather, and had come off victorious, though not without evidences of the conflict. At the same time it revealed features similar to those of the son, though somewhat rugged and red, besides being smothered in hair.

"Vulcan must be concoctin' a new brew," he muttered, as he gazed inquiringly over the bow, "or he's stirring up an old one."

"What d'you mean, father?"

"I mean that there's somethin' goin' on there-away—in the neighbourhood o' Sunda Straits," answered the Captain, directing attention to that point of the compass towards which the ship's head was turned. "Darkness like this don't happen without a cause. I've had some experience o' them seas before now, an' depend upon it that Vulcan is stirring up some o' the fires that are always blazin' away, more or less, around the Straits Settlements."

"By which you mean, I suppose, that one of the numerous volcanoes in the Malay Archipelago has become active," said Nigel; "but are we not some five or six hundred miles to the sou'-west of Sunda? Surely the influence of volcanic action could scarcely reach so far."

"So far!" repeated the captain, with a sort of humph which was meant to indicate mild contempt; "that shows how little you know, with all your book-learnin', about volcanoes."

"I don't profess to know much, father," retorted Nigel in a tone of cheery defiance.

"Why, boy," continued the other, resuming his perambulation of the deck, "explosions have sometimes been heard for hundreds, ay *hundreds*, of miles. I thought I heard one just now, but no doubt the unusual darkness works up my imagination and makes me suspicious, for it's wonderful what fools the imag—. Hallo! D'ee feel *that*?"

He went smartly towards the binnacle-light, as he spoke, and, holding an arm close to it, found that his sleeve was sprinkled with a thin coating of fine dust.

"Didn't I say so?" he exclaimed in some excitement, as he ran to the cabin skylight and glanced earnestly at the barometer. That glance caused him to shout a sudden order to take in all sail. At the same moment a sigh of wind swept over the sleeping sea as if the storm-fiend were expressing regret at having been so promptly discovered and met.

Seamen are well used to sudden danger—especially in equatorial seas—and to prompt, unquestioning action. Not many minutes elapsed before the *Sunshine* was under the smallest amount of sail she could carry. Even before this had been well accomplished a stiff breeze was tearing up the surface of the sea into wild foam, which a furious gale soon raised into raging billows.

The storm came from the Sunda Straits about which the captain and his son had just been talking, and was so violent that they could do nothing but scud before it under almost bare poles. All that night it raged. Towards morning it increased to such a pitch that one of the backstays of the foremast gave way. The result was that the additional strain thus thrown on the other stays was too much for them. They also parted, and the foretop-mast, snapping short off with a report like a cannon-shot, went over the side, carrying the main-topgallant-mast and all its gear along with it.

Chapter Two
The Haven in the Coral Ring

It seemed as if the storm-fiend were satisfied with the mischief he had accomplished, for immediately after the disaster just described, the gale began to moderate, and when the sun rose it had been reduced to a stiff but steady breeze.

From the moment of the accident onward, the whole crew had been exerting themselves to the utmost with axe and knife to cut and clear away the wreck of the masts, and repair damages.

Not the least energetic among them was our amateur first mate, Nigel Roy. When all had been made comparatively snug, he went aft to where his father stood beside the steersman, with his legs nautically wide apart, his sou'-wester pulled well down over his frowning brows, and his hands in their native pockets.

"This is a bad ending to a prosperous voyage," said the youth, sadly; "but you don't seem to take it much to heart, father!"

"How much or little I take it to heart you know nothin' whatever about, my boy, seein' that I don't wear my heart on my coat-sleeve, nor yet on the point of my nose, for the inspection of all and sundry. Besides, you can't tell whether it's a bad or a good endin', for it has not ended yet one way or another. Moreover, what appears bad is often found to be good, an' what seems good is pretty often uncommon bad."

"You are a walking dictionary of truisms, father! I suppose you mean to take a philosophical view of the misfortune and make the best of it," said Nigel, with what we may style one of his twinkling smiles, for on nearly all occasions that young man's dark, brown eyes twinkled, in spite of him, as vigorously as any "little star" that was ever told in prose or song to do so—and much more expressively, too, because of the eyebrows of which little stars appear to be destitute.

"No, lad," retorted the captain; "I take a common-sense view—not a philosophical one; an' when you've bin as long at sea as I have, you'll call nothin' a misfortune until it's proved to be such. The only misfortune I have at present is a son who cannot see things in the same light as his father sees 'em."

"Well, then, according to your own principle that is the reverse of a misfortune, for if I saw everything in the same light that you do, you'd have no pleasure in talking to me, you'd have no occasion to reason me out of error, or convince me of truth. Take the subject of poetry, now—"

"Luff;" said Captain Roy, sternly, to the man at the wheel.

When the man at the wheel had gone through the nautical evolution involved in "luff," the captain turned to his son and said abruptly—"We'll run for the Cocos-Keelin' Islands, Nigel, an' refit."

"Are the Keeling Islands far off?"

"Lift up your head and look straight along the bridge of your nose, lad, and you'll see them. They're an interesting group, are the Keelin' Islands. Volcanic, they are, with a coral top-dressin', so to speak. Sit down here an' I'll tell 'ee about 'em."

Nigel shut up the telescope through which he had been examining the thin, blue line on the horizon that indicated the islands in question, and sat down on the cabin skylight beside his father.

"They've got a romantic history too, though a short one, an' are set like a gem on the bosom of the deep blue sea."

"Come, father, you're drifting out of your true course—that's poetical!"

"I know it, lad, but I'm only quotin' your mother. Well, you must know that the Keelin' Islands—we call them Keelin' for short—were uninhabited between fifty and sixty years ago, when a Scotsman named Ross, thinking them well situated as a port of call for the repair and provisioning of vessels on their way to Australia and China, set his heart on them and quietly took possession in the name

of England. Then he went home to fetch his wife and family of six children, intendin' to settle on the islands for good. Returning in 1827 with the family and fourteen adventurers, twelve of whom were English, one a Portugee and one a Javanee, he found to his disgust that an Englishman named Hare had stepped in before him and taken possession. This Hare was a very bad fellow; a rich man who wanted to live like a Rajah, with lots o' native wives and retainers, an' be a sort of independent prince. Of course he was on bad terms at once with Ross, who, finding that things were going badly, felt that it would be unfair to hold his people to the agreement which was made when he thought the whole group was his own, so he offered to release them. They all, except two men and one woman, accepted the release and went off in a gun-boat that chanced to touch there at the time. For a good while Hare and his rival lived there—the one tryin' to get the Dutch, the other to induce the English Government to claim possession. Neither Dutch nor English would do so at first, but the English did it at long last—in 1878—and annexed the islands to the Government of Ceylon.

"Long before that date, however—before 1836—Hare left and went to Singapore, where he died, leaving Ross in possession—the 'King of the Cocos Islands' as he came to be called. In a few years—chiefly through the energy of Ross's eldest son, to whom he soon gave up the management of affairs—the Group became a prosperous settlement. Its ships traded in cocoa-nuts, (the chief produce of the islands), throughout all the Straits Settlements, and boatbuildin' became one of their most important industries. But there was one thing that prevented it from bein' a very happy though prosperous place, an' that was the coolies who had been hired in Java, for the only men that could be got there at first were criminals who had served their time in the chain-gangs of Batavia. As these men were fit for anything—from pitch-and-toss to murder—and soon outnumbered the colonists, the place was kept in constant alarm and watchfulness. For, as I dare say you know, the Malays are sometimes liable to have the spirit of *amok* on them, which leads them to care for and fear nothin', and to go in for a fight-to-death, from which we get our sayin'—*run amuck*. An' when a strong fellow is goin' about loose in this state o' mind, it's about as bad as havin' a tiger prowlin' in one's garden.

"Well, sometimes two or three o' these coolies would mutiny and bide in the woods o' one o' the smaller uninhabited islands. An' the colonists would have no rest till they hunted them down. So, to keep matters right, they had to be uncommon strict. It was made law that no one should spend the night on any but what was called the Home Island without permission. Every man was bound to report himself at the guard-house at a fixed hour; every fire to be out at sunset, and every boat was numbered and had to be in its place before that time. So they went on till the year 1862, when a disaster befell them that made a considerable change—at first for the worse, but for the better in the long-run. Provin' the truth, my lad, of what I was—well, no—I was goin' to draw a moral here, but I won't!

"It was a cyclone that did the business. Cyclones have got a free-an'-easy way of makin' a clean sweep of the work of years in a few hours. This cyclone completely wrecked the homes of the Keelin' Islanders, and Ross—that's the second Ross, the son of the first one—sent home for *his* son, who was then a student of engineering in Glasgow, to come out and help him to put things to rights. Ross the third obeyed the call, like a good son,—observe that, Nigel."

"All right, father, fire away!"

"Like a good son," repeated the captain, "an' he turned out to be a first-rate man, which was lucky, for his poor father died soon after, leavin' him to do the work alone. An' well able was the young engineer to do it. He got rid o' the chain-gang men altogether, and hired none but men o' the best character in their place. He cleared off the forests and planted the ground with cocoa-nut palms. Got out steam mills, circular saws, lathes, etcetera, and established a system of general education with a younger brother as head-master—an' tail-master too, for I believe there was only one. He also taught the men to work in brass, iron, and wood, and his wife—a Cocos girl that he married after comin' out—taught all the women and girls to sew, cook, and manage the house. In short, everything

went on in full swing of prosperity, till the year 1876, when the island-born inhabitants were about 500, as contented and happy as could be.

"In January of that year another cyclone paid them a visit. The barometer gave them warning, and, remembering the visit of fourteen years before, they made ready to receive the new visitor. All the boats were hauled up to places of safety, and every other preparation was made. Down it came, on the afternoon o' the 28th—worse than they had expected. Many of the storehouses and mills had been lately renewed or built. They were all gutted and demolished. Everything movable was swept away like bits of paper. Lanes, hundreds of yards in length, were cleared among the palm-trees by the whirling wind, which seemed to perform a demon-dance of revelry among them. In some cases it snapped trees off close to the ground. In others it seemed to swoop down from above, lick up a patch of trees bodily and carry them clean away, leaving the surrounding trees untouched. Sometimes it would select a tree of thirty years growth, seize it, spin it round, and leave it a permanent spiral screw. I was in these regions about the time, and had the account from a native who had gone through it all and couldn't speak of it except with glaring eyeballs and gasping breath.

"About midnight of the 28th the gale was at its worst. Darkness that could be felt between the flashes of lightning. Thunder that was nearly drowned by the roaring of the wind an' the crashing of everything all round. To save their lives the people had to fling themselves into ditches and hollows of the ground. Mr Ross and some of his people were lying in the shelter of a wall near his house. There had been a schooner lying not far off. When Mr Ross raised his head cautiously above the wall to have a look to wind'ard he saw the schooner comin' straight for him on the top of a big wave. 'Hold on!' he shouted, fell flat down, and laid hold o' the nearest bush. Next moment the wave burst right over the wall, roared on up to the garden, 150 yards above high-water mark, and swept his house clean away! By good fortune the wall stood the shock, and the schooner stuck fast just before reachin' it, but so near that the end of the jib-boom passed right over the place where the household lay holdin' on for dear life and half drowned. It was a tremendous night," concluded the captain, "an' nearly everything on the islands was wrecked, but they've survived it, as you'll see. Though it's seven years since that cyclone swep' over them, they're all right and goin' ahead again, full swing, as if nothin' had happened."

"And is Ross the Third still king?" asked Nigel with much interest.

"Ay—at least he was king a few years ago when I passed this way and had occasion to land to replace a tops'l yard that had been carried away."

"Then you won't arrive as a stranger?"

"I should think not," returned the captain, getting up and gazing steadily at the *atoll* or group of islets enclosed within a coral ring which they were gradually approaching.

Night had descended, however, and the gale had decreased almost to a calm, ere they steered through the narrow channel—or what we may call a broken part of the ring—which led to the calm lagoon inside. Nigel Roy leaned over the bow, watching with profound attention the numerous phosphorescent fish and eel-like creatures which darted hither and thither like streaks of silver from beneath their advancing keel. He had enough of the naturalist in him to arouse in his mind keen interest in the habits and action of the animal life around him, and these denizens of the coral-groves were as new to him as their appearance was unexpected.

"You'll find 'em very kind and hospitable, lad," said the captain to his son.

"What, the fish?"

"No, the inhabitants. Port—port—steady!"

"Steady it is!" responded the man at the wheel.

"Let go!" shouted the captain.

A heavy plunge, followed by the rattling of chains and swinging round of the brig, told that they had come to an anchor in the lagoon of the Cocos-Keeling Islands.

Chapter Three
Interesting Particulars of Various Kinds

By the first blush of dawn Nigel Roy hastened on deck, eager to see the place in regard to which his father's narrative had awakened in him considerable interest.

It not only surpassed but differed from all his preconceived ideas. The brig floated on the bosom of a perfectly calm lake of several miles in width, the bottom of which, with its bright sand and brilliant coral-beds, could be distinctly seen through the pellucid water. This lake was encompassed by a reef of coral which swelled here and there into tree-clad islets, and against which the breakers of the Indian Ocean were dashed into snowy foam in their vain but ceaseless efforts to invade the calm serenity of the lagoon. Smaller islands, rich with vegetation, were scattered here and there within the charmed circle, through which several channels of various depths and sizes connected the lagoon with the ocean.

"We shall soon have the king himself off to welcome us," said Captain Roy as he came on deck and gave a sailor-like glance all round the horizon and then up at the sky from the mere force of habit. "Visitors are not numerous here. A few scientific men have landed now and again; Darwin the great naturalist among others in 1836, and Forbes in 1878. No doubt they'll be very glad to welcome Nigel Roy in this year of grace 1883."

"But I'm not a naturalist, father, more's the pity."

"No matter, lad; you're an ammytoor first mate, an' pr'aps a poet may count for somethin' here. They lead poetical lives and are fond o' poetry."

"Perhaps that accounts for the fondness you say they have for you, father."

"Just so, lad. See!—there's a boat puttin' off already: the king, no doubt."

He was right. Mr Ross, the appointed governor, and "King of the Cocos Islands," was soon on deck, heartily shaking hands with and welcoming Captain Roy as an old friend. He carried him and his son off at once to breakfast in his island-home; introduced Nigel to his family, and then showed them round the settlement, assuring them at the same time that all its resources were at their disposal for the repair of the *Sunshine*.

"Thank 'ee kindly," said the captain in reply, "but I'll only ask for a stick to rig up a fore-topmast to carry us to Batavia, where we'll give the old craft a regular overhaul—for it's just possible she may have received some damage below the water-line, wi' bumpin' on the mast and yards."

The house of the "King" was a commodious, comfortable building in the midst of a garden, in which there were roses in great profusion, as well as fruit-trees and flowering shrubs. Each Keeling family possessed a neat well-furnished plank cottage enclosed in a little garden, besides a boat-house at the water-edge on the inner or lagoon side of the reef, and numerous boats were lying about on the white sand. The islanders, being almost born sailors, were naturally very skilful in everything connected with the sea. There was about them a good deal of that kindly innocence which one somehow expects to find associated with a mild paternal government and a limited intercourse with the surrounding world, and Nigel was powerfully attracted by them from the first.

After an extensive ramble, during which Mr Ross plied the captain with eager questions as to the latest news from the busy centres of civilisation—especially with reference to new inventions connected with engineering—the island king left them to their own resources till dinner-time, saying that he had duties to attend to connected with the kingdom!

"Now, boy," said the captain when their host had gone, "what'll 'ee do? Take a boat and have a pull over the lagoon, or go with me to visit a family I'm particularly fond of, an' who are uncommon fond of *me*!"

"Visit the family, of course," said Nigel. "I can have a pull any day."

"Come along then."

He led the way to one of the neatest of the plank cottages, which stood on the highest ridge of the island, so that from the front windows it commanded a view of the great blue ocean with its breakers that fringed the reef as with a ring of snow, while, on the opposite side, lay the peaceful waters and islets of the lagoon.

A shout of joyful surprise was uttered by several boys and girls at sight of the captain, for during his former visit he had won their hearts by telling them wild stories of the sea, one-half of each story being founded on fact and personal experience, the other half on a vivid imagination!

"We are rejoiced to see you," said the mother of the juveniles, a stout woman of mixed nationality—that of Dutch apparently predominating. She spoke English, however, remarkably well, as did many of the Cocos people, though Malay is the language of most of them.

The boys and girls soon hauled the captain down on a seat and began to urge him to tell them stories, using a style of English that was by no means equal to that of the mother.

"Stop, stop, let me see sister Kathy first. I can't begin without her. Where is she?"

"Somewhere, I s'pose," said the eldest boy.

"No doubt of that. Go—fetch her," returned the captain.

At that moment a back-door opened, and a girl of about seventeen years of age entered. She was pleasant-looking rather than pretty—tall, graceful, and with magnificent black eyes.

"Here she comes," cried the captain, rising and kissing her. "Why, Kathy, how you've grown since I saw you last! Quite a woman, I declare!"

Kathy was not too much of a woman, however, to join her brothers and sisters in forcing the captain into a seat and demanding a story on the spot.

"Stop, stop!" cried the captain, grasping round their waists a small boy and girl who had already clambered on his knees. "Let me inquire about my old friends first—and let me introduce my son to you—you've taken no notice of *him* yet! That's not hospitable."

All eyes were turned at once on Nigel, some boldly, others with a shy inquiring look, as though to say, "Can *you* tell stories?"

"Come, now," said Nigel, advancing, "Since you are all so fond of my father, I must shake hands with you all round."

The hearty way in which this was done at once put the children at their ease. They admitted him, as it were, into their circle, and then turning again to the captain continued their clamour for a story.

"No, no—about old friends first. How—how's old mother Morris?"

"Quite well," they shouted. "Fatterer than ever," added an urchin, who in England would have been styled cheeky.

"Yes," lisped a very little girl; "one of 'e doors in 'e house too small for she."

"Why, Gerchin, you've learned to speak English like the rest," said the captain.

"Yes, father make every one learn."

"Well, now," continued the captain, "what about Black Sam?"

"Gone to Batavia," chorused the children.

"And—and—what's-'is-name?—the man wi' the nose—"

A burst of laughter and, "We's *all* got noses here!" was the reply.

"Yes, but you know who I mean—the short man wi' the—"

"Oh! with the turned *up* nose. *I* know," cried the cheeky boy; "you means Johnson? He hoed away nobody know whar'."

"And little Kelly Drew, what of her?"

A sudden silence fell on the group, and solemn eyes were turned on sister Kathy, who was evidently expected to answer.

"Not dead?" said the captain earnestly.

"No, but very *very* ill," replied the girl.

"Dear Kelly have never git over the loss of her brother, who—."

At this point they were interrupted by another group of the captain's little admirers, who, having heard of his arrival, ran forward to give him a noisy welcome. Before stories could be commenced, however, the visitors were summoned to Mr Ross's house to dinner, and then the captain had got into such an eager talk with the king that evening was upon them before they knew where they were, as Nigel expressed it, and the stories had to be postponed until the following day.

Of course beds were offered, and accepted by Captain Roy and Nigel. Just before retiring to them, father and son went out to have a stroll on the margin of the lagoon.

"Ain't it a nice place, Nigel?" asked the former, whose kindly spirit had been stirred up to quite a jovial pitch by the gushing welcome he had received alike from old and young.

"It's charming, father. Quite different from what you had led me to expect."

"My boy," returned the captain, with that solemn deliberation which he was wont to assume when about to deliver a palpable truism. "W'en you've come to live as long as me you'll find that everything turns out different from what people have bin led to expect. Leastways that's *my* experience."

"Well, in the meantime, till I have come to your time of life, I'll take your word for that, and I do hope you intend to stay a long time here."

"No, my son, I don't. Why do ye ask?"

"Because I like the place and the people so much that I would like to study it and them, and to sketch the scenery."

"Business before pleasure, my lad," said the captain with a grave shake of the head. "You know we've bin blown out of our course, and have no business here at all. I'll only wait till the carpenter completes his repairs, and then be off for Batavia. Duty first; everything else afterwards."

"But you being owner as well as commander, there is no one to insist on duty being done," objected Nigel.

"Pardon me," returned the captain, "there is a certain owner named Captain David Roy, a very stern disciplinarian, who insists on the commander o' this here brig performin' his duty to the letter. You may depend upon it that if a man ain't true to himself he's not likely to be true to any one else. But it's likely that we may be here for a couple of days, so I release *you* from duty that you may make the most o' your time and enjoy yourself. By the way, it will save you wastin' time if you ask that little girl, Kathy Holbein, to show you the best places to sketch, for she's a born genius with her pencil and brush."

"No, thank you, father," returned Nigel. "I want no little girl to bother me while I'm sketching —even though she be a born genius—for I think I possess genius enough myself to select the best points for sketching, and to get along fairly well without help. At least I'll try what I can do."

"Please yourself, lad. Nevertheless, I think you wouldn't find poor Kathy a bother; she's too modest for that—moreover, she could manage a boat and pull a good oar when I was here last, and no doubt she has improved since."

"Nevertheless, I'd rather be alone," persisted Nigel. "But why do you call her *poor* Kathy? She seems to be quite as strong and as jolly as the rest of her brothers and sisters."

"Ah, poor thing, these are not her brothers and sisters," returned the captain in a gentler tone. "Kathy is only an adopted child, and an orphan. Her name, Kathleen, is not a Dutch one. She came to these islands in a somewhat curious way. Sit down here and I'll tell 'ee the little I know about her."

Father and son sat down on a mass of coral rock that had been washed up on the beach during some heavy gale, and for a few minutes gazed in silence on the beautiful lagoon, in which not only the islets, but the brilliant moon and even the starry hosts were mirrored faithfully.

"About thirteen years ago," said the captain, "two pirate junks in the Sunda Straits attacked a British barque, and, after a fight, captured her. Some o' the crew were killed in action, some were taken on board the junks to be held to ransom, I s'pose, and some, jumping into the sea to escape

if possible by swimming, were probably drowned, for they were a considerable distance from land. It was one o' these fellows, however, who took to the water that managed to land on the Java shore, more dead than alive. He gave information about the affair, and was the cause of a gun-boat, that was in these waters at the time, bein' sent off in chase o' the pirate junks.

"This man who swam ashore was a Lascar. He said that the chief o' the pirates, who seemed to own both junks, was a big ferocious Malay with only one eye—he might have added with no heart at all, if what he said o' the scoundrel was true, for he behaved with horrible cruelty to the crew o' the barque. After takin' all he wanted out of his prize he scuttled her, and then divided the people that were saved alive between the two junks. There were several passengers in the vessel; among them a young man—a widower—with a little daughter, four year old or so. He was bound for Calcutta. Being a very powerful man he fought like a lion to beat the pirates off, but he was surrounded and at last knocked down by a blow from behind. Then his arms were made fast and he was sent wi' the rest into the biggest junk.

"This poor fellow recovered his senses about the time the pirates were dividin' the prisoners among them. He seemed dazed at first, so said the Lascar, but as he must have bin in a considerable funk himself I suspect his observations couldn't have bin very correct. Anyhow, he said he was sittin' near the side o' the junk beside this poor man, whose name he never knew, but who seemed to be an Englishman from his language, when a wild scream was heard in the other junk. It was the little girl who had caught sight of her father and began to understand that she was going to be separated from him. At the sound o' her voice he started up, and, looking round like a wild bull, caught sight o' the little one on the deck o' the other junk, just as they were hoistin' sail to take advantage of a breeze that had sprung up.

"Whether it was that they had bound the man with a piece o' bad rope, or that the strength o' Samson had been given to him, the Lascar could not tell, but he saw the Englishman snap the rope as if it had bin a bit o' pack-thread, and jump overboard. He swam for the junk where his little girl was. If he had possessed the strength of a dozen Samsons it would have availed him nothin', for the big sail had caught the breeze and got way on her. At the same time the other junk lay over to the same breeze and the two separated. At first the one-eyed pirate jumped up with an oath and fired a pistol shot at the Englishman, but missed him. Then he seemed to change his mind and shouted in bad English, with a diabolical laugh—'Swim away; swim hard, p'raps you kitch 'im up!' Of course the two junks were soon out of sight o' the poor swimmer—and that was the end of *him*, for, of course, he must have been drowned."

"But what of the poor little girl?" asked Nigel, whose feelings were easily touched by the sorrows of children, and who began to have a suspicion of what was coming.

"I'm just comin' to that. Well, the gun-boat that went to look for the pirates sighted one o' the junks out in the Indian Ocean after a long search and captured her, but not a single one o' the barque's crew was to be found in her, and it was supposed they had been all murdered and thrown overboard wi' shots tied to their feet to sink them. Enough o' the cargo o' the British barque was found, however, to convict her, and on a more careful search bein' made, the little girl was discovered, hid away in the hold. Bein' only about four year old, the poor little thing was too frightened to understand the questions put to her. All she could say was that she wanted 'to go to father,' and that her name was Kathy, probably short for Kathleen, but she could not tell."

"Then that is the girl who is now here?" exclaimed Nigel.

"The same, lad. The gun-boat ran in here, like as we did, to have some slight repairs done, and Kathy was landed. She seemed to take at once to motherly Mrs Holbein, who offered to adopt her, and as the captain of the gun-boat had no more notion than the man-in-the-moon who the child belonged to, or what to do with her, he gladly handed her over, so here she has been livin' ever since. Of coarse attempts have been made to discover her friends, but without success, and now all hope has been given up. The poor girl herself never speaks on the subject, but old Holbein and his wife

tell me she is sure that Kathy has never forgotten her father. It may be so; anyhow, she has forgotten his name—if she ever knew it."

Next day Nigel made no objections to being guided to the most picturesque spots among the coral isles by the interesting orphan girl. If she had been older he might even have fallen in love with her, an event which would have necessitated an awkward modification of the ground-work of our tale. As it was, he pitied the poor child sincerely, and not only—recognising her genius—asked her advice a good deal on the subject of art, but—recognising also her extreme youth and ignorance—volunteered a good deal of advice in exchange, quite in a paternal way!

Chapter Four
Nigel Undergoes some quite New and Interesting Experiences

The arrangements made on the following day turned out to be quite in accordance with the wishes and tastes of the various parties concerned.

The ship's carpenter having been duly set to work on the repairs, and being inspected in that serious piece of prosaic business by the second mate, our captain was set free to charm the very souls of the juveniles by wandering for miles along the coral strand inventing, narrating, exaggerating to his heart's content. Pausing now and then to ask questions irrelevant to the story in hand, like a wily actor, for the purpose of intensifying the desire for more, he would mount a block of coral, and thence, sometimes as from a throne, or platform, or pulpit, impress some profound piece of wisdom, or some thrilling point, or some exceedingly obvious moral on his followers open-mouthed and open-eyed.

These were by no means idlers, steeped in the too common business of having nothing to do. No, they had regularly sought and obtained a holiday from work or school; for all the activities of social and civilised life were going on full swing—fuller, indeed, than the average swing—in that remote, scarcely known, and beautiful little gem of the Indian Ocean.

Meanwhile Nigel and Kathy, with sketch-books under their arms, went down to where the clear waters of the lagoon rippled on the white sand, and, launching a cockleshell of a boat, rowed out toward the islets.

"Now, Kathy, you must let me pull," said Nigel, pushing out the sculls, "for although the captain tells me you are very good at rowing, it would never do for a man, you know, to sit lazily down and let himself be rowed by a girl."

"Very well," said Kathy, with a quiet and most contented smile, for she had not yet reached the self-conscious age—at least, as ages go in the Cocos-Keeling Islands! Besides, Kathy was gifted with that charming disposition which never *objects* to anything—anything, of course, that does not involve principle!

But it was soon found that, as the cockleshell had no rudder, and the intricacies they had to wind among were numerous, frequent directions and corrections were called for from the girl.

"D'you know," said Nigel at last, "as I don't know where you want me to go to, it may be as well, after all, that you should row!"

"Very well," said Kathy, with another of her innocent smiles. "I thinked it will be better so at first."

Nigel could not help laughing at the way she said this as he handed her the sculls.

She soon proved herself to be a splendid boat-woman, and although her delicate and shapely arms were as mere pipe-stems to the great brawny limbs of her companion, yet she had a deft, mysterious way of handling the sculls that sent the cockleshell faster over the lagoon than before.

"Now, we go ashore here," said Kathy, turning the boat,—with a prompt backwater of the left scull, and a vigorous pull of the right one,—into a little cove just big enough to hold it.

The keel went with such a plump on the sand, that Nigel, who sat on a forward thwart with his back landward, reversed the natural order of things by putting his back on the bottom of the boat and his heels in the air.

To this day it is an unsettled question whether this was done on purpose by Kathy. Certain it is that *she* did not tumble, but burst into a hearty fit of laughter, while her large lustrous eyes half shut themselves up and twinkled.

"Why, you don't even apologise, you dreadful creature!" exclaimed Nigel, joining in the laugh, as he picked himself up.

"Why should I 'pologise?" asked the girl, in the somewhat broken English acquired from her adopted family. "Why you not look out?"

"Right, Kathy, right; I'll keep a sharp lookout next time. Meanwhile I will return good for evil by offering my hand to help you a—hallo!"

While he spoke the girl had sprung past him like a grasshopper, and alighted on the sand like a butterfly.

A few minutes later and this little jesting fit had vanished, and they were both engaged with pencil and book, eagerly—for both were enthusiastic—sketching one of the most enchanting scenes that can well be imagined. We will not attempt the impossible. Description could not convey it. We can only refer the reader's imagination to the one old, hackneyed but expressive, word—fairyland!

One peculiarly interesting point in the scene was, that on the opposite side of the lagoon the captain could be seen holding forth to his juvenile audience.

When a pretty long time had elapsed in absolute silence, each sketcher being totally oblivious of the other, Nigel looked up with a long sigh, and said:—

"Well, you *have* chosen a most exquisite scene for me. The more I work at it, the more I find to admire. May I look now at what you have done?"

"Oh yes, but I have done not much. I am slow," said the girl, as Nigel rose and looked over her shoulder.

"Why!—what—how beautiful!—but—but—what do you mean?" exclaimed the youth.

"I don't understand you," said the girl, looking up in surprise.

"Why, Kathy, I had supposed you were drawing that magnificent landscape all this time, and —and you've only been drawing a group of shells. Splendidly done, I admit, but why—"

He stopped at that moment, for her eyes suddenly filled with tears.

"Forgive me, dear child," said Nigel, hurriedly "I did not intend to hurt your feelings. I was only surprised at your preference."

"You have not hurt me," returned Kathy in a low voice, as she resumed her work, "but what you say calls back to me—my father was very fond of shells."

She stopped, and Nigel, blaming himself for having inadvertently touched some tender chord, hastened, somewhat clumsily, to change the subject.

"You draw landscape also, I doubt not?"

"Oh yes—plenty. If you come home to me to-night, I will show you some."

"I shall be only too happy," returned the youth, sitting down again to his sketch, "and perhaps I may be able to give you a hint or two—especially in reference to perspective—for I've had regular training, you know, Kathy, and I dare say you have not had that here."

"Not what you will think much, perhaps, yet I have study a little in school, and *very* much from Nature."

"Well, you have been under the best of masters," returned Nigel, "if you have studied much from Nature. And who has been your other teacher?"

"A brother of Mr Ross. I think he must understand very much. He was an engineer, and has explained to me the rules of perspective, and many other things which were at first very hard to understand. But I do see them now."

"Perhaps then, Kathleen," said Nigel, in that drawling, absent tone in which artists are apt to indulge when busy at work—"perhaps you may be already too far advanced to require instruction from me."

"Perhaps—but I think no, for you seems to understand a great deal. But why you call me Kathleen just now?"

"Because I suppose that is your real name—Kathy being the short for it. Is it not so?"

"Well, p'raps it is. I have hear mother Holbein say so once. I like Kathleen best."

"Then, may I call you Kathleen?"

"If you like."

At this point both artists had become so engrossed in their occupation that they ceased to converse, and for a considerable time profound silence reigned—at least on their part, though not as regarded others, for every now and then the faint sound of laughter came floating over the tranquil lagoon from that part of the coral strand where Captain Roy was still tickling the fancies and expanding the imaginations and harrowing or soothing the feelings of the Cocos-Keeling juveniles.

Inferior animal life was also in ceaseless activity around the sketchers, filling the air with those indescribably quiet noises which are so suggestive of that general happiness which was originally in terrestrial paradise and is ultimately to be the lot of redeemed creation.

Snipe and curlews were wading with jaunty step and absorbed inquiring gaze in the shallow pools. Hermit-crabs of several species and sizes were scuttling about searching for convenient shells in which to deposit their naturally homeless and tender tails. Overhead there was a sort of sea-rookery, the trees being tenanted by numerous gannets, frigate birds, and terns—the first gazing with a stupid yet angry air; the last—one beautiful little snow-white species in particular—hovering only a few feet above the sketchers' heads, while their large black eyes scanned the drawings with the owlish look of wisdom peculiar to connoisseurs. Noddies also were there, and, on the ground, lizards and spiders and innumerable ants engaged in all the varied activities connected with their several domestic arrangements.

Altogether it was a scene of bright peaceful felicity, which seemed to permeate Nigel's frame right inward to the spinal marrow, and would have kept him entranced there at his work for several hours longer if the cravings of a healthy appetite had not warned him to desist.

"Now, Kathleen," he said, rising and stretching himself as one is apt to do after sitting long in a constrained position, "it seems to me about time to—by the way, we've forgotten to bring something to eat!"

His expression as he said this made his companion look up and laugh.

"Plenty cocoa-nuts," she said, pointing with her pencil to the overarching trees.

"True, but I doubt my ability to climb these long straight stems; besides, I have got only a small clasp-knife, which would be but a poor weapon with which to attack the thick outer husk of the nuts."

"But I have got a few without the husks in the boat," said the girl, rising and running to the place where the cockleshell had been left.

She returned immediately with several nuts divested of their thick outer covering, and in the condition with which we are familiar in England. Some of them were already broken, so that they had nothing to do but sit down to lunch.

"Here is one," said Kathy, handing a nut to Nigel, "that has got no meat yet in it—only milk. Bore a hole in it and drink, but see you bore in the right hole."

"The right hole?" echoed the youth, "are some of them wrong ones?"

"Oh yes, only one of the three will do. One of our crawbs knows that and has claws that can bore through the husk and shell. We calls him coconut crawb."

"Indeed! That is strange; I never heard before of a crab that fed on cocoa-nuts."

"This one do. He is very big, and also climbs trees. It goes about most at night. Perhaps you see one before you go away."

The crab to which Kathy referred is indeed a somewhat eccentric crustacean, besides being unusually large. It makes deep tunnels in the ground larger than rabbit burrows, which it lines with cocoa-nut fibre. One of its claws is developed into an organ of extraordinary power with which it can break a cocoa-nut shell, and even, it is said, a man's limb! It never takes all the husk off a cocoa-nut —that would be an unnecessary trouble—but only enough off the end where the three eyelets are, to enable it to get at the inside. Having pierced the proper eye with one of its legs it rotates the nut round it until the hole is large enough to admit the point of its great claw, with which it continues the work. This remarkable creature also climbs the palm-trees, but not to gather nuts; that is certain,

for its habits have been closely watched and it has been ascertained that it feeds only on fallen nuts. Possibly it climbs for exercise, or to obtain a more extended view of its charming habitat, or simply "for fun." Why not?

All this and a great deal more was told to Nigel by Kathleen, who was a bit of a naturalist in her tendencies—as they sat there under the graceful fronds of the palm-trees admiring the exquisite view, eating and drinking cocoa-nuts.

"I suppose you have plenty of other kinds of food besides this?" said Nigel.

"Oh yes, plenty. Most of the fish in our lagoon be good for eating, and so also the crawbs, and we have turtle too."

"Indeed! How do you catch the turtle? Another nut, please.—Thank you."

"The way we gets turtle is by the men diving for them and catching them in the water. We has pigs too—plenty, and the wild birds are some very nice."[1]

When the artists had finished they proceeded to the shore, and to their surprise and amusement found the cockleshell in possession of a piratical urchin of about four years of age in a charmingly light state of clothing. He was well-known to Kathleen, and it turned out that, having seen the cockle start at too great a distance to be hailed, and having set his heart on joining in the excursion, he had watched their movements, observed their landing on the islet—which was not far from the main circlet of land—and, running round till he came opposite to it, swam off and got into the boat. Being somewhat tired he had lain down to rest and fallen sound asleep.

On the way home this urchin's sole delight was to lean over the bow and watch the fish and coral-groves over which they skimmed. In this he was imitated by Nigel who, ungallantly permitting his companion to row, also leaned over the side and gazed down into the clear crystal depths with unwearying delight.

For the wonderful colours displayed in those depths must be seen to be believed. Not only is the eye pleased with the ever-varying formations of the coral bowers, but almost dazzled with the glittering fish—blue, emerald, green, scarlet, orange, banded, spotted, and striped—that dart hither and thither among the rich-toned sea-weed and the variegated anemones which spread their tentacles upwards as if inviting the gazer to come down. Among these, crabs could be seen crawling with undecided motion, as if unable to make up their minds, while in out of the way crevices clams of a gigantic size were gaping in deadly quietude ready to close with a snap on any unfortunate creature that should give them the slightest touch.

Nigel was sharply awakened from his dream by a sudden splash. Looking up he observed that the small boy was gone. With a bound he stood erect, one foot on the gunwale and hands clasped ready to dive, when a glance revealed the fact that Kathy was smiling broadly!

"Don't jump!" she said. "He is only after a fish."

Even while she spoke Nigel saw the brown little fellow shooting about like a galvanised tadpole, with a small harpoon in his hand.

Next moment he appeared on the surface shouting and spluttering, with a splendid fish on the end of his harpoon! Both were hauled into the boat, and very soon after they drew near to land.

In the shallow water Nigel observed some remarkable creatures which resembled hedgehogs, having jaws armed with formidable teeth to enable them to feed, Kathy said, on coral insects. File-fishes also drew his attention particularly. These were magnificently striped and coloured, and apparently very fearless.

"What convenient tails they have to lay hold of," remarked our hero, as they slowly glided past one; "I believe I could catch it with my hand!"

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[1] We recommend those who desire more curious information on the fauna and flora of the Keeling Islands to apply to Henry O. Forbes most interesting book, *A Naturalist's Wanderings in the Eastern Archipelago*, published by Sampson Low.

Stooping swiftly as he spoke, he dipped his arm into the water, and actually did grasp the fish by its tail, but dropped it again instantly—to the shrieking delight of the urchin and Kathy,—for the tail was armed with a series of sharp spines which ran into his hand like lancets.

This was an appropriate conclusion to a day that would have been otherwise too enjoyable. Poor Nigel's felicity was further diluted when he met his father.

"We'll have to sleep aboard to-night," said the captain, "for there's a fair breeze outside which seems likely to hold, and the mast has been temporarily rigged up, so we'll have to up anchor, and away by break of day to-morrow."

Nigel's heart sank.

"To-morrow! father?"

"Ay, to-morrow. Business first, pleasure afterwards."

"Well, I suppose you are right, but it seems almost a shame to leave such a heaven upon earth as this in such a hurry. Besides, is it not unkind to such hospitable people to bolt off after you've got all that you want out of them?"

"Can't help that, lad—

"Dooty first, an' fun to follow,
That's what beats creation hollow."

"Come father, don't say that you quote *that* from mother!"

"No more I do, my boy. It's my own—homemade. I put it together last night when I couldn't sleep for your snorin'."

"Don't tell fibs, father. You know I never snore. But—really—are we to start at daylight?"

"We are, if the wind holds. But you may stay as late as you choose on shore to-night."

Nigel availed himself of the opportunity to see as much of the place and people as was possible in the limited time. Next morning the good though damaged brig was running in the direction of Sunda Straits before a stiff and steady breeze.

Chapter Five
Captain Roy surprises and gratifies his Son, who surprises a Negro, and suddenly forms an Astonishing Resolve

Arrived in Batavia—the low-lying seaport and capital of the Dutch island of Java—Captain Roy had his brig examined, and found that the damage she had sustained was so serious that several months would probably elapse before she would be again ready for sea.

"Now, Nigel, my lad," said the old gentleman, on the morning after the examination had been made, "come down below with me; I want to have a confabulation with 'ee."

"Why, father," said the youth, when seated at the small cabin table opposite his rugged parent, "you seem to be in an unusually solemn frame of mind this morning. Has anything happened?"

"Nothin', boy—nothin'. Leastwise nothin' in particular. You know all about the brig, an' what a deal o' repair she's got to undergo?"

"Of course I do. You know I was present when you talked the matter over with that fellow—what's-'is-name—that gave you his report."

"Just so. Well now, Nigel, you don't suppose, do you, that I'm goin' to keep you here for some months knockin' about with nothin' to do—eatin' your grub in idleness?"

"Certainly not," said the youth, regarding the stern countenance of his parent with an amused look. "I have no intention of acting such an ignoble part, and I'm surprised at you askin' the question, for you know I am not lazy—at least not more so than average active men—and there must be plenty of work for me to do in looking after the cargo, superintending repairs, taking care of the ship and men. I wonder at you, father. You must either have had a shock of dotage, or fallen into a poetical vein. What is a first mate fit for if—"

"Nigel," said Captain Roy, interrupting, "I'm the owner an' commander of the *Sunshine*, besides bein' the paternal parent of an impertinent son, and I claim to have the right to do as I please—therefore, hold your tongue and listen to me."

"All right, father," replied the young man, with a benignant grin; "proceed, but don't be hard upon me; spare my feelings."

"Well now, this is how the land lies," said the old seaman, resting his elbows on the table and clasping his hands before him. "As Mr Moor and I, with the stooard and men, are quite sufficient to manage the affairs o' the brig, and as we shall certainly be here for a considerable time to come, I've made up my mind to give you a holiday. You're young, you see, an' foolish, and your mind needs improvin'. In short, you want a good deal o' the poetry knocked out o' you, for it's not like your mother's poetry by any means, so you needn't flatter yourself—not built on the same lines by a long way. Well—where was I?"

"Only got the length of the holiday yet, father."

"Only, indeed. You ungrateful dog! It's a considerable length to get, that, isn't it? Well, I also intend to give you some money, to enable you to move about in this curious archipelago—not much, but enough to keep you from starvation if used with economy, so I recommend you to go into the town, make general inquiries about everything and everywhere, an' settle in your mind what you'll do, for I give you a rovin' commission an' don't want to be bothered with you for some time to come."

"Are you in earnest, father?" asked Nigel, who had become more interested while the captain unfolded his plan.

"Never more in earnest in my life—except, p'raps, when I inquired over twenty years ago whether you was a boy or a girl."

"Well, now, that *is* good of you, father. Of course I need not say that I am charmed at the prospect you open up to me. And—and when may I start?"

"At once. Up anchor and away to-night if you choose."

"But—where?"

"Anywhere—everywhere, Java, Sumatra, Borneo—all Malaysia before you where to choose. Now be off, and think over it, for I've got too much to do to waste time on you at present," said the captain, rising, "and, stay—Nigel."

"Well?" said the youth, looking back as he was about to leave the cabin.

"Whatever you do, don't grow poetical about it. You know it is said somewhere, that mischief is found for idle hands to do."

"All right, father. I'll keep clear of poetry—leave all that sort o' nonsense to *you*. I'll—

> "I'll flee Temptation's siren voice,
> *Throw* poesy to the *crows*
> And let my soul's ethereal fire
> Gush out in sober prose."

It need scarcely be said that our hero was not slow to take advantage of the opportunity thus thrown in his way. He went off immediately through the town, armed with the introduction of his father's well-known name, and made inquiries of all sorts of people as to the nature, the conditions, the facilities, and the prospects of travel in the Malay Archipelago. In this quest he found himself sorely perplexed for the very good reason that "all sorts" of people, having all sorts of ideas and tastes, gave amazingly conflicting accounts of the region and its attractions.

Wearied at last with his researches, he sauntered towards afternoon in the direction of the port, and began in a listless sort of way to watch the movements of a man who was busily engaged with a boat, as if he were making preparations to put to sea.

Now, whatever philosophers may say to the contrary, we hold strongly to the opinion that likings and dislikings among men and women and children are the result of some profound occult cause which has nothing whatever to do with experience. No doubt experience may afterwards come in to modify or intensify the feelings, but it is not the originating cause. If you say it is, how are we to account for love at first sight? Beauty has nothing necessarily to do with it, for men fall in love at first sight with what the world calls plain women—happily! Character is not the cause, for love assails the human breast, oft-times, before the loved object has uttered a word, or perpetrated a smile, or even fulminated a glance to indicate character. So, in like manner, affection may arise between man and man.

It was so on this occasion with Nigel Roy. As he stood abstractedly gazing at the boatman he fell in love with him—at least he took a powerful fancy to him, and this was all the more surprising that the man was a negro,—a woolly-headed, flat-nosed, thick-lipped nigger!

We would not for a moment have it supposed that it is unnatural to love such a man. Quite the reverse. But when such a man is a perfect stranger, has never uttered a word in one's presence, or vouchsafed so much as a glance, and is gravely, stolidly engaged in the unsavoury work of greasing some of the tackling of a boat, it does seem unaccountable that he should be unwittingly capable of stirring up in another man's bosom feelings of ardent goodwill, to put it mildly.

After watching him for some time, Nigel, under an almost involuntary impulse, shouted "Hullo!"

"Hullo!" replied the negro, looking up with a somewhat stern frown and a pout of his thick lips, as much as to say—"Who are *you*?"

Nigel smiled, and made that suggestive motion with his forefinger which signifies "Come here."

The frown fled and the pout became a smile as the negro approached, wiping his hands on a piece of cotton-waste.

"What you want wi' *me*, sar?" he asked.

"Well, upon my word," said Nigel, somewhat perplexed, "I can't very well say. I suppose something must have been in my mind, but—anyhow, I felt a desire to have a talk with you; that is, if you can spare the time."

The first part of this reply induced a slight recurrence of the frown and pout, but at its conclusion the black brow cleared and the mouth expanded to such a gum-and-teeth-exposing extent that Nigel fairly burst into a laugh.

"You's bery good, sar," said the man, "an' I's hab much pleasure to make your acquaintance. —Der an't no grease on 'em now."

The last remark had reference to the enormous black paw which he held out.

Nigel at once grasped it and shook it heartily.

"I's bery fond ob a talk, sar," continued the negro, "so as you wants one, heabe ahead."

Thus encouraged, our hero began by remarking that he seemed to be preparing for a trip.

"Dat's zackly what I's a-doin', sar."

"A long one?"

"Well, dat depends on what you call short. Goin' to Sunda Straits, which p'raps you know, sar, is nigh a hundred miles fro' here."

"And what may you be going to do there?" asked Nigel.

"Goin' home to Krakatoa."

"Why, I thought that was an uninhabited island. I passed close to it on my way here, and saw no sign of inhabitants."

"Dat's cause I was absint fro' home. An' massa he keeps indoors a good deal."

"And pray who is massa?" asked Nigel.

"Sar," said the negro, drawing up his square sturdy frame with a look of dignity; "fair-play is eberyt'ing wid me. You've ax me a heap o' questions. Now's my turn. Whar you comes fro'?"

"From England," replied Nigel.

"An' whar you go to?"

"Well, you've posed me now, for I really don't know where I'm going to. In fact that is the very thing I have been trying to find out all day, so if you'll help me I'll be much obliged."

Here Nigel explained his position and difficulties, and it was quite obvious, judging from the glittering eyes and mobile mouth, that he poured his tale into peculiarly sympathetic ears. When he had finished, the negro stood for a considerable time gazing in meditative silence at the sky.

"Yes," he said at last, as if communing with himself, "I t'ink—I ain't quite sure, but I t'ink—I may ventur'."

"Whatever it is you are thinking about," remarked Nigel, "you may venture to say anything you like to *me*."

The negro, who, although comparatively short of stature, was Herculean in build, looked at the youth with an amused expression.

"You're bery good, sar, but dat's not what I's t'inkin' ob. I's t'inkin' whedder I dar' ventur' to introdoce you to my massa. He's not fond o' company, an' it might make 'im angry, but he came by a heaby loss lately an' p'raps he may cond'send to receibe you. Anyhow you'd be quite safe, for he's sure to be civil to any friend ob mine."

"Is he then so fierce?" asked Nigel, becoming interested as well as amused.

"Fierce! no, he's gentle as a lamb, but he's awrful when he's roused—tigers, crokindiles, 'noceroses is nuffin' to him!"

"Indeed! what's his name, and what does he do? how does he live?"

The negro shook his head. "Da's more'n I dar tell till I ax his leave, sar. I kin only say de peepil around calls 'im the hermit ob Rakata, 'cause he libs by his-self (wid me, ob course, but *I* counts for nuffin'), close under de ole volcano ob Krakatoa. Dey tink—some ob de foolish peepil—dat he hab sold his-self to de dibil, but I knows better. He's a good man, and you'd hab great fun if you stop

wid him. Now, what I's a-gwine to advise you is, come wid me an' see de hermit. If he lets you stop, good. If not, I fetch you ober to de main land—whar you please—an' you kin come back here or go whar you choose. Its wort' your while to take your chance, anyhow."

The negro said this with such an earnest look that Nigel made up his mind on the spot to accept this curious invitation.

"I'll go!" he exclaimed with sudden energy. "When do you start?"

"To-morrer at daybreak, sar."

"Well, I shall have to talk it over first with my father, but I'm sure he won't object, so you may look out for me here at daybreak. Shall I have to fetch any provisions with me for the voyage?"

"No, nuffin'. Boat's crammed wi' grub. But you'd better bring a gun o' some sort an' a 'volver, an' a big knife, an' a mortal big appetite, for a man's no good widout dat."

"I always carry that about with me," said the youth, "whatever else I may leave behind; and I'll see to the other things.—By the way, what's your name?"

"Moses."

"Is that all?"

"Isn't dat enuff?" returned the negro with a look of dignity.

"Quite; but I have the advantage of you there, Moses, for I have two names—Nigel Roy."

"Well, I don't see much use ob two, but which does you like to be called by—Nadgel or Roy?"

"Whichever you please, Moses; I'll answer to either. So now, good-bye for the present, and look out for me to-morrow at daylight."

"Good-bye, Massa Nadgel, till to-morrer."

The negro waved his hand and, sauntering slowly back to his boat, remarked in an undertone, "I lub dat young feller!" Saying which, he resumed his greasing operations.

Of course Captain Roy made no objection to his son's proposal, though he freely gave his opinion that it was a wild-goose chase.

"However, lad, please yourself and you'll please me," he added; "and now, be particular to bear in mind that you've got to write to me every time you get within hail of a post-office or a passing ship or steamer that may chance to be comin' this way, and in each letter be sure to tell me where you're goin' to next, so as I may send a letter there to you in case I want you to return sudden or otherwise. We mustn't lose touch, you see. You needn't write long screeds. I only want to know your whereabouts from time to time. For the rest—you can spin it out in yarns when you come back."

Chapter Six
The Hermit of Rakata Introduced

Nothing worthy of particular note occurred during the boat-voyage along the northern shore of Java to Sunda Straits. A fair, steady breeze wafted them westward, and, on the morning of the third day, they came in sight of the comparatively small uninhabited island of Krakatoa.

The boat in which they voyaged, although a little one, had a small portion of the bow decked over, so that our hero and his sable friend could find shelter from the night air when disposed to sleep, and from the fierce rays of the sun at noon.

By the advice of his father, Nigel had changed his sailor costume for the "shore-goin' toggery" in which he had landed on the Keeling Islands, as being more suitable to his new character as a traveller, namely, a white cloth cap with a peak in front and a curtain behind to protect his neck, a light-grey tunic belted at the waist, and a pair of strong canvas trousers. He had also purchased an old-fashioned double-barrelled fowling-piece, muzzle-loading and with percussion locks.

"For you see, Nigel," the captain had said, "it's all very well to use breech-loaders when you've got towns and railways and suchlike to supply you wi' cartridges, but when you've got to cruise in out-o'-the-way waters, there's nothin' like the old style. It's not difficult to carry a few thousand percussion-caps an' a bullet-mould about wi' you wherever you go. As to powder, why, you'll come across that 'most everywhere, an' lead too; and, for the matter o' that, if your life depended on it you could shove a handful of gravel or a pen-knife or tooth-pick into your gun an' blaze away, but with a breech-loader, if you run out o' cartridges, where are you?"

So, as Nigel could not say where he was, the percussion-gun had been purchased.

The peak of Rakata—the highest in the island—a little over 2600 feet, came in sight first; gradually the rest of the island rose out of the horizon, and ere long the rich tropical verdure became distinguishable.

Krakatoa—destined so soon to play a thrilling part in the world's history; to change the aspect of the heavens everywhere; to attract the wondering gaze of nearly all nations, and to devastate its immediate neighbourhood—is of volcanic origin, and, at the time we write of (1883) was beginning to awaken from a long, deep slumber of two hundred years. Its last explosion occurred in the year 1680. Since that date it had remained quiet. But now the tremendous subterranean forces which had originally called it into being were beginning to reassert their existence and their power. Vulcan was rousing himself again and beginning once more to blow his bellows. So said some of the sailors who were constantly going close past the island and through Sunda Straits, which may be styled the narrows of the world's highway to the China seas.

Subterranean forces, however, are so constantly at work more or less violently in those regions that people took little notice of these indications in the comparatively small island of Krakatoa, which was between five and six miles long by four broad.

As we have said, it was uninhabited, and lying as it does between Sumatra and Java, about sixteen miles from the former and over twenty miles from the latter, it was occasionally visited by fishermen. The hermit whom Nigel was about to visit might, in some sort, be counted an inhabitant, for he had dwelt there many years, but he lived in a cave which was difficult of access, and held communication with no one. How he spent his time was a mystery, for although his negro servant went to the neighbouring town of Anjer in Java for supplies, and sometimes to Batavia, as we have seen, no piece of inanimate ebony from the forest could have been less communicative than he. Indeed, our hero was the first to unlock the door of his lips, with that key of mysterious sympathy to which reference has already been made. Some of the bolder of the young fishermen of the neighbouring coasts had several times made futile efforts to find out where and how the hermit lived, but the few

who got a glimpse of him at a distance brought back such a report that a kind of superstitious fear of him was generated which kept them at a respectful distance.

He was ten feet high, some romancers said, with shoulders four feet broad, a chest like a sugar-hogs-head, and a countenance resembling a compound of orang-utan and tiger.

Of course our hero knew nothing of these rumours, and as Moses declined to give any information regarding his master beyond that already given, he was left to the full play of his imagination.

Moses was quite candid about it. He made no pretence to shroud things in mystery.

"You mus' know, Massa Nadgel," he said, as they slowly drew near to the island, "I's 'fraid ob 'im dough I lub 'im."

"But why do you love him, Moses?"

"'Cause he sabe my life an' set me free."

"Indeed? well, that is good reason. And why do you fear him?"

"Da's what I don' know, massa," replied the negro with a puzzled look.

"Is he harsh, then?"

"No."

"Passionate?"

"No. Gentle as a lamb."

"Strong?"

"Yes—oh! mighty strong an' big."

"Surely you're not afraid of his giving you a licking, Moses?"

"Oh no," returned the negro, with a smile of expansive benignity; "I's not 'fraid ob dat. I's bin a slabe once, got used to lickin's. Don't care nuffin' at all for a lickin'!"

"Then it must be that you're afraid of hurting his feelings, Moses, for I know of no other kind of fear."

"Pr'aps da's it!" said the negro with a bright look, "now I wouldn't wonder if you's right, Massa Nadgel. It neber come into my head in dat light before. I used to be t'ink, t'inkin' ob nights—when I's tired ob countin' my fingers an' toes. But I couldn't make nuffin' ob it. *Now* I knows! It's 'fraid I am ob hurtin' his feelin's."

In the excess of his satisfaction at the solution of this long-standing puzzle, Moses threw back his head, shut his eyes, opened his enormous mouth and chuckled.

By the time he had reversed this process they were sufficiently near to Krakatoa to distinguish all its features clearly, and the negro began to point out to Nigel its various localities. There were three prominent peaks on it, he said, named respectively, Perboewatan, about 400 feet high, at the northern end of the island; Danan, near the centre, 1500 feet; and Rakata, at the southern end, over 2600 feet. It was high up on the sides of the last cone that the residence of the hermit was situated.

"And you won't tell me your master's name?" said Nigel.

Moses shook his woolly head. "No, sar, no. I's 'fraid ob him—he! he! I 'fraid ob hurtin' his feelin's!"

"Well, never mind; I'll find it out from himself soon. By the way, what were you telling me about explosions yesterday when that little white gull came to admire your pretty face, and took off our attention?"

"Well, I dun know. Not got much to tell, only dar's bin rumblin' an' grumblin's an' heavin's lately in de mountains as didn't use to be, an' cracks like somet'in' bustin' down b'low, an' massa he shook 'is head two or t'ree times an' look solemn. He don't often do dat—shook 'is head, I mean—for he mostly always looks solemn."

A few minutes later the boat, running through a narrow opening among the rocks into a small circular harbour not more than fifty yards in diameter, rested its keel gently on a little bed of pure

yellow sand. The shore there was so densely covered with bushes that the harbour might easily have been passed without being observed.

Jumping ashore, Moses made the painter fast to a tree.

"What a quiet, cosy place!" said Nigel, as he sprung on the beach and looked admiringly round.

"Yes, an' not easy to find if you don't knows 'im. We will leabe de boat here,—no danger ob bein' tooked away—an' den go up to de cave."

"Is it far?" asked Nigel.

"A good bit—near de top ob de mountain," answered the negro, who looked at his companion somewhat uneasily.

"Why, what's the matter, Moses?"

"Nuffin'—oh! nuffin'—but—but when massa axes you who you is, an' what you bin up to, an' whar you're a-gwine to, an' what wages you want, jist you answer 'im in a sorter permiscuous way, an' don't be too partikler."

"Wages! man, what d'ye mean?"

"Well, you'll 'scuse me, sar," returned the negro with an air of profound humility, "but my massa lost a old sarvint—a nigger like myself—only last munt', an' he wants to go on one ob his usual expeditions jus' now, so he sends me to Batavia to git anoder man—'a good one, you know,' says massa,—an' as you, sar, was good 'nuff to ax me what you should do, an' you looked a pritty smart man, I—"

"You scoundrel!" cried Nigel, interrupting him, "do you really mean to tell me that you've brought me here as a hired servant?"

"Well, not zackly," returned Moses, with solemn simplicity, "you needn't ax no wages unless you like."

"But what if I don't want to take service?" demanded our hero, with a savage frown.

"You kin go home agin," answered Moses, humbly.

Nigel could contain himself no longer. As he observed the man's deprecatory air, and thought of his own position, he burst into a fit of hearty laughter, whereupon the negro recovered himself and smiled the smile of the guiltless.

"Come," said Nigel at last. "Lead on, you rascal! When I see your master I shall know what to say."

"All right, Massa Nadgel, but mind what you say, else I won't answer for de consikences. Foller me an' look arter your feet, for de road is roughish."

The negro's last remark was unquestionably true, for the road—if a mere footpath merits the name—was rugged in the extreme—here winding round the base of steep cliffs, there traversing portions of luxuriant forest, elsewhere skirting the margin of the sea.

Moses walked at such a pace that Nigel, young and active though he was, found it no easy matter to keep up with him. Pride, however, forbade him to show the slightest sign of difficulty, and made him even converse now and then in tones of simulated placidity. At last the path turned abruptly towards the face of a precipice and seemed to terminate in a small shallow cave. Any one following the path out of mere curiosity would have naturally imagined that the cave was the termination of it; and a very poor termination too, seeing that it was a rather uninteresting cave, the whole of the interior of which could be seen at a single glance from its mouth.

But this cave served in reality as a blind. Climbing by one or two projecting points, the negro, closely followed by Nigel, reached a narrow ledge and walked along it a short distance. On coming to the end of the ledge he jumped down into a mass of undergrowth, where the track again became visible—winding among great masses of weatherworn lava. Here the ascent became very steep, and Moses put on what sporting men call a spurt, which took him far ahead of Nigel, despite the best efforts of the latter to keep up. Still our hero scorned to run or call out to his guide to wait, and thereby admit himself beaten. He pushed steadily on, and managed to keep the active Moses in view.

Presently the negro stepped upon a platform of rock high up on the cliffs, where his form could be distinctly seen against the bright sky. There Nigel observed that he was joined by a man whose tall commanding figure seemed in such a position to be of gigantic proportions.

The two stood engaged in earnest conversation while watching Nigel. The latter immediately slackened his pace, in order at once to recover breath and approach with a leisurely aspect.

"The wild man of the island, I suppose," he thought as he drew near; but on coming still nearer he saw that he must be mistaken, for the stranger who advanced to meet him with gracious ease and self-possession was obviously a gentleman, and dressed, not unlike himself, in a sort of mixed travelling and shooting costume.

"I must apologise, Mr Roy, for the presumption of my man, in bringing you here under something like false pretences," said the stranger, holding out his hand, which Nigel shook heartily. "Moses, I find, has failed to execute my commission, and has partially deceived you; but as you are now here, the least I can do is to bid you welcome, and offer you the hospitality of my roof."

There was something so courteous and kindly in the tone and manner of the stranger, and something so winning in his soft gentle tones, which contrasted strangely with his grand towering figure and massive bearded countenance, that Nigel felt drawn to him instantly. Indeed there was a peculiar and mysterious something about him which quite fascinated our hero as he looked up at him, for, bordering on six feet though Nigel was, the stranger stood several inches above him.

"You are very kind," said the visitor, "and I don't think that Moses can fairly be charged with deceiving me, although he has been somewhat unwise in his way of going about this business, for I had told him I wanted to see something of these regions, and perhaps it may be to my advantage to travel in your service—that is, if I can be of any use to you; but the time at my disposal may be too limited."

"How much time have you to spare?" asked the stranger.

"Well, say perhaps three months."

"That will do," returned his questioner, looking thoughtfully at the ground. "We will talk of this hereafter."

"But—excuse me," said Nigel, "your man spoke of you as a hermit—a sort of—of—forgive me—a wild-man-of-the-island, if I may—"

"No, I didn't, Massa Nadgel," said the negro, the edge of whose flat contradiction was taken off by the extreme humility of his look.

"Well," returned Nigel, with a laugh; "you at least gave me to understand that other people said something of that sort."

"Da's right, Massa Nadgel—kite right. You're k'rect *now*."

"People have indeed got some strange ideas about me, I believe," interposed the hermit, with a grave almost sad expression and tone. "But come, let me introduce you to my hermitage and you shall judge for yourself."

So saying, this singular being turned and led the way further up the rugged side of the peak of Rakata.

After about five minutes' walk in silence, the trio reached a spot where there was a clear view over the tree-tops, revealing the blue waters of the strait, with the Java shores and mountains in the distance.

Behind them there yawned, dark and mysterious, a mighty cavern, so black and high that it might well suggest a portal leading to the regions below, where Vulcan is supposed to stir those tremendous fires which have moulded much of the configuration of the world, and which are ever seething—an awful Inferno—under the thin crust of the globe on which we stand.

Curiously-formed and large-leaved trees of the tropics, with their pendent parasites, as well as rank grasses, sprouting from below and hanging from above, partially concealed this cavern from Nigel when he first turned towards it, but a few steps further on he could see it in all its rugged grandeur.

"My home," said the hermit, with a very slight smile and the air of a prince, as he turned towards his visitor and waved his hand towards it.

"A magnificent entrance at all events," said Nigel, returning the smile with something of dubiety, for he was not quite sure that his host was in earnest.

"Follow me," said the hermit, leading the way down a narrow well-worn path which seemed to lose itself in profound darkness. After being a few minutes within the cavern, however, Nigel's eyes became accustomed to the dim light, and he perceived that the roof rapidly lowered, while its walls narrowed until they reached a spot which was not much wider than an ordinary corridor. Here, however, it was so dark that it was barely possible to see a small door in the right-hand wall before which they halted. Lifting a latch the hermit threw the door wide open, and a glare of dazzling light almost blinded the visitor.

Passing through the entrance, Nigel followed his guide, and the negro let the heavy door shut behind him with a clang that was depressingly suggestive of a prison.

"Again I bid you welcome to my home," said the hermit, turning round and extending his hand, which Nigel mechanically took and pressed, but without very well knowing what he did, for he was almost dumfounded by what he saw, and for some minutes gazed in silence around him.

And, truly, there was ground for surprise. The visitor found himself in a small but immensely high and brilliantly lighted cavern or natural chamber, the walls of which were adorned with drawings of scenery and trees and specimens of plants, while on various shelves stood innumerable stuffed birds, and shells, and other specimens of natural history.

A table and two chairs stood at one end of the cave, and, strangest of all, a small but well-filled book-case ornamented the other end.

"Arabian Nights!" thought Nigel. "I *must* be dreaming."

His wandering eyes travelled slowly round the cavern until they rested at last on the door by which they had entered, beside which stood the negro with a broad grin on his sable visage.

Chapter Seven
Wonders of the Hermit's Cave and Island

The thing that perhaps surprised Nigel most in this strange cavern was the blaze of light with which it was filled, for it came down direct through a funnel-shaped hole in the high roof and bore a marvellous resemblance to natural sunshine. He was well aware that unless the sun were shining absolutely in the zenith, the laws of light forbade the entrance of a *direct* ray into such a place, yet there were the positive rays, although the sun was not yet high in the heavens, blinding him while he looked at them, and casting the shadows of himself and his new friends on the floor.

There was the faintest semblance of a smile on the hermit's face as he quietly observed his visitor, and waited till he should recover self-possession. As for Moses—words are wanting to describe the fields of teeth and gum which he displayed, but no sound was suffered to escape his magnificent lips, which closed like the slide of a dark lantern when the temptation to give way to feeling became too strong.

"My cave interests you," said the hermit at last.

"It amazes me," returned our hero, recovering himself and looking earnestly at his host, "for you seem not only to have all the necessaries of life around you in your strange abode, but many of the luxuries; among them the cheering presence of sunshine—though how you manage to get it is beyond my powers of conception."

"It is simple enough, as you shall see," returned the hermit. "You have heard of the saying, no doubt, that 'all things are possible to well-directed labour?'"

"Yes, and that 'nothing can be achieved without labour.'"

"Well, I have proved that to some extent," continued the hermit. "You see, by the various and miscellaneous implements on my shelves, that I am given to dabbling a little in science, and thus have made my lonely home as pleasant as such a home can be—but let us not talk of these matters just now. You must be hungry. Have you had breakfast?"

"No, we have not—unless, at least, you count a sea biscuit dipped in salt water a breakfast. After all, that may well be the case, for hermits are noted for the frugality of their fare."

"I am not a genuine hermit," remarked his host gravely. "Men do indeed call me the Hermit of Rakata, because I dwell alone here under the shadow of this particular cone of Krakatoa, but I do not ape the austere life of the conventional hermit, as you see, either in my domestic arrangements or food. Come, your breakfast is ready. From my outlook I saw your boat approaching some hours ago, and knew that it was mine, so I made ready for your arrival, though I did not guess that Moses was bringing me a guest instead of a servant!"

So saying, he led the way through a short natural passage to an inner cave, the entrance to which, like the outer one, was boarded. On opening a small door, Nigel was again greeted as before with brilliant rays of sunshine, and, in addition, with a gush of odours that were exceedingly grateful to a hungry man. A low "Ho! ho!" behind him told that his black companion was equally gratified.

The inner cave or mess-room, as the host styled it, combined dining-room and kitchen, for while in one corner stood a deal table with plates, cups, etcetera, but no tablecloth, in another stood a small stove, heated by an oil-lamp, from which issued puffing and sputtering sounds, and the savoury odours above referred to.

Nigel now perceived that although his strange host necessarily spoke a good deal while welcoming him and offering him the hospitalities of his abode, he was by no means communicative. On the contrary, it was evident that he was naturally reserved and reticent, and that although polite and gentle in the extreme, there was a quiet grave dignity about him which discouraged familiarity. It must not be supposed, however, that he was in any degree morosely silent. He was simply quiet and

undemonstrative, said little except when asked questions, and spoke, alike to Nigel and Moses, in the soft, low, kindly tones with which one might address very young people.

Going to the stove he took a coffee-pot therefrom and set it on the table. At the same time, Moses, without requiring to be told, opened the oven and brought forth fried fish, meat of some kind, and cakes of he knew not what, but cared little, for their excellence was unquestionable.

During the meal that followed, Nigel ventured as far as politeness permitted—indeed a little further, if truth must be told—to inquire into the circumstances and motives of his entertainer in taking up his abode in such a strange place, but he soon found that his eccentric friend was not one who could be "pumped." Without a touch of rudeness, and in the sweetest of voices, he simply assumed an absent manner and changed the subject of discourse, when he did not choose to reply, by drawing attention to some irrelevant matter, or by putting a counter question which led away from the subject. Nigel also found that his host never laughed and rarely smiled, though, when he did so, the smile was so slight as merely to indicate a general feeling of urbanity and goodwill, and it was followed instantly by a look of gravity, if not sadness. Altogether the guest was much perplexed about the host at first, and somewhat constrained in consequence, but gradually he began to feel at ease. Another discovery that he soon made was, that the hermit treated Moses not as a servant, but as if he were in all respects an equal and a comrade.

After eating for some time in silence, and having tried to draw out his host without success, Nigel changed his tactics and said—

"You were so kind as to speak of me as your guest, Mr—Mr—I beg pardon, may I—"

"My name is Van der Kemp," said the hermit quietly.

"Well, Mr Van der Kemp, I must tell you that I am quite willing to accept the position for which Moses hired me—"

"No, I didn't," contradicted the negro, flatly yet very gently, both in tone and manner, for long residence with the hermit had apparently imbued him with something of his spirit.

"Well, then," said Nigel, "the position for which Moses *should have* hired some one else." ("K'rect *now*," whispered Moses.) "Of course I do not intend to ask for or accept wages, and also, of course, I accept the position on the understanding that you think me fit for the service. May I ask what that service is to be, and where you think of going to?"

"The service," returned the hermit slowly and with his eyes fixed on the floor as if pondering his reply, "is to accompany me as my attendant and companion, to take notes as occasion may serve, and to paddle a canoe."

At this reply our hero almost laughed, but was prevented from doing so by his host asking abruptly if he understood canoeing.

"Well, yes. At least I can manage what in England is known as the Rob Roy canoe, having possessed one in my boyhood."

"That will do," returned the hermit gravely. "Can you write shorthand?"

"I can. A friend of mine, a reporter on one of the London dailies, once gave me a few lessons, and, becoming fond of the subject, I followed it up."

"That is well; you did well. It is of immense advantage to a man, whatever his position in life, that he should be able to write shorthand with facility. Especially useful is it in commerce. I know that, having had some experience of commercial life."

At this point in the conversation Nigel was startled by what was to him an absolutely new sensation, namely a shaking or trembling of the whole cavern, accompanied by faint rumbling sounds as if in deeper caverns below him.

He glanced quickly at his host and at the negro, but to his surprise these remarkable men seemed not to be aware of the shaking, although it was severe enough to cause some of the furniture to rattle. Observing his look of surprise, Moses remarked, with a benignant though capacious smile, "Mountain's got de mulligrumps pritty bad jist now."

"We are pretty well accustomed to that," said the host, observing that Nigel turned to him for an explanation. "No doubt you are aware that this region is celebrated for earthquakes and volcanoes, so much so that the inhabitants pay little attention to them unless they become unusually violent. This island of Krakatoa is itself the fragment of an extinct volcano; but the term 'extinct' is scarcely applicable to volcanoes, for it is well-known that many which were for centuries supposed to be extinct have awakened to sudden and violent activity—'quiescent' might be a more appropriate term."

"Yes," said Moses, ceasing to masticate for purposes of speech; "dem 'stinkt volcanoes hab got an okard habit ob unstinkin' dereselves hereabouts when you don' 'spect it of 'em. Go on, massa. I ax yer pard'n for 'truptin'."

The hermit's peculiar good-natured little smile played for a moment on his massive features, and then faded away as he continued—

"Perhaps you may have heard that this is the very heart of the district that has long been recognised as the greatest focus of volcanic activity on the globe?"

"I have heard something of the sort," answered Nigel, "but I confess that my knowledge is limited and my mind hazy on the subject."

"I doubt it not," returned his friend, "for geographical and scientific training in primary schools anywhere is not what it might be. The island of Java, with an area about equal to that of England, contains no fewer than forty-nine great volcanic mountains, some of which rise to 12,000 feet above the sea-level. Many of these mountains are at the present time active." ("Yes, much *too* active," muttered the negro), "and more than half of them have been seen in eruption since Java was occupied by Europeans. Hot springs, mud-volcanoes, and vapour-vents abound all over the island, whilst earthquakes are by no means uncommon. There is a distinct line in the chain of these mountains which seems to point to a great fissure in the earth's crust, caused by the subterranean fires. This tremendous crack or fissure crosses the Straits of Sunda, and in consequence we find a number of these vents—as volcanic mountains may be styled—in the Island of Sumatra, which you saw to the nor'ard as you came along. But there is supposed to be another great crack in the earth's crust—indicated by several volcanic mountains—which crosses the other fissure almost at right angles, and at the exact point where these two lines intersect *stands this island of Krakatoa*.

"I emphasise the fact," continued the hermit after a pause, "first, because, although this has been a quiescent volcano since the year 1680, and people have come to regard it as extinct, there are indications now which lead me to believe that its energy is reviving; and, second, because this focus where fissures cross each other—this Krakatoa Island—is in reality part of the crater of an older and much larger volcanic mountain, which must have been literally blown away in prehistoric times, and of which Krakatoa and the neighbouring islets of Varlaten, Polish Hat, Lang Island, and the rest, are but the remnants of the great crater ring. If these rumblings and minor earthquakes, which I have noticed of late—and the latest of which you have just experienced—are the precursors of another explosion, my home here may be rendered untenable."

"Hi!" exclaimed Moses, who had been listening with open mouth and eyes to this discourse, which was obviously news to him, "I hope, massa, he ain't a-gwine to 'splode to-day—anyhow, not till arter breakfast!"

"You must have studied the subject of volcanoes a good deal, I suppose, from what you say," observed Nigel.

"Naturally, living as I do almost on the top of one. My library, which I will show you presently, contains many interesting works on the subject. But come, if you have finished we will ascend the Peak of Rakata and I will introduce you to my sunshine."

He rose and led his guest back to the outer cavern, leaving Moses still busy with knife and fork, apparently meditating on the pleasure of breakfasting with the prospect of a possible and immediate explosion.

In passing through the first chamber, Nigel observed, in a natural recess, the library just referred to. He also noted that, besides stuffed birds and other specimens and sea-shells, there were chisels, saws, hammers, and other tools, besides something like a forge and carpenter's bench in a side-chamber opening out of the large one, which he had not at first seen—from all which he concluded that the hermit was imbued with mechanical as well as scientific and literary tastes.

At the further and darker end of the outer cave there was a staircase, partly natural, and partly improved by art, which led upward into profound darkness.

"Let me take your hand here," said the hermit, looking down upon his guest with his slight but winning smile; "it is a rough and dark staircase. You will be apt to stumble."

Nigel placed his hand in that of his host with perfect confidence, and with a curious feeling—aroused, probably, by the action—of having returned to the days of childhood.

The stair was indeed rugged as well as winding, and so pitchy dark that the youth could not have advanced at all without stumbling, unless his host had held him all the way. At last a glimmer of light was seen in the distance. It seemed to increase suddenly, and in a few moments the two emerged from total darkness into dazzling sunshine.

When Nigel looked round him he saw that they had gained a plateau, high up on the very summit of the mountain, which appeared to be absolutely inaccessible by any means save that by which they had reached it.

"This is what I call my observatory," said the hermit, turning to his guest. "We have passed right through the peak of Rakata, and reached its northern side, which commands, as you see, a view of all the northern part of the island. I come here often in the night to study the face of the heavens, the moon, and stars, and meditate on their mysterious Maker, whose ways are indeed wonderful and past finding out; but all which must, in the nature of things, be *right*."

As this was the first mention that the hermit had made of the Creator, and the reference was one requiring more thought than Nigel had yet bestowed on it, he made no rejoinder.

"Have you studied astronomy, Mr Roy?"

"No—at least not more of it than was needful for navigation. But pray, sir, do not call me Mr Roy," said the youth, with a somewhat embarrassed air. "If I am to be your assistant and familiar companion for two or three months, I hope that you will agree to call me Nigel. Your man has done so already without asking leave!"

"I will, on one condition."

"And that is?"

"That you also dispense with the 'Mr' and 'sir,' and call me Van der Kemp."

"Agreed," said Nigel, "though it does not seem so appropriate in me as in you, considering the difference of our years."

"Look here," said the hermit, turning abruptly to a small wooden shed which had hitherto escaped the youth's observation, so covered was it with overhanging boughs and tropical creeping plants, "these are my astronomical instruments."

He pointed to a table in the hut on which stood several telescopes—and microscopes as well—one of the former being a large instrument, certainly not less than six feet long, with a diameter of apparently six or eight inches.

"Here, you see, I have the means of investigating the wonders of Nature in her grandest as well as her minutest scales. And there," he added, pointing to a couple of large reflecting mirrors in strong wooden frames, erected on joints in such a way that they could be turned in any direction,—"there you have the secret of my sunshine. One of these mirrors catches the sunshine direct and reflects it on the other, which, as you see, is so arranged that it transmits the rays down the natural funnel or chimney into the cave. By means of chains connected with the mechanism, and extending below, I can change the direction of the mirrors as the sun changes its place in the sky, without requiring to come up here."

"Very ingenious!" said Nigel; "but how do you manage when the mountain comes between you and the sun, as I see it cannot fail to do during some part of the day?"

"Simply enough," returned the hermit, pointing to a distant projecting cliff or peak. "On yon summit I have fixed four mirrors similar to these. When the sun can no longer be reflected from this pair, the first of the distant mirrors takes it up and shoots a beam of light over here. When the sun passes from that, the second mirror is arranged to catch and transmit it, and so on to the fourth. After that I bid good-bye to the sun, and light my lamp!"

Nigel felt an almost irresistible tendency to smile at this, but the grave simplicity of the man forbade such familiarity.

"Look yonder," continued the hermit, sweeping one of his long arms towards Sumatra, "in that direction runs the line of volcanic disturbance—the fissure of which I have already spoken. Focus this telescope to suit your sight. Now, do you see the little island away there to the nor'-west?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is *Varlaten*. I mentioned it when at breakfast. Sweep your glass round to the nor'ard, the little island there is *Polish Hat*, and you see *Lang Island* in the nor'-east. These, with Krakatoa, are merely the higher parts still remaining above water of the ring or lip of the ancient crater. This will give you some idea what an enormous mountain the original of this old volcano must have been. This island-mountain is estimated to have been twenty-five miles in circumference, and 10,000 to 12,000 feet high. It was blown into the air in 1680, and this island, with the few islets I have pointed out, is all that remains of it. Now, cast your eye down the centre of the island on which we stand; you see several cones of various sizes. These are ancient vents, supposed to be extinct—"

"But one of them, the one furthest away," interrupted Nigel, steadying his telescope on the branch of a tree, "seems to be anything but extinct, for I see a thin column of white smoke or steam rising from it."

"That is just what I was going to point out. They call that Perboewatan. It is the lowest peak on the island, about 400 feet high, and stands, I should say, in the very centre of the ancient crater, where are the two fissures I have mentioned. For two hundred years Perboewatan has not smoked like that, and, slight though it is at present, I cannot help thinking that it indicates an impending eruption, especially when I consider that earthquakes have become more numerous of late years, and there was one in 1880 which was so violent as to damage seriously the lighthouse on Java's First Point."

"Then you have resided here for some time?" said Nigel.

"Yes, for many years," replied the hermit, in a low, sad tone.

"But is it wise in you to stay if you think an explosion so likely? Don't you needlessly run considerable risk?"

"I do not fear to die."

Nigel looked at his new friend in surprise, but there was not a shadow of boastfulness or affectation either in his look or tone.

"Besides," he continued, "the explosion may be but slight, and Perboewatan is, as you see, about four miles off. People in the neighbourhood of the straits and passing ships are so accustomed to volcanic explosions on a more or less grand scale that they will never notice this little cloud hanging over Krakatoa. Those who, like myself, know the ancient history of the island, regard it in a more serious light, but we may be wrong. Come, now, we will descend again and have a ramble over part of the island. It will interest you. Not many men have penetrated its luxuriant forests or know their secrets. I have wandered through them in all directions, and can guide you. Indeed, Moses could do that as well as I, for he has lived with me many years. Come."

Returning to the cavern they found that the active negro had not only finished his breakfast, but had washed the dishes and cleared up the kitchen, so that he was quite ready to shoulder a wallet and a gun when his master bade him prepare for a day in the forest.

It is not, however, our intention to follow the trio thither. Matters of greater interest, if not importance, claim our attention at present. Let it suffice to say, therefore, that after a most delightful day, spent in wandering amongst the luxuriant tropical vegetation with which the island was densely covered, visiting one of the extinct craters, bathing in one of the numerous hot springs, and collecting many objects of interest to the hermit, in the shape of botanical and geological specimens, they returned in the evening to their cavern-house not only ready but eager for sustenance and repose.

Chapter Eight
Perboewatan becomes moderately Violent

The cave was enshrouded in almost total darkness when they entered it, but this was quickly dispelled, to Nigel's no little surprise, by the rays of a magnificent oil-lamp, which Moses lighted and placed on the table in the larger cave. A smaller one of the same kind already illuminated the kitchen.

Not much conversation was indulged in during the progress of the supper that was soon spread upon the rude table. The three men, being uncommonly hungry and powerfully robust, found in food a sufficient occupation for their mouths for some time.

After supper they became a little, but not much, more sociable, for, although Nigel's active mind would gladly have found vent in conversation, he experienced some difficulty in making headway against the discouragement of Van der Kemp's very quiet disposition, and the cavernous yawns with which Moses displayed at once his desire for slumber and his magnificent dental arrangements.

"We always retire early to rest after a day of this sort," said the hermit at last, turning to his guest. "Do you feel disposed for bed?"

"Indeed I do," said Nigel, with a half-suppressed yawn, that was irresistibly dragged out of him by the sight of another earthquake on the negro's face.

"Come, then, I will show you your berth; we have no bedrooms here," said the hermit, with a sort of deprecatory smile, as he led the way to the darker end of the cavern, where he pointed to a little recess in which there was a pile of something that smelt fresh and looked like heather, spread on which there was a single blanket.

"Sailors are said to be indifferent to sheets. You won't miss them, I daresay?"

"Not in the least," returned Nigel, with a laugh. "Good-night," he added, shaking hands with his host and suppressing another yawn, for Moses' face, even in the extreme distance, was irresistibly infectious!

Our hero was indifferent not only to sheets, but also, in certain circumstances, to the usual habiliments of night. Indeed, while travelling in out-of-the-way regions he held it to be a duty to undress but partially before turning in, so that he might be ready for emergencies.

On lying down he found his mattress, whatever it was, to be a springy, luxurious bed, and was about to resign himself to slumber when he observed that, from the position in which he lay, he could see the cavern in all its extent. Opening his half-closed eyes, therefore, he watched the proceedings of his host, and in doing so, as well as in speculating on his strange character and surroundings, he became somewhat wakeful.

He saw that Van der Kemp, returning to the other end of the cave, sat down beside the lamp, the blaze of which fell full on his fine calm countenance. A motion of his head brought Moses to him, who sat down beside him and entered into earnest conversation, to judge from his gestures, for nothing could be heard where Nigel lay save the monotonous murmur of their voices. The hermit did not move. Except for an occasional inclination of the head he appeared to be a grand classic statue, but it was otherwise with the negro. His position in front of the lamp caused him to look if possible even blacker than ever, and the blackness was so uniform that his entire profile became strongly pronounced, thus rendering every motion distinct, and the varied pouting of his huge lips remarkably obvious. The extended left hand, too, with the frequent thrusting of the index finger of the other into the palm, was suggestive of argument, and of much reasoning effort—if not power.

After about half-an-hour of conversation, Moses arose, shook his master by the hand, appeared to say "Good-night" very obviously, yawned, and retired to the kitchen, whence, in five minutes or so, there issued sounds which betokened felicitous repose.

Meanwhile his master sat motionless for some time, gazing at the floor as if in meditation. Then he rose, went to his book-case and took down a large thick volume, which he proceeded to read.

Nigel had by that time dropped into a drowsy condition, yet his interest in the doings of his strange entertainer was so great that he struggled hard to keep awake, and partially succeeded.

"I wonder," he muttered, in sleepy tones, "if that's a f–fam–'ly Bible he's reading—or—or—a vol'm o' the En–Encyclopida Brit—"

He dropped off at this point, but, feeling that he had given way to some sort of weakness, he struggled back again in to wakefulness, and saw that the hermit was bending over the large book with his massive brow resting on the palms of both hands, and his fingers thrust into his iron-grey hair. It was evident, however, that he was not reading the book at that moment, for on its pages was lying what seemed to be a miniature or photograph case, at which he gazed intently. Nigel roused himself to consider this, and in doing so again dropped off—not yet soundly, however, for curiosity induced one more violent struggle, and he became aware of the fact that the hermit was on his knees with his face buried in his hands.

The youth's thoughts must have become inextricably confused at this point, yet their general drift was indicated by the muttered words:

"I—I'm glad o' that—a good sign—an'—an' it's *not* th' Encyclop." Here Morpheus finally conquered, and he sank into dreamless repose.

How long this condition lasted he could not tell, but he was awakened violently by sensations and feelings of dread, which were entirely new to him. The bed on which he rested seemed to heave under him, and his ears were filled by sharp rattling sounds, something like—yet very different from—the continuous roll of musketry.

Starting up, he sprang into the large cavern where he found Van der Kemp quietly tightening his belt and Moses hastily pulling on his boots.

"Sometin's bu'sted an' no mistake!" exclaimed the latter.

"An eruption from one of the cones," said the hermit. "I have been for a long time expecting it. Come with us."

He went swiftly up the staircase and passages which led to the observatory as he spoke.

The scene that met their eyes on reaching the ledge or plateau was sublime in the extreme, as well as terrific.

"As I thought," said Van der Kemp, in a low tone. "It is Perboewatan that has broken out."

"The cone from which I observed smoke rising?" asked Nigel.

"The same. The one over the very centre of the old crater, showing that we were wrong in supposing it to be extinct: it was only slumbering. It is in what vulcanologists term moderate eruption now, and, perhaps, may prove a safety-valve which will prevent a more violent explosion."

That the cone of Perboewatan was indeed in a state of considerable activity, worthy of a stronger term than "moderate," was very obvious. Although at a distance, as we have said, of four miles, the glare of its fires on the three figures perched near the top of Rakata was very intense, while explosion after explosion sent molten lava and red-hot rocks, pumice, and dust, high into the thickening air—clouds of smoke and steam being vomited forth at the same time. The wind, of which there was very little, blew it all away from the position occupied by the three observers.

"What if the wind were to change and blow it all this way?" asked Nigel, with very pardonable feelings of discomfort.

"We could return to the cavern," said the hermit.

"But what if Rakata itself should become active?"

It was evident from the very solemn expression on the negro's face that he awaited the reply to Nigel's question with some anxiety.

"Rakata," answered the hermit thoughtfully, "although the highest cone, is the one most distant from the great centre of activity. It is therefore not likely that the volcanic energy will seek a vent

here while there are other cones between us and Perboewatan. But we shall soon see whether the one vent is likely to suffice. There is undoubtedly no diminution in the explosions at present."

There certainly was not, for the voice of the speaker was almost drowned by the horrible din caused, apparently, by the hurtling of innumerable fragments of rock and stones in the air, while a succession of fiery flashes, each followed by a loud explosion, lit up the dome-shaped mass of vapour that was mounting upwards and spreading over the sky. Vivid flashes of lightning were also seen playing around the vapour-column. At the same time, there began a fall of fine white dust, resembling snow, which soon covered the foliage and the ground of all the lower part of the island. The sea around was also ere long covered with masses of pumice, which, being very light, floated away into the Indian ocean, and these were afterwards encountered in large quantities by various vessels passing through Sunda Straits.

The Scientific Committee, which ultimately wrote on the details of this eruption in Krakatoa, mention this first outburst as being a phase of moderate activity, similar to that which is said to have been exhibited for some months during the years 1680 and 1681, and they added that "the outburst was one of considerable violence, especially at its commencement," that falls of dust were noticed at the distance of three hundred miles, and that "the commander of the German war-vessel *Elizabeth* estimated the height of the dust-column issuing from the volcano at 11 kilometres (36,000 feet or about 7 miles)."

To our hero, however, and to Moses, the outburst seemed anything but "moderate," and that night as they two sat together in the cave after supper, listening with awe-struck faces to the cannonading and wild musketry going on as it seemed under their very feet, the negro solemnly imparted to Nigel in a low whisper that he thought "de end ob de wurld hab come at last!"

Returning at that moment from his observatory, to which he had ascended for a few minutes to view the scene through one of his glasses, Van der Kemp relieved their anxieties somewhat by remarking, in his quiet manner, that there was a distinct diminution in the violence of the explosions, and that, from his knowledge and experience of other volcanoes in Java, Sumatra, and elsewhere, he thought it probable they had seen the worst of it at that time, and that none of the other cones would be likely to break out.

"I'm glad to hear you say so," observed Nigel, "for although the sight is extremely magnificent and very interesting, both from a scientific and artistic point of view, I cannot help thinking that we should be safer away from this island at present—at least while the volcano is active."

The hermit smiled almost pitifully. "I do not apprehend danger," he said, "at least nothing unusual. But it happens that my business requires me to leave in the course of a few days at any rate, so, whether the eruption becomes fiercer or feebler, it will not matter to us. I have preparations to make, however, and I have no doubt you won't object to remain till all is ready for a start?"

"Oh, as to that," returned the youth, slightly hurt by the implied doubt as to his courage, "if *you* are willing to risk going off the earth like a skyrocket, I am quite ready to take my chance of following you!"

"An' Moses am de man," said the negro, smiting his broad chest with his fist, "what's ready to serve as a rocket-stick to bof, an' go up along wid you!"

The hermit made the nearest approach to a laugh which Nigel had yet seen, as he left the cave to undertake some of the preparations above referred to.[2]

[2] See *The Eruption of Krakatoa and Subsequent Phenomena* page 11. (Tribner and Company, London.)

Chapter Nine
Describes, among other Things, a Singular Meeting under Peculiar Circumstances

There is unquestionably a class of men—especially Englishmen—who are deeply imbued with the idea that the Universe in general, and our world in particular, has been created with a view to afford them what they call fun.

"It would be great fun," said an English commercial man to a friend who sat beside him, "to go and have a look at this eruption. They say it is Krakatoa which has broken out after a sleep of two centuries, and as it has been bursting away now for nearly a week, it is likely to hold on for some time longer. What would you say to charter a steamer and have a grand excursion to the volcano?"

The friend said he thought it would indeed be "capital fun!"

We have never been able to ascertain who these Englishmen were, but they must have been men of influence, or able to move men of influence, for they at once set to work and organised an excursion.

The place where this excursion was organised was Batavia. Although that city was situated in Java, nearly a hundred miles distant from Krakatoa, the inhabitants had not only heard distinctly the explosions of the volcano, but had felt some quakings of the earth and much rattling of doors and windows, besides a sprinkling of ashes, which indicated that the eruption, even in that eruptive region, was of unusual violence. They little imagined to what mighty throes the solid rocks of Krakatoa were yet to be subjected before those volcanic fires could find a vent. Meanwhile, as we have said, there was enough of the unusual in it to warrant our merchants in their anticipation of a considerable amount of fun.

A steamer was got ready; a number of sightseeing enthusiasts were collected, and they set forth on the morning of the 26th of May. Among these excursionists was our friend Captain David Roy —not that *he* was addicted to running about in search of "fun," but, being unavoidably thrown idle at the time, and having a poetical turn of mind—derived from his wife—he thought he could not do better than take a run to the volcano and see how his son was getting along.

The party reached the scene of the eruption on the morning of the 27th, having witnessed during the night several tolerably strong explosions, which were accompanied by earthquake shocks. It was found that Krakatoa and all the adjoining islands were covered with a fine white dust, like snow, and that the trees on the northern part of the former island and Varlaten had been to a great extent deprived of their leaves and branches by falling pumice, while those on Lang Island and Polish Hat, as well as those on the Peak of Rakata, had to a great extent escaped—no doubt owing to the prevailing direction of the wind.

It was soon seen that Perboewatan on Krakatoa was the cone in active eruption, and the steamer made for its neighbourhood, landing her party within a short distance of its base. Explosions were occurring at intervals of from five to ten minutes. Each explosion being accompanied by an uncovering of the molten lava in the vent, the overhanging steam-cloud was lighted up with a grand glow for a few seconds. Some of the party, who seemed to be authorities on such matters, estimated that the vapour-column rose to a height of nearly 10,000 feet, and that fragments of pumice were shot upwards to a height of 600 feet.

"That's a sign that the violence of the eruption is diminished," remarked the young merchant, who was in search of fun, as he prepared to wade ankle-deep in the loose pumice up the slopes of the cone.

"Diminished!" repeated our captain, who had fraternised much with this merchant during their short voyage. "If that's what you call diminishin', I shouldn't like to be here when it's increasin'."

"Pooh!" exclaimed the merchant, "that's nothing. I've seen, at other volcanoes, pieces of pumice blown up so high that they've been caught by the upper currents of the atmosphere and carried away in an opposite direction to the wind that was blowing below at the time. Ay, I believe that dust is sometimes blown *miles* up into the air."

As Captain Roy thought that the merchant was drawing the long bow he made no reply, but changed the subject by asking what was the height of Perboewatan.

"Three hundred feet or thereabouts," replied his friend.

"I hope my son will have the sense to clear out of the island if things look like gittin' worse," muttered the captain, as an unusually violent explosion shook the whole side of the cone.

"No fear of him," returned the merchant. "If he is visiting the hermit of Rakata, as you tell me, he'll be safe enough. Although something of a dare-devil, the hermit knows how to take care of himself. I'm afraid, however, that you'll not find it so easy to 'look up' your son as you seem to think. Just glance round at these almost impenetrable forests. You don't know what part of the island he may be in just now; and you might as well look for a needle in a bundle of hay as look for him there. He is probably at the other end of Krakatoa—four or five miles off—on the South side of Rakata, where the hermit's cave is supposed to be, for no one seems to be quite sure as to its whereabouts. Besides, you'll have to stick by the excursionists if you wish to return to Batavia."

Captain Roy paused for a moment to recover breath, and looking down upon the dense tropical forest that stretched between him and the Peak of Rakata, he shook his head, and admitted that the merchant was right. Turning round he addressed himself once more to the ascent of the cone, on the sides of which the whole excursion party now straggled and struggled, remarking, as he panted along, that hill-climbing among ashes and cinders didn't "come easy to a sea-farin' man."

Now, nothing was more natural than that Van der Kemp and his guest should be smitten with the same sort of desire which had brought these excursionists from Batavia. The only thing that we do not pretend to account for is the strange coincidence that they should have been so smitten, and had so arranged their plans, that they arrived at Perboewatan almost at the same time with the excursionists —only about half an hour before them!

Their preliminary walk, however, through the tangled, almost impassable, forest had been very slow and toilsome, and having been involved in its shadow from daybreak, they were, of course, quite unaware of the approach of the steamer or the landing of the excursion party.

"If the volcano seems quieting down," said Nigel to his host, "shall you start to-morrow?"

"Yes; by daybreak. Even if the eruption does *not* quiet down I must set out, for my business presses."

Nigel felt much inclined to ask what his business was, but there was a quiet something in the air of the hermit, when he did not choose to be questioned, which effectually silenced curiosity. Falling behind a little, till the negro came up with him, Nigel tried to obtain information from him, for he felt that he had a sort of right to know at least something about the expedition in which he was about to act a part.

"Do you know, Moses, what business your master is going about?" he asked, in a low voice.

"No more nor de man ob de moon, Massa Nadgel," said Moses, with an air at once so truthful and so solemn that the young man gave it up with a laugh of resignation.

On arriving at Perboewatan, and ascending its sides, they at last became aware of the approach of the excursion steamer.

"Strange," muttered the hermit, "vessels don't often touch here."

"Perhaps they have run short of water," suggested Nigel.

"Even if they had it would not be worth their while to stop here for that," returned the hermit, resuming the ascent of the cone after an intervening clump of trees had shut out the steamer from view.

It was with feelings of profound interest and considerable excitement that our hero stood for the first time on the top of a volcanic cone and gazed down into its glowing vent.

The crater might be described as a huge basin of 3000 feet in diameter. From the rim of this basin on which the visitors stood the sides sloped so gradually inward that the flat floor at the bottom was not more than half that in diameter. This floor—which was about 150 feet below the upper edge—was covered with a black crust, and in the centre of it was the tremendous cavity—between one and two hundred feet in diameter—from which issued the great steam-cloud. The cloud was mixed with quantities of pumice and fragments of what appeared to be black glass. The roar of this huge vent was deafening and stupendous. If the reader will reflect on the wonderful hubbub that can be created even by a kitchen kettle when superheated, and on the exasperating shrieks of a steamboat's safety-valve in action, or the bellowing of a fog-horn, he may form some idea of the extent of his incapacity to conceive the thunderous roar of Krakatoa when it began to boil over.

When to this awful sound there were added the intermittent explosions, the horrid crackling of millions of rock-masses meeting in the air, and the bubbling up of molten lava—verily it did not require the imagination of a Dante to see in all this the very vomiting of Gehenna!

So amazed and well-nigh stunned was Nigel at the sights and sounds that he neither heard nor saw the arrival of the excursionists, until the equally awe-stricken Moses touched him on the elbow and drew his attention to several men who suddenly appeared on the crater-brim not fifty yards off, but who, like themselves, were too much absorbed with the volcano itself to observe the other visitors. Probably they took them for some of their own party who had reached the summit before them.

Nigel was yet looking at these visitors in some surprise, when an elderly nautical man suddenly stood not twenty yards off gazing in open-mouthed amazement, past our hero's very nose, at the volcanic fires.

"Hallo, Father!" shouted the one.

"Zounds! Nigel!" exclaimed the other.

Both men glared and were speechless for several seconds. Then Nigel rushed at the captain, and the captain met him halfway, and they shook hands with such hearty goodwill as to arrest in his operations for a few moments a photographer who was hastily setting up his camera!

Yes, science has done much to reveal the marvellous and arouse exalted thoughts in the human mind, but it has also done something to crush enthusiasts and shock the romantic. Veracity constrains us to state that there he was, with his tripod, and his eager haste, and his hideous black cloth, preparing to "take" Perboewatan on a "dry plate"! And he "took" it too! And you may see it, if you will, as a marvellous frontispiece to the volume by the "Krakatoa Committee"—a work which is apparently as exhaustive of the subject of Krakatoa as was the great explosion itself of those internal fires which will probably keep that volcano quiet for the next two hundred years.

But this was not the Great Eruption of Krakatoa—only a rehearsal, as it were.

"What brought you here, my son?" asked the captain, on recovering speech.

"My legs, father."

"Don't be insolent, boy."

"It's not insolence, father. It's only poetical licence, meant to assure you that I did not come by 'bus or rail, though you did by steamer! But let me introduce you to my friend, Mr —"

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