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CASTAWAY AT THE POLE

By

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CHAPTER I.

A DIFFERENCE OF OPINION.

Our situation was not only hopeless, but demoralizing as well. I realized this when I caught the professor looking at me with hard and hungry eyes.

"What ails you, Prebble?" I asked, straightening out the sleeping bag with my numb fingers.

"My body craves nutrition," he answered huskily. "I must eat. Have you forgotten that we divided the last ounce of pemmican yesterday?"

"How could I forget it," I replied, "with this dreadful gnawing at my stomach to serve as a constant reminder?"

"Something must be done!" my companion declared, with convulsive energy.

"But what?" I returned. "Here we are, lost on the ice cap, abandoned by our Eskimo guides.

sled gone, dogs gone, compass broken, and nothing to eat but our sealskin clothes. **Something** must be done, you say, and I agree with you fully. You joined this expedition to solve problems. Solve this one."

That should have floored Prebble. But it did not.

"I have already solved this one—to my own satisfaction," said he.

And again that hard and hungry look was turned on me.

"What are you thinking of?" I demanded angrily.

He gave a cackling, ill-timed laugh—a laugh that irritated me beyond words.

"The old law of the survival of the fittest will apply here," he said. "In your dash for the pole, captain, you have attained the farthest north, and I have demonstrated the truth of the meteoric theory of the aurora borealis. If I go back I can tell what you have done; but you, if you returned to civilization without me, could no more tell of my discovery than discourse in Attic Greek. Ergo, *I* return."

I knew what he meant, well enough. But I was not ready to serve as a diet for the professor, even at the command of science; and as for eking out my own miserable existence with a ragout *à la Prebble*, I would as soon have thought of bolting the rule of three.

"You're crazy," I said shiveringly.

"Consistent, my dear fellow."

"See here," I went on, "somewhere behind us is the ship and the ship's crew. When the Eskimo guides get back without us, searching parties will be sent out, and we'll be found."

"But suppose the Eskimo guides don't get back?"

"I choose to think that they will," I responded firmly. "I'm not going to yield up my life to you and your meteoric theory of the aurora. That's flat."

"Haven't you a thought beyond your own selfish aims and ambitions?" Prebble returned indignantly.

"Possibly I have," I flung back at him tartly, "but I refuse to throw myself away on a little old professor with a bee in his bonnet."

That was a shot that went home. The professor sank into a morbid silence.

"Besides," I proceeded, "the farthest north doesn't satisfy me. I shall attain the only point on this earth where the compass has but three cardinal points: east, west, and south."

"The North Pole!" he exclaimed. "Madman!"

"I shall attain it," I repeated, a warm glow of enthusiasm pulsing through my hungry body. "I shall plant my country's flag at the apex of the earth."

"What good will it do your country, or any other country?" he asked.

"You talk strangely, professor," I said frigidly.

"How will the discovery of the North Pole benefit mankind, or advance civilization a single inch?"

"Consider the luster of the achievement, sir."

"Luster of the achievement! *Mirabile dictu!*"

"Not only that," I went on, waving my mitted hand in a direction I believed to be south, "but somewhere behind us is that execrable Grif-fyn, F. R. G. S.—an Englishman, sir, who has

sworn to beat me to the pole. Have you no pride, no patriotism?"

"I have both," said Prebble plaintively. "But I am hungry."

"Hungry!"

The insolence of this professor filled me with wrath unutterable. I towered above him and gave him a look that sent him crouching to his knees. He lifted his hands appealingly.

"Your nose, sir," said he, "is very white."

I left off glaring at him, picked up a handful of snow, and began rubbing my nose. By the time circulation was restored, I found the professor had crawled into the sleeping bag; so I crawled in beside him, thankful he had warmed it up.

This particular bag was a three-man bag; that is, capable of holding three adults. It was shaped like an envelope, opening from end to end; was made of reindeer skin, and had an outer covering of oil-tanned sealskin, the latter keeping out the water and keeping in the animal heat.

I fastened the flap over the opening. Then Prebble bade me an ironical "good night."

The professor's "good night" may have been ironical because of one of two things: Either because of his resentment toward me, or because at that time of the year in the Arctics continual day reigned, and there was no night.

"Which is the greater achievement, Prebble," I asked, "finding the pole or demonstrating the truth of a meteoric theory?"

"There is no comparison, Captain Salis. Finding the North Pole is simply a matter of brute endurance; but demonstrating the truth of that theory, sir, involves ratiocination—calls forth all the best powers of the mind."

"Bah, sir!" I cried.

"Bah to you!" he retorted.

There and then I made a mental vow that the next time I went exploring in the Arctics I would use more care in selecting the scientific members of the expedition. Prebble had a string of letters after his name, abbreviating his honorable suffixes and extending his rights to sit with the highbrows, but he was about as sociable as a polar bear.

He had said "good night" merely to open our

muffled conversation in the sleeping bag. Sometimes he was like that—a human moving-picture film run through the lantern wrong end to. I had “bah’d” him in the hope of cutting short his garrulity. But the effort failed.

“Suppose you find the pole,” said he, “how are you going to know when you get there?”

“For a professor of your attainments,” I observed frigidly, “that remark is asinine.”

He cackled jeeringly.

“How are you going to make sure you’re at the North Pole when you get there?” he repeated, with maddening insistence.

“By observations!” I snapped.

“Who’ll vouch for the accuracy of your observations?”

“You will. You haven’t any sympathy with my aims or aspirations, Prebble, but you’ll have to support me in a matter of truth and verity. If you don’t, your scientific reputation will suffer.”

Once more he cackled.

“I have been making mental notes, and drawing deductions,” he proceeded, “and, from my

studies of human activities in the frozen world, I venture a most remarkable but most scientific conclusion. Do you care to hear it?"

"If you have discovered anything remarkable," I scored, "the event is sufficiently unique to command my attention. Out with it, Prebble."

"Listen," he returned, in his most didactic tone. "The basis of all observations that are to command the respect and confidence of the learned public is embraced in the old statement of *mens sana in corpore sano*—a sound mind in a sound body. In using your artificial horizon and working out your position, you must approach the task with every faculty alert and unclouded."

"Certainly!" I agreed.

"Salis," he declared, "no human being can undergo the awful perils and hardships of polar discovery without an overthrow of his mental poise."

"Bosh!" I cried.

"Derision," said he, "is the fool's answer to an argument, proving nothing, and leading nowhere."

“Do you mean to say,” I demanded, “that I will not keep my reason?”

“You have not kept it, my friend. Even now, with the pole still far away, the intense cold, the terrific physical strain, and the insufficient food have thrown you off your mental balance. You are not yourself, and you have not been yourself for several days. My discoveries along this line lead me to propound a theory of polar aberration. The other day you called the white snow purple. That is a chromatic proof of failing reason.”

Rage filled me, rage and indignation.

“Prebble,” I cried, “you are the one who is losing his mind! You——”

“Another proof,” he continued calmly, “is your obstinate refusal to listen to my highly valuable suggestions. If your mind was unclouded, you would profit by my very excellent advice.”

“If you had your senses,” I answered, “you wouldn’t think of turning cannibal merely to enable you to get back to civilization and propound your meteoric theory of the aurora.”

“Desperate straits require desperate remedies,” he insisted.

“If you were to propound such a desperate remedy back home, how long would it be before you were clapped into a strait-jacket?”

“Such a remedy would not be propounded back home; it would not be necessary.”

“You’re mad as a hatter!” I told him—and I was really beginning to think so.

“When a mind fails,” said he, “it is a fact of record that it believes every other mind has failed. Salis, more and more you prove my contention.”

“The fact of record,” I returned, “applies both ways. You think I’m crazy, and I know you are. I shall discover the pole, and I shall convince the learned public that I have discovered it. When I get out of this bag, and the ink in my fountain pen is thawed out so I can write with it, I’ll put down the substance of your remarks in my diary.”

“I hope so,” he answered. “And I hope you will put them down exactly as I make them. In

your present deplorable condition, however, I presume that is asking too much."

Thereupon he rolled to one side of the bag, and I rolled to the other. There was a coldness between us.

Strange how little things conspire to shape our destinies here below. But for the space which mutual intolerance placed between the professor and myself in that three-man sleeping bag, one or both of us would have been sacrificed, and our sleep would have been a sleep of death.

I remember reflecting bitterly on our hapless lot, and dozing off by degrees, the professor's snores fading on my ears, and at last dying away utterly. How long I slept I have no means of knowing; but suddenly I was awakened by such a tremendous shock as I never expect to experience again and live.

CHAPTER II.

HURLED INTO SPACE.

The ends of the frozen bag were bent toward each other with a great crackling, so that instead of lying prostrate I was in a sitting position. I thrust one hand toward Prebble's side of the bag, only to encounter a partition of deerskin.

What had happened? The sleeping bag had suddenly acquired motion—not over the rough surface of the ice cap, but apparently through the air.

I had a thought which chilled my blood. Had the bag slipped over a precipice at the edge of the ice cap? And were we falling, falling——

But, no, this could not be. There was no precipice at the edge of the ice cap, and the theory was untenable.

Besides, if we had been falling, we would have struck something long since.

“Have you noticed, captain, that we have a concentric and a lateral, as well as a forward motion?”

"Prebble!" I exclaimed. "Are you alive?"

"Keenly, sir. This is a most astounding phenomenon."

I now discovered that the partition of reindeer hide separating the professor from myself consisted of a fold of the sleeping bag pushed inward as by some hard substance.

"What do you think is going on?" I asked.

"Our gyratory motion suggests a hurricane," he answered. "It may be that we have been caught off the top of the ice cap by an arctic whirlwind. Can you open the flap, captain?"

I could, and did, after some little trouble. The lengthwise slit was in front of us, and we were able to look through it without a change of position.

The view was not satisfactory, for a great white cloud enveloped us and made it impossible to see very far in any direction. We were suspended in gray space and moving with frightful rapidity.

As we gazed out into the void, a black object came rushing from overhead, grazed the side of the sleeping bag, and vanished below. It was

over in a flash; so quickly, in fact, that neither I nor my companion could determine what manner of thing the object was.

“Merciful powers!” I gasped.

“We are bounding upward,” mused Prebble; “upward as well as onward.”

“Can you imagine what that thing was?” I queried.

“Possibly a missile of meteoric origin. You are more athletic than I am, captain, and don’t you think you could get an upward look without falling from the bag?”

I craned my neck outside. The next instant an exclamation escaped my lips.

“What do you see?” asked Prebble eagerly.

“A rope!”

“Suspended from what?”

“I can’t see. The object it hangs from is lost in the clouds. By the mizzen-truck of the great Harry!”

“What now?”

I had made a discovery that almost caused my hair to stand on end.

“This sleeping bag is caught on the fluke of an anchor——”

“I see, I see!”

“The sleeping bag was scooped up bodily, the fluke catching it in the center. Your weight on one side and my weight on the other balances the bag.”

“Beautiful, beautiful! Some aëronaut is making for the pole by balloon—his drag rope swept the ice cap—the anchor caught us. The object that darted downward a moment ago was a sand-bag, thrown from the balloon to offset our added weight. Most remarkable!”

Prebble was chuckling, rubbing his mittened hands together, and thoroughly enjoying the situation.

“Some scamp is trying to get ahead of Griffyn and me,” said I crossly.

“Do you observe that the cold is abating?” inquired my companion.

“The sleeping bag does seem to be thawing out.”

“Exactly! And I am in a profuse perspiration.”

Prebble divested himself of his mittens and parka. Then from somewhere about his person he produced his steel-rimmed spectacles and adjusted them to his nose.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, peering at me sharply. "It is a joy to use one's glasses and have them keep clear of the frost. Do you realize what a rising thermometer means, captain?"

"It means warmer weather," said I, divesting myself of a few of my furs.

"Also that we are sailing southward at a great rate."

I was startled, for I had not thought of the rising temperature in that way. My hope of reaching the pole on that expedition was to be only a hope, and nothing more!

The field was being left clear for my rival, Griffin, the man who had followed me like a shadow ever since leaving the coast of Labrador. My bitterness of soul may be imagined, but not described.

In the gloom of the moment I forgot my hunger, forgot that the professor and I were balanced on the iron horn of a dilemma that might

easily prove our undoing—forgot everything, in fact, but that I had weathered that long arctic night, and borne innumerable hardships, all to no purpose.

“We enter the domains of the improbable,” came the remark of the professor, breaking in upon my unpleasant reflections.

“Hard luck has a domain of its own,” said I, glaring from my niche into Prebble’s, “and it’s so commonplace you can’t call it improbable.”

“You do not grasp my meaning, captain,” my companion proceeded. “If you were to give any one in the temperate zone a true account of this adventure your statements would be dismissed with a shrug—if with nothing worse.”

“You would have to back up my statements, Prebble. Your scientific standing would bolster up my integrity as a navigator, and——”

“I don’t know about that.”

I fell back aghast. Picked off the ice cap by a balloon, and carried southward on the fluke of an anchor, I had been meditating an indictment against some reckless aëronaut. The terms of

that indictment were to set me right before those who had helped finance my expedition.

"What do you mean?" I rasped angrily. "I know you have no sympathy with my polar aims and ambitions, but you can't deny the evidence of your senses."

"Captain," he returned, "I am doubting the evidence of my senses. North of the arctic circle the human faculties become frozen and unreliable. I do not credit our present experience—I do not dare."

"Popycock!" I cried, in wrathful impatience.

"We are under the spell of the purple snows," he went on. "Our adventures seem very real to us because our hardships have created illusions. All my life I have fought against being led astray by illusions—and under the Pole Star lies the abode of things that seem, but are not."

"You're mad as a hatter!" I stormed.

"Not mad, Salis," he protested mildly, "but temporarily unbalanced. You are in the same state of mind."

I saw him wriggle around in his half of the sleeping bag, punching and pinching himself.

Really it seemed he had an idea that he was asleep and dreaming these very momentous events. I saw him shake his head forebodingly upon being forced to the conclusion that he was wide awake.

“You’re a scientific freak, Prebble,” I jeered.

“I am trying, in my feeble way,” he answered, “to combat error.”

“You are trying to give reason the lie. That’s what it amounts to.”

“When your brain is clear, captain, you will consider my actions differently.”

“We are being snatched southward at a pace which should soon carry us out of these regions of illusion,” I observed. “Then, if we are still in this sleeping bag and balanced across the fluke of the anchor, I suppose you will have to believe what you see?”

He made no response, but I could see that my words had thrown him into a brown study.

“And,” I continued bitterly, “while we are bound for the prosy lands of reality and truth, my rival for polar honors is pressing forward into the white world of enchantment, where he

will probably discover what I have spent the better part of my life looking for.”

“Don’t let that fact distress you, captain,” said Prebble. “Griffyn may think he has found the pole, and he may even get back to civilization to tell of it—but who will believe him?”

These words, although I knew them to be far-fetched and far from dependable, gave me a thrill of delight. If my own statements and figures regarding the discovery of the pole were not to be offered in evidence, I took pleasure in seeing the report of my rival completely discredited. The sentiment was unworthy, I grant, but I was human, and had the customary human failings.

“Anyhow, captain,” proceeded Prebble, “you have a contract with a newspaper, a contract with a magazine, and a contract with a lecture bureau. Out of these various contracts you will be able to amass a fortune, even if you don’t find the pole. Griffyn, even though he is successful, will be discredited. You are an ex-officer of the army, and the army will be behind you. Griffyn is only a poor devil who took a chance on reaching the pole because he happened to

find the way open. Nobody will believe Griffyn. If you claim only the farthest north, everybody will believe you—in spite of the fact that you may not believe in yourself.”

“This is foolish talk, Prebble,” I declared. “You ought to be above such random conversation.”

In my mind, however, I was already planning my newspaper and magazine articles, and was figuring on the results of that lecture campaign. There was a possibility that I should receive the thanks of Congress and a medal! My heart began to thaw out, even as the frost was melting away from the sleeping bag.

Our motion through space was easy and exhilarating. It was like flying through the skies on downy beds of ease. Swinging through the air and covering the miles with magical swiftness was vastly different from trekking, with dogs and sledges, over the broken floes, and making great detours to avoid open leads of water.

We were going southward, and the result of my daring and my perils had been merely the attainment of the farthest north. Although the fact was deplorable, it had its amenities.

I gave myself over to a long period of contemplation. In the course of my thoughts I found occasion to dwell at some length on the arrival of this mysterious balloon. Who was the aëronaut, and where had he come from? Quite naturally, I could formulate no answers to these mental queries.

Hours passed; then suddenly my companion reached over the partition and touched my shoulder.

"The cloud is vanishing," he said. "Lean out and look upward, captain."

I obeyed. High above us was the huge bulk of a balloon, and visible over the rim of the wickerwork car, suspended beneath, were the faces of two men whom I knew only too well.

I was speechless for a moment. Then a cry of rage escaped me.

"Salis, by Jupiter!" boomed a voice from overhead.

"Griffyn!" I shouted.

What an irony of fate! My enemy and his secretary were the aëronauts, and it was their anchor that had hooked into our sleeping bag.

Prebble clasped his bony hands convulsively.

"I didn't know that Griffyn had a balloon," he muttered hoarsely. "For Heaven's sake, captain, be amiable! Be——"

"Silence!" I commanded.

"You have taken an underhand advantage of me, Captain Salis," my enemy called down. "You have attached yourself to my anchor, sirrah, with never so much as a 'by your leave.' Your conduct is unprofessional, and I shall make it known to the members of the Arctic Club. If I had wanted to take you with me, I should have invited you."

Being a sailor, I had a supply of language for just such an emergency as this. Before I could release the torrent of words, however, Griffyn, F. R. G. S.—to his lasting infamy be it said—had reached his hand from the basket and had severed the drag rope with a keen knife.

Down we dropped through the depths of space; down, down, the wind shrieking in our ears, and our brains reeling. Then a shock, a roar as of a hundred Niagaras, and after that—oblivion.

CHAPTER III.

TERRA INCOGNITA.

“Where are we?”

That was my first question. It fell instinctively from my lips, and was addressed to no one in particular.

I was a very much bewildered man. As I reclined on the ground and made use of my startled eyes, to my right I saw a pond, circular in form and perhaps fifty yards in diameter.

This pond was edged with blocks of white stone. Knee-deep in the center of it stood a graven figure of colossal proportions, a jet of water spouting from its uplifted hands.

Rosebushes in full bloom bordered the lake, and back of the rosebushes, separated by a stretch of white sand, grew palm trees tossing their fronded tops in the balmy air.

Birds sang in the depths of the grove, and a genial heat pervaded the atmosphere.

I rubbed my forehead, water flying from the sleeves of my soaked coat as I raised my hands.

"Where are we?" I asked again, this time in a louder key.

"Marvelous!" crooned a familiar voice behind me. " A is the balloon, b is ourselves, c is the lake, and x the way we got out; b divided from a goes into c ——"

I looked around, and there knelt that blessed old professor, wet as a rat, tracing algebraic symbols in the sand with his finger.

"Professor," I called, "avast with your foolishness, and try to make a guess as to where we are."

He looked up at me blankly. Water from his drenched garments had rilled around him in the sandy soil, and was running down his arm and off the index finger that was tracing the symbols.

Still on his knees over the unsolved equation, he allowed his eyes to wander from me toward our surroundings.

"A fountain," he said. "Really a most admirable work of art."

"And it spouts fresh water," said I, freeing my lungs of a mouthful of it.

"The lake," he went on, running his gaze over

the circular stone borders, "shows calculation and design carried out with engineering skill and a rare eye for beauty."

"Correct," I agreed.

"Roses in full bloom," he proceeded. "The air is redolent of odors that are soothing and delightful."

"Exactly," I returned. "We must have made a tremendous southing on the fluke of that anchor. Palm trees suggest the tropics."

"Suggest?" he answered. "I grant you, but it is a suggestion we must adopt warily. The leagues upon leagues that lie between the arctic circle and the equator could not have been covered by us on the fluke of the anchor."

"I know that," said I, "and I wish you'd exercise your wits and make a guess at our present position. I'm bewildered."

"One thing at a time, captain," he admonished, bending over his problem. "A is the balloon, b is ourselves——"

"What has become of the balloon?" I cut in, searching the skies for some sign of the sky wanderer.

Prebble frowned, and again looked up. But he did not rise.

"When we were cut away, captain," he explained, "the immense weight suddenly released from the balloon caused it to mount to extraordinary heights. This warm air, too, would have its effect on the gas in the bag, expanding it and giving it tremendous buoyancy. Griffyn is sailing on."

"And southward," I chuckled. "The scoundrel dropped us by the way, and I am glad we have parted company. In his rage, he is at least leaving us nearer the pole than he is himself."

The professor frowned thoughtfully.

"Griffyn must have come from the north, captain," he observed. "In order to pick us off the ice cap and bear us south, Griffyn must have come out of the north."

The professor's logic paralyzed me.

"Do you think—is it possible——" My tongue clove to the roof of my mouth, and I could carry the distressing words no further.

"Do I think," finished the professor, "that he has discovered the pole, and that he was coming

away from it when the anchor picked us up? That is an open question, an open question. We need not concern ourselves about it." Once more he began his finger-and-whole-arm movements over the sand. "*A* is the balloon, *b* is——"

"But I do concern myself about it!" I shouted. "If Griffyn has found the pole I don't believe I can ever get over it!"

Prebble was annoyed by my interruptions, and jabbed his finger angrily into the symbol *b*.

"Remember what I have already told you, Salis," he flared. "Nobody will believe Griffyn found the pole, even if he claims the honor. He can't prove it. His observations will be faulty. Anyhow, would it be possible to take observations from a balloon traveling as fast as that one? The airship was the sport of the winds. Is it possible that the winds carried Griffyn to the pole? Exercise reason, Salis."

"Then you admit that our reasoning is to be trusted?" I inquired.

"Now—yes. We are in a tropical clime. The frozen ice fields have been left behind us. The result of our calculations cannot be nipped by

the frost. If that were not the case, why should I be struggling to work out a problem that has to do with our rescue from the lake? Amuse yourself, Salis, and leave me to my labors."

"Professor," said I, "we are in a land that is inhabited by people well advanced in the arts and sciences. What we see proves it. Instead of wasting your energies trying to work out a trifling problem, would it not be better to stroll off somewhere and look for some one who can tell us what we want to know?"

He was still annoyed, still fretful. That equation had obsessed him, and he was not to be drawn away from it.

"One thing at a time," he answered. "Let us meet our problems as they come to us. We are sure of the present, but we cannot predicate anything certain of the future. If you have business any place else, Salis, don't let me detain you a moment."

He waved his hand to command silence. In disgust, I turned from him and searched the distance with wondering eyes.

Fortune had been extremely kind to the pro-

fessor and me; there was no gainsaying that. Cut loose from the balloon by the murderous hand of Griffyn, we had alighted safely from space. Apparently our lines had fallen in pleasant places.

I say apparently, for presently something happened which proved our position was not so secure as I had imagined.

A sound reached my ears—a sound as of a stealthy movement. I whirled on the professor. He had not left his kneeling posture, but was gabbling to himself, and oblivious of everything but his foolish problem.

And behind him—— Good heavens! What I saw behind the professor, stealing upon him with deadly intent, was a figure such as I had never before encountered outside of a hideous nightmare.

Seven feet the figure stood, if it stood an inch. It walked upright, and bore a striking resemblance to man, having two arms, two legs, a head, and features more or less human.

But it was covered from top to toe with a fine, reddish hair, the hair of the scalp long and flowing about the shoulders. Save for a bearskin

twisted around its middle, the monster was entirely nude.

How its eyes snapped and glowed in the furry recesses of its face! And as it stole toward the professor with catlike tread it raised a long spear with a shimmering point, poisoning the weapon.

I tried to shout a warning, but my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth. I tried again, and this time I managed to gurgle incoherently.

The professor peered in my direction. I fluttered a hand toward the impending danger, and he turned around.

“Ha!” he gasped. “The Missing Link!”

Speech returned to me. With it came the thought that unless I put the professor’s peril into terms he could instantly comprehend, he was lost.

“*A* is the Missing Link,” I cried, “*b* is the spear, and *c* is yourself. *A* divides itself from *b*, *b* goes into *c*, and *x* is what becomes of Prebble!”

He gave a yell of horror, and fell flat. Chug! As he dropped, the spear flashed through the air above his head and buried its point in the sand.

CHAPTER IV.

DANGERS MANIFOLD.

This danger had hurled itself upon us with paralyzing suddenness. I had succeeded in mastering my nerves, however, and was able to deal actively with the situation.

In a twinkling, I sprang for the spear, jerked it from the ground, and balanced it in my hand as I faced the hairy demon.

"Don't kill him, captain—don't!" cried Prebble excitedly. "Really, he's a most remarkable specimen, and we must take him back with us."

The Thing crouched in front of us, eyes burning like twin coals, and muscles working with an itch to spring.

"It's a gigantic gorilla!" I declared.

"Nonsense!" returned Prebble. "It's as much above the gorilla as it is below man. It thinks we're pagan gods, and was simply bent on testing our invulnerability. Careful what you do, captain! It completes the Darwinian chain-- --"

"Darwinian fiddlesticks!" I cut in, out of patience.

"Calm yourself, sir. Fortune favored us when we were cut loose from the balloon. We fell into that lake, and this creature must have pulled us out. If it had wanted to slay us, why didn't it do so while we were unconscious and entirely at its mercy? Observe, captain."

Prebble got up and looked the hairy monster in the eye.

"Hungry," he said, making motions with his hands and jaws, as though eating, "famished."

"What kind of a pagan god do you imagine it will think you if it finds you are hungry?" I demanded.

"That's so," said the professor. "Your lubrications, captain, occasionally evolve something that is particularly apt."

Just then the monster roared aloud. The mighty sound went echoing through the grove, and was answered in kind from a dozen different points.

"We are undone!" I groaned, as a whole pack

of the fiends appeared and raced toward us in full cry, from every quarter.

I was not blind to the incongruity of the situation. Although no judge of art, I knew full well that the colossus in the center of the lake was beyond the craft of these half-naked creatures, whose facial angles were small improvement on those of the orang-utan.

Granted that these man brutes were subjects of a ruling race, where were the real lords of the country, or some one in authority, to whom we could make appeal?

Prebble and I were face to face with death in a most horrible form. The red demons were rushing upon us, snarling and yelping like so many bloodhounds, their spears leveled and ready to impale us.

We could not take to trees, for the attacking force was between us and the grove. Nor could we retreat, for the lake lay behind us.

Our doom was sealed. I felt it in every fiber, yet I would not shame the glorious traditions of the American sailor by standing supinely and allowing myself to be speared.

The last ditch for me! Gripping the haft of my seven-foot lance, I held it at attention.

Considering that the world was to lose an exhaustive paper on the meteoric theory of the aurora, and a thesis on the missing link, Prebble carried himself admirably.

"Thirty seconds of life, captain," said he. "They are getting ready to throw."

"Only one of them is to throw," said I. "Look! That hulking imp with the rings in his ears is to have the first cast. See him rise on one foot—he throws himself back—he lets the spear fly——"

I watched, every faculty whetted to abnormal keenness. The weapon darted toward us, its bright point cleaving the air like a jet of fire.

I struck at it wildly. Fate was kind, and I countered the shaft, swerving it sideways, and sending it hissing into the waters of the lake.

The fatal moment was postponed, that was all. Clenching my teeth, I waited for the next enemy to step to the front and make a trial.

"Captain," quavered the professor, clutching

my arm convulsively, "I have this! I had forgotten about it!"

A revolver! Prebble was holding it out to me in his shaking hand.

A shout escaped me. Flinging down the spear, I clutched the firearm, and before a second savage could launch a shaft I had fired.

The effect of that shot was tremendous. The bullet did not find a mark—my nerves were not steady enough for accurate shooting—but the report was all-sufficient.

Every one of the uncanny creatures fell face downward, and lay groveling on the earth.

"Now, Prebble," I cried sharply, "run for your life! The woods—the woods!"

We started, and had almost gained the shelter of the trees when a second detachment of the enemy appeared before us. I presented the revolver, and pulled the trigger, but only an ominous click followed.

Again and again I tried, but without success—the cylinder was empty!

"Too much *aqua pura* mixed with the ammunition," said the professor sagely. "That bath

in the lake must have disabled the firearm. It's a wonder, captain, that you were able to fire even a single shot. A very pretty problem suggests itself, and I——"

"Look!" I cried, interrupting his idle chatter in a frenzy. "They're elevating their spear points. We'll be dead men in a dozen ticks of the watch unless we can do something to save ourselves."

"I am at the end of my resources," declared the professor calmly.

But I was not. An idea flashed over me, and I began putting it into execution without delay. With a hop, skip, and jump, I started a grotesque dance, hopping up and down, waving my arms, and grimacing as horribly as I knew how.

The professor watched me in a sort of fascination. I saw wonder in his face, and then dismay, and something very like anguish.

But I also saw the lifted spears of the red rabble poise motionless in mid-air. That was the result for which I was working, and I redoubled my exertions.

"Salis, Saliş!" screamed Prebble. "I was afraid

of this! I knew you were unbalanced. I knew your mind was trending toward this deplorable condition, but I had not expected such violence.

"Get busy, Prebble!" I panted, pirouetting on my toes, and throwing off a small cascade of water as I whirled.

"My poor friend!" wailed Prebble, clasping his hands, and striking an attitude of extreme dejection.

"Go to it!" I puffed, showing off a few buck-and-wing steps. "We're a pair of dancing dervishes, Prebble! Reel it off, man—reel it off!"

The spears still hung motionless in the air. I had the hairy monsters guessing, for my contortions were making a powerful appeal to their aboriginal minds.

The professor hurried toward me and laid an imploring hand on my arm.

"If we must die, Captain Salis," he begged, "let us go decently, and as becomes intelligent men."

"Don't be an idiot!" I flung back. "Can't you see that I'm doing this for a purpose?"

"Purpose?" the professor answered. "What purpose can such crazy antics serve?"

"We'd resemble a couple of pincushions by now, Prebble, if I hadn't started this fandango." The words were fairly jolted out of me as I tottered around, first on one foot and then on the other. "I've seen this trick worked on the Indians. All barbarians, particularly those who are low in the human scale, have a superstitious veneration for persons who are crazy. The idea popped into my head, and I began to carry it out. You see what an effect it is having."

Our enemies had now dropped their spear points, and were gazing at us curiously.

"They imagine," remarked the professor, studying the savages with a good deal of interest, "that you are some sort of an evil deity."

"I don't care what they imagine," said I, "just so they keep their distance, and don't use their spears."

"How long do you think you can keep that up?"

"I don't know," I answered. "I'm hoping I

can keep it up until something or other happens to insure our safety indefinitely."

The professor was showing no disposition to join me in the dance. It was only when the savages executed a movement *en masse* toward the right, and lifted their spears for a throw at him, that he leaped into terpsichorean effort. He required no urging from me. He was quick to perceive the danger, and equally quick to resort to the only means for averting it.

Round and round we whirled, exemplifying everything from a double shuffle to a sailor's hornpipe and a Highland fling.

"This is monstrous!" wailed the professor, stepping high. "What a performance for a man of my professional standing! Salis, I have never felt more humiliated in my life."

"Keep it up!" I begged of him hoarsely. "When you give out, and have to drop, feign a fit. If you do it well it may save you."

At that moment, when the spears were again lifted, the savages who had been routed near the lake by the report of the revolver came warily

upon the scene. By a wide detour, they avoided us, and joined the ones who were threatening us.

"There'll be something doing now," I gasped hoarsely.

"The savages who just came will tell the others about the report of the revolver," said Prebble hopefully, "and that will so awe those who are hostile that we will be spared, and allowed to go in peace."

But the professor was wrong. Instead of the late comers inspiring fear in their comrades by telling of the exploding firearm, the other side seemed to get the best of the argument. Both parties presented a united front; what was worse, our exhibition of fancy dancing seemed to have lost its charm.

"The hostility," wheezed the professor, "seems to have become general."

"All hands are making ready to come at us," I whispered.

"What's to be done, Salis? Can we run?"

"Useless. Spears would lay us low before we had taken a dozen leaps toward the sky line."

"We might as well stop this foolish dancing?"

“Yes,” and we both staggered to a stop like tops that have all but run down.

I faced the desperate situation with all the fortitude I could muster.

“Die like a man, Prebble,” I gasped. “That’s all we can do now.”

Another moment, and we should have fallen, pierced by half a dozen spears; but the unexpected happened.

Out from the shadows of the palm trees glided a form in white, halted between us and the threatening spear points, and raised one hand commandingly.

Instantly every spear point dropped, and the form in white turned slowly and surveyed us.

CHAPTER V.

ASTONISHING DISCLOSURES.

Our protector was a woman. Her delicate features, the shell-like tint of her cheeks, her long, sunny hair, her graceful form, all testified to that.

She was clad in a clinging robe of white, edged with gold galloon; buskins of white and gold covered her small feet, and around her brows was a gold ribbon. She wore no head covering, and her wealth of yellow tresses flowed about her like a veil, even to her waist.

Never had I beheld such rare loveliness, and twenty years of sea had not blunted my appreciation of the divine in woman. An exclamation of astonishment and admiration fell from my lips.

Nor was the astonishment all on our part. Surprise and wonder were mirrored in the woman's wide, blue eyes.

Although thankful for her timely intervention, I would have had my meeting with her occur un-

der happier auspices. A young man—I was but thirty-five—should be particular how he comes under the eye of beauty, and my water-soaked clothes and disheveled appearance made my position most embarrassing.

Prebble did not seem to mind it. He was smirking and rubbing his hands and pushing himself forward in a way that irritated me.

“Thank you kindly,” said he, bobbing his head and flashing his bald pate in her eyes. “Are you the owner of these beautiful grounds, madam?”

Our language was not hers. She stared at the professor blankly, and then shifted her gaze to me.

She smiled. Small wonder she smiled, with my learned companion ogling and ducking and making a display of himself.

“Hungry,” whimpered the professor, conveying imaginary things to his mouth and working his jaws, “famished.”

He turned to me with an unwonted luster in his eyes.

“We can’t deceive her into thinking we are

pagan gods," he imparted. "This is paradise, captain, and she is one of the peri."

"Stop your tomfoolery!" said I petulantly. "Your spectacles are hanging from one of your ears, one of your mukluks is gone, and you look as though you had been through a cyclone. She's laughing at you!"

"At us!" he tittered. "Both of your mukluks are gone, captain, and——"

I did not hear the rest. Looking down, I discovered, to my horror, that my feet were bare, and never before had they seemed so large or so out of place.

I reddened to the roots of my hair. A sailor and a gentleman may be excused, I trust.

She spoke to us, her voice like a flowing rill, rippling, musical. But her words! They were as much beyond us as ours were beyond her.

When she ceased speaking there was silence. I looked, perhaps, what I could not say, for she vouchsafed another smile, turned to the hairy ones behind her, and addressed them imperiously.

She vanished then, vanished whither she had

come. I gazed after her with eyes that spoke what my lips dared not utter if they could.

The fiends stole up to us fawningly, making signs indicative of good will, as well as suggesting that we go with them. We heeded the mute request, and were led off through the grove in the direction taken by the lady, Our Lady of Hope and Deliverance.

Behind us trooped the other detachment of Missing Links, equally harmless, and equally desirous of showing the amicable turn their feelings had taken.

"Where are we, professor?" I asked, for the third time.

"We have fallen," said he, "upon some uncharted isle in the tropics. You are Telemachus, I am Mentor, the maid is Circe. Beware, captain!"

"Folly!" I retorted. "Do you mean to say that we were carried on the anchor of Griffyn's balloon from above the arctic circle to below the Tropic of Cancer?"

"How else do you account for the flowers, the palms, the balmy atmosphere? We are cast-

aways, captain, and our lines, it seems, have fallen in pleasant places.”

I marveled. Yet how else could we explain the surroundings in which we found ourselves?

Presently we came upon a vista which seemed cut bodily from the “Thousand and One Nights.”

A palace arose before us; a palace with domes and towers of purest white, outlined against the blue sky.

A great flight of marble steps led upward to the façade of the building. On either side of the first step stood two stalwart warriors on guard.

“Such a magnificent building!” murmured Prebble. “There must be something to eat inside of it, captain.”

“That is my hope,” said I, “and the quicker we fall to, the better. I am growing weak in the knees.”

At the foot of the grand stairway, a man appeared as if by magic. Evidently he had been informed of our coming, and was expecting us.

He was of normal height, and wore a white tunic, edged with silver. His head was un-

covered, and his forehead and short, yellow hair were spanned with a silver ribbon.

His face was high-browed and almost of Grecian contour. His eyes were blue, as were those of the young woman, and as they rested on me a peculiar sensation sped along every nerve.

Mentality was the keynote of the man's eyes. The powers of his mind were extraordinary, and were reflected in his glance in a manner most strange and incomprehensible.

Not being versed in psychology, I could not explain this visual force. I merely realized that the eyes of this startling individual usurped the office of lips and tongue, speaking a language and compelling obedience.

Without a spoken word, the man turned on the hairy creatures who had conducted us to the palace. They quailed under his look, shivered, and slunk away.

Then he flashed an order to us. The next moment he was ascending the steps, Prebble and I at his heels.

Whether it was the hypnotism of the man's eyes, or a weakness caused by hunger, yet my

brain grew dizzy, I staggered rather than walked, and had but faint recollection of events for some time.

We were in a large room, it seemed, and more of the uncouth slaves were at work over us. In due course we left this room, and came out into another, where there were strange plants and blossoms, and couches covered with finest skins.

We reclined. Slaves hovered about us, giving us food out of silver dishes.

What we ate I do not know; but the food, whatever it was, was piquant and delicious.

With hunger finally appeased, I felt in a mood for sleep; but the professor was garrulous.

"Certainly," he sighed, with blissful content, settling himself luxuriously upon his couch, "this is paradise, this is the abode of the blest. I, for one, am very much obliged to Griffyn for cutting us clear of his balloon."

"He will answer for that!" I scowled, allowing a spasm of righteous wrath to cross my contentment.

"Will he so, my dear captain?" chuckled Prebble. "Where, and when, if I may ask?"

"Where?" I snapped. "Why, where else can I pillory him save in his own country, which his unprofessional conduct has disgraced? And when, you ask. As to that, Prebble, I promise you it shall happen directly we return to civilization."

"Return to civilization! We have already returned to civilization, captain. Ever since we dropped from the balloon we have seen, all around us, evidences of a most civilized and progressive people."

"You quibble," said I, with strong disapproval. "It does not fit your character, professor. You understand what I mean. We have here a very high grade of civilization, it seems; but what I had in mind was a return to our own country."

"And when will that be?" he asked.

"I'm in the dark as to that. I presume, however, that we have only to describe our situation to the people in authority here in order to be assisted to a home port."

He cackled. There was something in that laugh of his which always ruffled my nerves the wrong way.

“What is there humorous about that?” I demanded.

“I fancy,” he replied, “that you are building your hopes on a very insecure foundation. The rulers of this most delightful land may have other plans for us. They may not lend us their assistance as you so fondly imagine.”

“Certainly,” I returned, “they must have compassion upon us! People so artistic and so progressive must have hearts to be touched by our forlorn situation.”

“They are a rich people, and a rich and cultured people are always generous. They may not be able to help us, however.”

“Why not?”

Prebble loved disputation for its own sake. He was not always to be taken seriously when he grew argumentative.

“I am fairly well acquainted with the charted portions of the Seven Seas,” he went on, “and I have read extensively along the lines of anthropology and kindred sciences, but I find it impossible to identify those hairy monsters who came so near proving our undoing, or these white-

robed demigods who came to our rescue. Nor have I the least idea what country this is, or where it can be situated. If visited before, it certainly must have been written about. There is nothing in literature, however, that touches upon this favored country: Of that I am positive."

"Do you incline to the belief that we made an abnormal southing while on the anchor of that balloon? You doubted it when I mentioned the matter by the lake; and then, on our way to this palace, you seemed to swerve and incline to my original opinion. But my own ideas had undergone a change."

"It was physically impossible for us to be carried so far south," said he, after a little reflection. "We are in a tropic land."

"A tropic land under the arctic circle!"

"A paradox, I grant you. Yet we must believe the evidence of our senses and predicate equatorial regions here, or else we must doubt the evidence altogether, and fall back upon the assumption that we are *non compos*, and are not

to place any credence in what we see, or feel, or hear."

"Bah!" said I.

"I rather incline to the theory," he proceeded, unmoved by my disgusted retort, "that we are under the spell of the purple snows. It is very possible that we are still on the ice cap, in the sleeping bag, far gone with hunger, and freezing slowly. Our minds are benumbed, save for a few of its faculties, which appear to be abnormally alert."

This astounding theory quite took my breath.

"Nonsense!" I exclaimed, as soon as I was able to express myself. "Suppose you had been impaled by that spear down by the lake? That was not an imaginative spear, Prebble, and you would not have died an imaginative death."

"To drop into the vernacular," he smiled, "my frozen finish would merely have been symbolized by that spear. What we are apparently undergoing, it seems to me, is merely symbolical, and is——"

"You think we're asleep?"

"If we are, it would be difficult to awake in

a pleasanter paradise than this. For one, captain, I am not particular whether we ever leave this abode of bliss or not."

"How about your meteoric theory of the aurora?"

"It will be a distinct loss to science if that is never enunciated," he answered, with a dash of disappointment. "But"—and he brightened—"if you fail to qualify with your newspapers, and magazines, and the lecture platform, I believe I should be able to bear with my own disappointments."

"My principal reason for returning to my own country just now," said I firmly, "is to enlighten the Arctic Club and the world regarding Griffyn."

"Forget Griffyn, captain! His own safety seemed to demand that he cut us adrift. I am thankful that he released us from his balloon, for otherwise we should not have visited this most interesting country."

I had a sufficiency of his views, however, and while he talked on I went to sleep.

I was awakened by a touch on the shoulder.

Starting up from the couch, I encountered the eyes of the man who had met us at the palace steps.

The eyes bade me get up. I obeyed, and caught a glimpse of the professor, in a tunic of white and silver, with a silver ribbon snugly encircling his bald spot.

At this I laughed immoderately, but ceased when the face of our unknown friend turned on me in rebuke. The face was grave, ominous, and I read disaster in its every line.

Commanded by a look, Prebble and I trailed after our guide to an archway hung with arras in cloth of gold. The curtains were parted by invisible hands, and we passed through into an immense apartment, our eyes dazzled with a scene of gorgeousness I shall never forget.

Yellow and white and blood red were the prevailing colors of vaulted roof, lofty walls, and tessellated floor. The gleam of gold was above us, the sheen of silver on all sides, and our buskined feet trod tiles of jasper.

In front of us, at the farther end of the vast room, was a throne, with a crimson canopy. Un-

der the canopy sat a man clad in the prevailing white and silver; and wearing a crown that flashed with jewels.

On the topmost step of the short flight leading to the dais sat a regal figure in white and gold. I rubbed my bewildered eyes, for, unless they deceived me, this was she who had saved us at the lake.

The room was thronged with people in white and silver and white and gold, and a V-shaped lane had been opened for us up to the very steps of the throne. Rays of sun, entering through windows in the eastern wall, struck the tiles and threw wondrous patches of scarlet over the white-clad groups.

CHAPTER VI.

FURTHER PERILS.

Amid all this bewildering scene, the mind of Prebble was analytically at work. I could hear him mutter:

"The women wear the gold and the men wear the silver. How does it come that an island so rich, with inhabitants of such intellectual power, has never been heard of by the outside world? Captain!"

"Well?" I breathed softly.

"They still think we're pagan deities. We have been robed in the costume of the country, and you, with your black hair and dark eyes, look well enough, although a trifle out of place. Don't stand there like a dazed imbecile! Throw dignity into your bearing. Watch me!"

He adjusted his spectacles, folded his arms across his narrow chest, and peered about him with lofty disdain. But he was not of a size to foster an impression of haughtiness.

As we stood there, cynosures for all eyes, two

of the red warriors stole past us with velvet tread. Between them they carried our old sleeping bag, and laid it on the floor before the throne.

The man who had taken us in hand advanced, kowtowed to his ruler, and began to talk. They were queer-sounding words that came from his lips, and that they had all to do with us was evident from the astounded looks that continued to be turned in our direction.

When he had made an end, he salaamed and stepped back. Thereupon the young woman spoke to the king from her seat on the step.

Her remarks finished, the king himself indulged in a few words, and the man who had brought us to the throne room gave his attention to the sleeping bag. Our clothes were inside the bag, and were brought out and duly exhibited.

There was something else which our friend wanted, and he got it by burying himself to the heels in the bag. As I live, it was a quart flask of whisky!

"Look here, Prebble," I growled in his ear, "did you have that flask all the while we were lost on the ice cap?"

"I was saving it for emergencies, captain," he mumbled.

"And you never said anything about it!" I exclaimed fiercely.

I tell you I was saving it for emergencies!"

I was strongly tempted to lay hands on Prebble, but just then hands were laid on both of us, and we were hurried up nearer the throne.

The king rapped his scepter against the arm of the throne chair. A little man appeared; a little man with luminous eyes, and the nose and chin of a Punchinello.

In his hands he carried two metal circlets, each crossed with a pair of thin metal bands bent into concave form. He seemed to understand what was wanted of him, for, after saluting the king, he came to Prebble and me and placed the contrivances upon our heads. They fitted the skull like a cap.

I trust that so far it has not been necessary for an officer and a gentleman to dwell upon his veracity. That I advert to it here is simply because I have reached a point where the reader's credulity may receive its first shock.

Other shocks will follow, and I wish to lighten the blows by a manly and straightforward statement.

Prebble and I had dropped in on a truly wonderful people. The skill they showed, the arts they applied, the highly developed mental processes that were theirs, were the natural concomitants of a civilization marked at every turn by ways and means to us oftentimes inexplicable.

I am writing these experiences with painstaking care, and if the reader will abide with me to the end, I promise that he shall not only be instructed and thrilled, but convinced as well. Now, then, for the first shock.

The instant those metal caps were placed upon our heads, Prebble and I were put *en rapport* with these amazing beings. We could not only understand their speech, but our tongues were endowed with it!

“Strangers, whence come you?” demanded the king.

Prebble clapped his hands like a delighted schoolboy, pulled off his metal cap, looked at it

gloatingly, fondled it, and then replaced it upon his shining pate.

"From a far country, sir," he answered.

"What brought you hither?"

"Chance."

"And a drag rope," I added mentally.

"Are you from beyond the ice wall?"

Prebble blinked in bewilderment.

"I do not understand, your majesty," said he.

For once I happened to be a little quicker of comprehension.

"What is the latitude of this country, sir?" I asked eagerly.

The king nodded toward the little man with the hooked nose and chin.

"Eighty-nine degrees and forty minutes north," said the little man.

"Twenty minutes," I gasped, reeling against Prebble. "Twenty minutes from the pole——"

"How—what—why——" faltered Prebble. "The open sea—the ice—— What does this all mean?"

"Only twenty-three miles from the goal of my hopes!" I shouted. "Only twenty-three miles

from fame, from the greatest discovery the world has ever known! Glory!" I danced around like a wild man. "Twenty-three miles!" I roared. "Twenty-three miles!"

I started at a run for the doorway, anxious to leave the palace and race on foot over the twenty-three miles that separated me from the spot it was my consuming desire to reach.

Prebble grabbed me, but I kept on, jerking him heels over head. The two hairy warriors then placed themselves in my way, and I fought like a fiend to escape.

There was the greatest disorder in the vast room. The king was on his feet, and the court was in a tumult. I was fighting fiercely, my senses dazzled by my proximity to the pole. Had I used my reason, I might have questioned the reliable nature of the knowledge just given me; for how could I be in a tropical region and yet only twenty-three miles from the goal of my ambition? But I was in no condition just then to reason about anything. I was wild with excitement.

Food and rest had revived my failing strength.

A straight-cut blow from the shoulder dazed one of the hairy guards; it only dazed him, however. Had he been endowed with ordinary physical powers, it would have floored him.

The fellow came back at me, hissing like a wild cat. I saw his ponderous hand clench for a retaliating blow and his gigantic arm draw back. A shout from the king caused the second of the two guards to seize his companion's arm before he could strike. This diversion seemed to leave the path clear for me, and I turned to continue my mad flight. A foot tripped me, and I measured my length on the jasper tiles. Before I could rise, two bare knees were on my chest, pinning me down, and two hands were at my wrists, holding me powerless.

Prebble, white and apprehensive, drew close.

"Captain," said he, "you are beside yourself. What folly! Man, man, don't you know it is impossible to escape from this palace, guarded as it is? Even if you did manage to get outside, in traversing the twenty-three miles said to lie between you and the pole, there would be ample

opportunity to lay you by the heels. The whole country would be up in arms against you."

I ceased struggling.

"That is quite true, professor," I answered. "My enthusiasm ran away with me."

"Your enthusiasm came very near costing you your life."

"But the pole——"

"There is some wild guessing on the part of the gentleman with the hooked nose. Reason tells us that the polar regions are choked with ice. There could be no summer weather such a short distance from the North Pole. Either that, captain, or we are in a realm of enchantment."

"I don't believe in enchantments," I scoffed. "But enough of this. Get off me," said I to the giant on my chest, "and I'll be tractable."

The guard did not seem to comprehend. Prebble picked up the helmet, which I had dropped from my brows, and replaced it.

"Now tell him," said he. "By the aid of that marvelous ring he'll be able to understand you."

Some of the nobles had advanced by that time, and the hostile flash of their blue, compelling eyes

forced the warrior to arise and allow me to regain a more dignified attitude.

I arranged my disordered tunic. The sullen guards placed themselves one on each side of me, and one of the nobles stepped close and spoke sharply.

"This," said he, "is most unseemly conduct for the throne room."

"I was carried away by the knowledge that was imparted to me," I returned humbly. "I am very sorry I caused any trouble."

"He is very impulsive," put in Prebble, "altogether too much so at times for his own good. But at least, I assure you, barring a few little conceits and crochets, he is a very agreeable fellow."

"His majesty deals very severely with any infraction of court etiquette," went on the noble "Unless you promise to be more circumspect in your behavior it will be necessary to put you in restraint."

"Don't do that, your lordship," spoke up Prebble, in considerable agitation. "The captain means well, I assure you, although now and then he has

a poor way of showing it. I will stand sponsor for him."

The flinty blue eyes of the noble withered the professor for a space.

"And who will be responsible for you?" he asked.

Prebble was usually sufficient unto himself, and it was humorous to see him squirm and shrivel under the flash of the noble's blue orbs.

"In my own country," answered the professor, attempting a little dignity, but with scant success, "my word is as good as my bond."

Prebble was measured with a swift glance, and the noble turned away with a shadow of a smile.

"Is he laughing at me?" the professor whispered in my ear. "What does he mean by that?"

"Your ring's crooked," said I, completely restored to my normal condition of mind, "and it doesn't enhance the dignity of your appearance. Better straighten it, Prebble."

"I'm afraid this outburst of yours, captain," remarked Prebble, as he straightened the ring,

“will inspire the king to harsh measures against us.”

“I don’t think much of him as a king if he allows his judgment to be swayed by a little natural exuberance on my part.”

“You should have repressed yourself. The fellow in the skin robe is still blinking from the effects of that blow you dealt him.”

“But for a remarkably thick skull,” I returned, “he’d not now be able even to blink.”

The disorder had died away, and a measure of courtly quiet once more prevailed. The king had seated himself, and our guards, obeying an imperial gesture, returned Prebble and me to the foot of the throne.

“For ages,” said his majesty, “our mythology has taught us to look for two fiends who were to drop from the sky and bring woe and ruin to my devoted kingdom. Are you those arch fiends? Answer!”

By this time I had recovered my wits.

“No, sir,” I replied, “we are not the fiends you are expecting. They are coming through the air on a strange ship, and seem to be a little

behind schedule, but I assure you they will arrive, all right."

Prebble whirled on me, caught one of my hands, and shook it heartily.

"Neatly done, captain!" he whispered.

"I must beat Griffyn to the pole," I returned excitedly. "If he comes down anywhere this side of latitude ninety, I think that will block him."

"We will be on the lookout for the fiends you mention," pursued his majesty. "Meanwhile, as there seems to be no little mystery surrounding you two gentlemen, I shall be under the painful necessity of having you put to death!"

"Sire!" cried the young woman, looking up at the king and holding out her hands appealingly.

We started to enter a vigorous protest, but the king waved his hand impatiently.

"Princess Ylma, enough!" said he to the young woman sternly.

To us he added: "I am deaf to your entreaties. You have come as tradition says the demons were to come, you act strangely, and an ounce of pre-

vention, in this particular case, is worth a pound of cure."

The professor and I gazed at each other in wildest horror. For a space, Prebble appeared to shrivel up; then suddenly he expanded, a forlorn hope flickering across his pallid face.

Springing to the heap of garments lying on the sleeping bag, he picked up the flask, and carried it to the edge of the dais.

"We are very great prophets in our own land, O king," he averred glibly. "Behold the proof of our skill!" and he waved the bottle aloft.

"What is it?" asked the king.

"The Elixir of Life, sire! Drink, and you will renew your youth."

Eagerly the king grasped at the flask. Unwittingly Prebble had touched a button that connected with his majesty's dearest desire.

"Beware, your majesty!" cried voices. "It may be poison!"

Already the king had unscrewed the top. After hesitating a moment he smiled craftily.

"Drink!" said he, handing the flask to the professor. "If it kills you, I will let it alone."

Prebble took a swallow from the flask. Then I grabbed it away from him and took another.

This satisfied the king. Taking the flask from my hands, he raised it to his lips and drank deeply.

He was lost! As the fiery liquor went down, an electric thrill sent the hot blood racing through his veins, and he felt that the beginning of his rejuvenation was at hand.

“These are not the fiends who were to bring destruction to my kingdom!” he cried. “These are my good friends! Lord Nylis, they are in your charge—their safety be upon your head.

“Lodge them royally, give them the best of everything. Gadzooks, but I feel a different man already! Away with them, Lord Nylis! And as for the rest of you, depart from the presence. I would fain be alone with my elixir.”

Again was there confusion. During the hubbub, Prebble and I were conducted from the throne room and from the palace by Lord Nylis.

The flask of bourbon had saved us, for the time being. But at what a cost of danger to ourselves and vicissitudes to that devoted kingdom!

CHAPTER VII.

COLD FACTS ABOUT A WARM COUNTRY.

“Eighty-nine forty, eighty-nine forty,” I kept repeating to myself, as the professor and I followed Lord Nylis down the grand stairway of the palace.

I could think of nothing but that the culmination of my earthly desires lay only twenty-three miles away.

This Lord Nylis was the astute person who had engineered our entrance into the palace. At the foot of the marble steps he paused and looked toward the red warrior on the right.

Instantly the warrior's spear rang thrice against his shield.

“That calls my oyd car,” explained his lordship. “We are some distance from my palace, and must ride.”

The metallic crash of spear on shield had brought me to myself. At his lordship's mention of a conveyance, an idea flashed through my mind.

"Could we not ride to the pole?" I asked eagerly. "It is not far, Lord Nyliis, and I particularly desire to reach the pole."

He shook his head.

"It would be as much as our lives are worth," he answered.

A cold chill struck to my heart.

"What do you mean?" I faltered.

"The pole is in the land of the Churs," he went on. "They are brutes like these," he indicated the guards to right and left of the palace steps, "but they are not under our domination. Some of the Churs we have brought to submission by will power alone, and they are everywhere throughout the kingdom, serving as soldiers and menials.

"The Churs at the pole, however, are wild and ferocious. We never encroach upon their territory unless in quest of slaves. Ah, here is the oyd car. Mount, gentlemen!"

The vehicle now drawn up before us was a queer bit of mechanism. The bed of it was diamond-shaped, and had a large wheel at each

side and smaller ones at the points, front and rear.

Across the middle was thrown a very wide seat, and there was another narrow one, occupied by a shaggy Chur, in the front point.

"Home, Klimon," said Lord Nyls.

Klimon bent over a square box, and slightly raised a sliding cover, at the same time manipulating a lever on his left. At once we glided away, smoothly and noiselessly.

The vehicle ran point foremost. But what furnished the motive power? The professor was first with a question on this head.

"What is the power that drives this vehicle, your lordship?"

"We call it oyd," answered the noble. "It drives all the machinery in the kingdom."

"Oyd," muttered the professor. "I know about everything worth knowing, but somehow that has escaped me. Will you explain?"

"The force is magnetic," was the answer. "There is a mineral which we delve from deep in the ground and call zellin. The whirling of the earth creates a friction which makes of the

North Pole a tremendously powerful loadstone, so that it attracts every particle of zellin on the surface of the kingdom—and it attracts only zellin, and nothing else.”

“I see,” said the professor sagely. “You have a piece of zellin in that box on the forward point of the carriage.”

“Yes. That box is a nonmagnetic screen, and when it covers the cube of zellin the oyd power is shut off. But the instant the front of the screen is raised the attracting force sets in, and we move.”

“Most remarkable!” cried Prebble. “The amount of power is regulated by lifting the front of the screen?”

“Exactly. If the front is raised one-third, the oyd force, or attraction, is only one-third; but raised one-half, the attraction is one-half the power of the zellin cube, and so on. Hence we proceed at a slow pace, at a run, or, with the full power of the cube, we all but fly.”

Prebble struck his hands together in ecstasy.

“How large is the cube, your lordship?” he asked.

"This car is fitted with a twelve-inch block, which is a twenty-four-man power. A six-inch cube would be a twelve-man power, a twenty-four-inch cube would be a forty-eight-man power, and so on."

"Is the force of the polar attraction always the same?"

"Always."

"And always attracts due north?"

"The attraction is continually toward the pole."

"How are you able to proceed in anything but a straight line?"

"That lever on Klimon's left connects with the wheel at the rear point. The turning of that wheel acts as a rudder, and steers us easterly or westerly."

"Beautiful, beautiful! But if you wish to go south, directly away from the pole? Your rudder couldn't help you to move in that direction."

"Certainly not. When we wish to go southward we make use of the suboyd power."

"What is that, pray?"

"Do you not know that there is another magnetic pole? The other is simply a focus of mag-

netic power, and is the one that attracts the needle of the mariner's compass——”

“Ah, yes!” murmured Prebble. “That pole is located in seventy-one north and ninety-six west.”

“It is the source of our suboyd power,” resumed his lordship. “There is another screened box under Klimon's feet. This second box incloses a cube of soft iron. If we wish to travel due south, or in any direction east or west by south, the cube of zellin is screened entirely, and the cube of iron is switched forward on a movable arm. The ratio of power in the suboyd cube is exactly the same as in the oyd block.”

“How beautifully Nature has cared for you in this delightful country!” chirruped the professor. “Beyond the ice wall we know nothing of the oyd or suboyd powers. The force that attracts your cube of soft iron is barely sufficient to sway our magnetic needle. How do you explain the difference in the power of your country and ours?”

“I don't explain it,” said Lord Nylis. “It is one of Nature's inscrutable laws.”

We were traveling swiftly over a well-paved

road. The breath of June was in the air, green groves and flower-strewn meadows stretched on both sides of us, and as we journeyed I caught glimpses of strange-looking houses half hidden by the trees.

The people we passed, or who came down to the roadway to look at us, were all of a kind with the men and women we had already seen, albeit of lower station. But I saw none of them at work.

The country blossomed as the rose, yet no yellow-haired laborers were in the fields. I asked Lord Nylis about this.

"We labor with the mind, not with the hands," he replied. "What the oyd and suboyd force cannot accomplish, the Churs take care of."

My brain was overwhelmed with all this riot of new sensations and unheard-of conditions. Prebble and I had been dropped into a country as different from our own as our minds could conceive.

There were a thousand and one questions I wanted to ask, but their very multitude appalled and silenced me.

I thought of the pole, and, in spite of the savage Churs, I determined to reach it just as soon as I had familiarized myself somewhat with the ways of the country, and could plan intelligently. Certainly if I could not get to the pole, Griffyn would not be able to do so.

From the pole my thoughts wandered to the Princess Ylma. Her lovely face was before me, the rich cadences of her voice in my ears.

Ah, if fortune would be kind to me! If I could win her and carry her back to my own country and my own people——

I came to myself with a guilty start. What crazy notion had taken possession of me, that I should raise my eyes to a princess of the blood?

I tried to banish her from my thoughts, but her entrancing features and dulcet voice would not allow themselves to be ignored.

I recalled the smile she gave me; and then I recalled my missing mukluks, and turned toward my two companions. Prebble was just asking for a test of speed—he wanted to see how fast the oyd car could run.

“Full power, Klimon!” said Lord Nylis.

The Chur opened the screen to its full extent, and the carriage leaped away like a bullet from a gun. I clung to the professor, and the professor clung to me.

Houses, people, trees passed so swiftly that they danced on the sight in blurring lines. Finally we slowed down by degrees and came to a halt in front of his lordship's palace.

"Thank Heaven!" I exclaimed.

"Hurrah for the oyd power!" cried the professor, beside himself. "The most wonderful power on earth!"

"It is the making of the kingdom," remarked Lord Nylis, as he descended. "Follow me, gentlemen."

This palace, as was fitting, was much smaller and less ornate than the one we had just quitted. Still, it was a gem in its way.

On a terrace, amid flowers and shrubbery and splashing fountains, we reclined at length on couches spread with downy robes of fur. The heat was such that the shade of the terrace was most refreshing. If I had had a cigar or a pipe, I would have been in a seventh heaven.

Lord Nylis, having made us as comfortable as he could in the circumstances, excused himself for a space. Prebble peered at me as one in a daze. He started to speak, then checked himself, as though he dared not trust his wonder to words.

"Out with it, professor," said I languidly. "What problem is bothering you just now?"

"Not one problem, captain, but a hundred problems!" sighed Prebble. "I'm all at sea over this astounding adventure."

"Frozen fancies!" I laughed. "You're dreaming it all. We're still on the ice cap in the sleeping bag."

"I hope not, I hope not!" he mumbled. "All these experiences with things new and before untried are too interesting to be passed with any explanation of that sort. Of all the remarkable objects we have so far beheld, this"—and he removed the glittering circlet from his brows—"easily carries off the palm. I wonder, now," and he frowned, as his wits began working, "if we think in an alien language as well as talk in it? Does this ring exercise a power over our intellect to such an unheard-of degree, or——"

"This is too pleasant an hour to be disturbed with riddles past our solving," I broke in. "Suppose we consider a mistake we have made—a mistake into which I was led by yourself."

He lifted his brows. "What mistake?" he inquired.

"When the anchor picked us off the ice cap," I explained, "you asserted that it was carrying us south, and that the balloon was coming out of the north."

"That seemed a proper inference, captain, before we were informed of our proximity to the pole while in the throne room. Even at this moment I am inclined to take the information imparted by that hook-nosed gentleman with a grain of salt. However, in a country of so many wonders, perhaps it is not well to doubt anything. But—proceed."

"If Griffyn had come from the north," I went on, "there was another proper inference that he had come from the pole, perhaps had discovered it."

Prebble replaced the ring, and nodded, to signify that he was following me.

"We have now proof," I continued, "that Griffyn was going north when he snatched us off the ice cap."

"We both tacitly realized and acknowledged that error in our audience with the king," said the professor. He chuckled. "The ruler of this delightful country told us that two fiends were to drop out of the skies and bring trouble. You very brilliantly informed his majesty that the fiends were none other than Griffyn and his companion in the balloon. Admirable! That was, indeed, a happy inspiration. If Griffyn and his friend will only come down, and let themselves be discovered, I fancy the king will have confidence in your assertion. That, captain, will mean continued safety for us."

"But," I returned, "suppose the balloon comes down among the Churs!"

"That, I take it, would prove a *coup de grâce* for the Englishmen."

"I hope it won't happen," said I.

"Are you relenting toward Griffyn?" queried Prebble, somewhat surprised.

"I can't find it in my heart," I answered, "to

wish him ill to that extent. Think of the spears which we so narrowly escaped!" and I shuddered.

"I have a well-defined impression," observed Prebble, after a little reflection, "that we shall presently be put to it to look after ourselves, so we may just as well cease worrying about the fate that is to overtake Griffyn."

"Aye," was my answer, "we have bought our lives at the price of a flask of bourbon. No good can come of such a transaction;" and I felt moody and apprehensive.

"I have been expecting applause from you on the score of that flask of bourbon," said Prebble, a little hurt. "You turned a point concerning Griffyn and his fellow voyager being the expected fiends, and I shook hands with you, and—er—well, I gloated. Now you rebuke me for turning a point with the whisky."

"Not at all," I hastened to answer. "You saved our lives, and I appreciate your resourcefulness, even though I overlook the selfish manner in which you stowed away that flask while we were

on the ice cap. A flask and a revolver! I knew nothing about these, my friend."

"Each has done its part in preserving us, captain. The end, therefore, has justified the means. Let it pass. The oyd and suboyd powers are much in my mind. Here we have subtle forces, fully controlled and made to perform the will of man. The people of this land have invented themselves into that blissful state where labor is unnecessary. By sheer force of the intellect they conquer and hold in subjection the Churs, and make the hairy savages do menial service. The life of the ruling race seems to be a life of enjoyment."

"Which is not, and can never be, a successful life," I declared. "The dignity of labor is needed to round out the lives of this ruling race. If this situation has continued for any length of time, then something is due to happen."

"Captain," agreed Prebble, "you are probably correct. But, after our wearing struggles with the ice, a period of idleness affords a most refreshing prospect."

I nodded.

“But,” said Prebble, growing disputatious, “although the rulers of this land do not work with their hands, let us not suppose that they are idle. Their minds must be busy. And such minds! The mental effort necessary to keep the enslaved Churs under subjection must be enormous.”

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CHAPTER VIII.

A B O U R B O N M E N A C E .

“What is the name of this country, your lordship?” I asked.

“We call it Nyll,” he answered.

“And what is the name of the reigning house?”

“Boazar. Boazar III. is now on the throne.”

“Has he many children?”

I was slowly working up to the subject that was becoming as dear to my heart as the discovery of the pole.

“One only, the Princess Ylma.” His lordship’s voice saddened as he added, with a gloomy shake of the head: “Poor Princess Ylma!”

I roused to inquire why the Princess Ylma should be the object of his commiseration, when Prebble broke in ahead of me with a question on an altogether different matter.

“Whence comes this heat, Lord Nylis? You have the sun here for six months at a time, but it does not furnish sufficient caloric for a climate like this.”

"The friction of the earth in its rotation around the pole generates the heat," his lordship explained.

"But the pole is figurative," demurred the professor. "The earth can cause no friction in turning around a figurative axis."

"The axis is not figurative. The pole is a real one."

"Of course it is," said I. "What do you think I'm looking for, Prebble?"

He turned his head and blinked at me through his glasses.

"We're learning things, Captain Salis," said he, "that no two men outside of Nyll ever learned before." He pressed one hand to his temples. "Merciful powers, my head is splitting! This is morning, isn't it, Lord Nylis?"

"Yes," replied his lordship, "the morning of the long day."

"When do you dine?" inquired Prebble, moistening his lips with his tongue, and thinking, no doubt, of the good things we had had at the palace of King Boazar.

"In two weeks and three days," said Lord Nylis.

I was startled. Prebble nearly fell off his couch. His lordship noticed our astonishment, and added:

"We eat but three times daily."

"That's our custom in our own country," I commented.

"But our days are six months long."

I groaned.

"And you eat only once in two months?" I asked.

"Three months intervene between breakfast and dinner, and dinner and supper. We sleep throughout the long night."

"I'm not a bear—I can't hibernate," said Prebble, rearing up on his elbows and looking at me. "Captain, let's go home!"

Although his frame was meager and showed no results of high living, I yet knew that Prebble was fond of his meals, and something of an epicure.

"Home!" I exclaimed. "You invent the flying machine, professor, and I'll navigate it. Until

you do, don't talk about home. You're wasting your time."

"There, there, my friends," put in Lord Nylis smilingly, "we shall not expect you to abide by our customs in this respect. Eat when you feel like it, sleep when you wish. You shall have the run of the larder and untrammled use of the dormitory. The king's orders, gentlemen. My humble roof is yours."

"Many thanks, your lordship," said Prebble, himself again. "I am a man of science, but my stomach is my weak point. I believe that even now I could—er—relish a glass of—of—— By the way, what do you drink in this glorious land?"

"Water."

"Nothing but water?"

"We have nothing else. We find water sufficient."

Prebble was forgetting himself. Had there been any alcoholic beverages in the kingdom, that flask of bourbon would have been no novelty to the king.

A glitter came into the eyes of our host, and he rested a keen glance on my friend.

"I suppose," said he, "that your Elixir of Life is the common beverage in the land from which you come?"

Prebble coughed.

"It is not so plentiful as to be what you might call common, Lord Nylis," said he. "Not," he went on hastily, "that there is a scarcity of it. On the contrary, it is to be found nearly everywhere, but it is for the select few who are able to—er—secure it."

Prebble's quibbling was carrying him into deep places. It was a subject, moreover, which made me uneasy. I attempted to shift the topic.

"I should like to know something more about this Princess Ylma, Lord Nylis," I remarked, with assumed carelessness.

He affected not to hear me.

"You," he went on, studying the professor attentively, "must surely be of the select few who are able to obtain the elixir?"

"Why, yes," replied Prebble. "As need manifested itself, I have had my share of the potent fluid. I am a scientist, however, and know where

to draw the line. "Now," he went on, with abrupt eagerness, "about this oyd force——"

He was clearly as distrustful of the matter Lord Nylis was pressing as I was; also, he was seeking to give another turn to the conversation. His lordship, however, was not to be shaken. He clung to the subject relentlessly.

As I covertly watched the eyes of our host, an uncanny conviction that they were probing deeper than his tongue laid hold of me. What unplumbed depths lay at the back of his lordship's penetrating glances?

"You informed the king," Lord Nylis interrupted Prebble to remark, "that you and your friend are very great prophets in your own land."

The professor made a heroic effort to appear at ease, and to meet the issue plausibly.

"Exactly so," he returned. "My own prophetic line is scientific. The captain's, on the other hand, is exploring. Whenever he goes exploring he takes me along to furnish facts and figures, to work out various problems, to——"

"The elixir, you claimed, was a proof of your skill."

I wished, in my soul, that something might happen to draw his lordship off. He was paying out more than enough rope to entangle Prebble and to trip him. The less that "elixir" was discussed the better it would be for us.

"Quite true," asserted Prebble, with a panicky look in my direction.

"Then," scored Lord Nylis, "if you are a prophet, if the elixir is a product of your skill, and you know its virtues, and make use of them, why have you not renewed your own youth?"

Prebble was silent. He showed his good sense by not plunging into some far-fetched explanation that would give his lordship a chance to score again.

"And you"—here Lord Nylis turned to me—"is youth not a condition in much demand in your own country? Is growing old so agreeable to those who live in your native land?"

The professor answered for me. Perhaps he was even more afraid to trust me than he was to trust himself.

"Gray hairs command respect," said he, "and that is what our prophets demand more than

youth—the respect born of gray hairs and wisdom.”

This remark appeared to please Lord Nylis. The professor had touched his intellectual side, where he was strongest.

“It seems, then,” said he, “that your countrymen, particularly your prophets, reverence knowledge far more than they desire youth?”

“That is the case, your lordship.”

“Then, why do you give such a proof of your skill to your people? If it is wise to grow old in years and wisdom, even though you must die for it, why cater to folly with a beverage which keeps people young?”

“All men do not think the same on a subject so broad as that,” coughed the professor, no doubt wishing he had left his lordship to talk with me.

“Your elixir had a most remarkable effect upon the king!”

“I was assured of that before I gave it to him,” said Prebble.

“His royal will was completely overturned.”

“The elixir is warranted to overturn the will of any one, royal or otherwise.”

A troubled look, as I thought, crossed his lordship's countenance.

"It must be exceedingly powerful!" he exclaimed.

"I hesitate to describe the elixir's full powers to you, Lord Nylis. Possibly you would not believe me."

I was glad the professor hesitated.

"The Princess Ylma," I ventured, "saved us from the Churs. Naturally, your lordship, I should be glad to learn something about the young lady. The professor and I are deeply indebted to her, and——"

"Pardon me," Lord Nylis interrupted, "but the marvelous powers of your elixir have quite captivated my fancy. And yet," he frowned a little as he spoke, "I have a premonition that it is not well for the people of this kingdom to renew their youth by means of your elixir. I feel, my friends, that I must go deeper into this subject. It is new, and——"

At this juncture there was an interruption. I drew a deep breath of satisfaction, although certainly I should not have felt such profound relief

had I known, at the moment, all that the interruption portended.

Suddenly there came to our ears a loud shout from the direction of the road. We sprang up in time to see a large oyd car, with a dozen armed Churs and one Nyllite, sweep up to the palace steps.

The instant the car stopped the warriors and the man in charge of them leaped to the ground and rushed up to the terrace. In another instant Prebble and I were surrounded.

“Seize them!” commanded the Nyllite, who was captain of the king’s guard.

Six spear points pricked my breast, and six pairs of ferocious, bloodshot eyes glared into mine. The professor was also at bay in a precisely similar manner.

“Count Zylox, what means this?” demanded the indignant Lord Nylis, confronting the captain of the guard.

“The king is dying!” cried the count excitedly.

“Dying?” echoed his lordship, aghast.

“Aye, and through the māchinations of these foreign devils! Woe, woe to this land, Lord

Nylis! At this very instant King Boazar is stretched out on the dais, at the foot of the throne chair, rolling his eyes, gasping, and chokingly endeavoring to give his final orders."

"What does he say?" queried his horrified lordship.

"We cannot understand his pitiful attempts at speech," responded the tearful captain of the guard. " 'Whash mazzar,' it sounds like; 'whash mazzar, whash mazzar,' over and over again. Ah, this is a sorry day for our beloved country. Our good king! The last of the Boazars!"

He whirled furiously upon the Churs who were threatening Prebble and me.

"Bind the foreign devils!" he shrieked. "Their lives shall pay for this, and a poor enough forfeit it is!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE KING'S "PERIL."

Out of the frying pan into the fire is a homely expression, but it describes a situation which seemed to fit our case. The king was in no danger, but had used his "elixir" too freely.

Yet how to convince Count Zylox of this before we were drawn and quartered? That was the question.

"If you ever thought in your life, Captain Salis, think now!" cried the professor, brushing the sweat from his forehead with a fold of his tunic.

"Cords, cords!" shouted Count Zylox. "Bind them!"

"Lord Nylis," I exclaimed, "we appeal to you! The king is in no danger. I swear it!"

"Danger?" repeated the captain of the guard. "He lies like a log, I tell you, and his end is near."

"Not so," clamored the professor. "That is the way the elixir works. Did you not see me swallow it? And my friend, there? If it had been poison, we ourselves would be dead or dying.

Look out, you relic of the Stone Age, you're sticking me!"

Prebble brushed aside a spear point that was making itself too keenly felt.

"What he says is true," I averred. "In a few hours the king will be himself again."

"I will not believe it!" was the fierce response of Count Zylox. "Rather than bother with binding them, it would perhaps be as well for us to run them through——"

"Not that!" spoke up Lord Nylis. "The king has placed these gentlemen in my charge, and I am responsible for them with my head."

"But the king is passing! He is——"

"These gentlemen say not. I yield up my guests only on the king's orders, Count Zylox."

"The king is incapable of giving orders."

"He will issue them when he is capable."

"What if he dies?"

"In that event I take my commands from Princess Ylma."

Count Zylox was an exceedingly angry man. He stamped about the terrace in his buskins.

"My hospitality has taken a rather grim turn,

count," observed his lordship. "I must request that you have your Churs lower their weapons."

"And permit these foreign devils to escape?" cried the exasperated count.

"By no means. Guard them until we have further news of the king."

The count gnawed his under lip for a moment. Then he said:

"We will tarry three hours. By that time a courier from the palace will let us know whether the king lives or is dead."

"If he lives his wishes will be brought by the courier," said Lord Nylis, "and shall be implicitly obeyed."

"And if he dies?"

"If he dies, these foreigners shall suffer death by oyd."

"'Tis well," said the count, and gave orders that caused the Churs to withdraw and marshal themselves in a column behind Prebble and myself.

I sat down on my couch and Prebble sat down on his. This constant peril was most trying to

the nerves, for we never seemed able to tell when the lightning was going to strike, or how.

"This death by oyd," murmured Prebble, "what is it, your lordship?"

"If the king dies, and the Princess Ylma so commands, as she undoubtedly will in that event, your feet will be securely bound to the feet of your friend. A twenty-four-man block of zellin, properly screened, will be chained to your wrists; and a twenty-four-man block of iron will be chained to the wrists of your companion. The screens will then be raised by degrees. You will be pulled north, your friend south. First, a force equivalent to six men will drag at your limbs, pulling against each other; then twelve men; then eighteen; then the full twenty-four."

It was awful to contemplate! The very fiendishness of it fairly sickened me.

"It is the punishment for high treason," commented the count, glowering at us.

"Wait six hours instead of three!" implored Prebble.

"Three hours only!" snapped the count.

How slowly the minutes dragged! Surrounded

and guarded to make sure that we did not escape, Prebble and I endeavored to compose our nerves.

"I was afraid of something like this, professor," said I.

"It would be rather a humorous situation," said Prebble, "if these Nyllites weren't so ignorant. What a sight for gods and men to see King Boazar prone upon the throne, surrounded by his grief-stricken court, and only giving vent to hiccups and gurgles, and the two mysterious words, 'Whash mazzer?'"

The professor forgot his own desperate situation so far as to cackle with suppressed merriment.

"It's liable to be anything but a laughing matter for you and me, Prebble," I admonished him.

"How can there be a tragedy? The king will come out of his trance, and word will be sent to release us."

"Suppose the court doctors get busy with the king? They don't understand what ails him, and they may resort to heroic measures. He may succumb to the measures, but the elixir will be

charged up with it; and, of course, we are already charged up with the elixir."

Prebble looked worried.

"There's something in that, captain," he faltered. "I wish we could get word to those doctors to keep their hands off."

"What good would it do us to get word to them?" I inquired. "Do you think they would pay any attention to our wishes in the matter, one way or the other?"

"Possibly not."

"Certainly not. There's not a doubt as to the position we occupy in the Land of Nyll."

"Let us suppose," said the professor, "that the king's case is not aggravated by the solicitude of his physicians. Our dangers will pass, in that event."

"Very likely, providing these troublesome Churs are not goaded into something violent by Zylox."

The captain of the guard was still tramping fretfully up and down, itching to be at us, and yet not daring to override the instructions of the king.

"The count is in a hard row of stumps," I went on, to Prebble. "He'd give his eyes to see us impaled on the points of those spears; but if the king should recover the count would be called on to pay with his head for his rash actions."

"And Lord Nylis, too," added Prebble. "An execution by oyd," he proceeded, his thoughts taking a gruesome trend, "must be a particularly horrible performance."

"It has the electric chair beaten both ways," said I. "Slowly, but relentlessly, a victim is pulled to pieces."

A sickening pallor spread itself over the professor's face. Sitting upright on his couch, he shaded his eyes with one hand and looked off along the road that led to the palace.

"I wonder why some one doesn't come from the king?" he worried.

"No one will come until the king either dies or recovers sufficiently to tell his court that he has no intention of dying," I answered.

Lord Nylis, observing that some of the Churs were becoming rather overzealous in their guard duty, placed himself closer to Prebble and me.

A single look which he threw at the hairy warriors dampened their vengeful ardor, and they drew back.

"This condition of his majesty," remarked his lordship, turning to Prebble, "seems an odd way of renewing youth. And yet you declare that the elixir works in that manner?"

"His majesty took too much of it," said Prebble.

"Too much is dangerous?"

"Not at all. Too much merely stupefies."

"So the king is out of his senses?"

"Nothing worse has befallen him, Lord Nylis, I assure you. Are there many court physicians?"

"A dozen or more."

"Do you suppose the whole dozen of them are working over the king?"

"Undoubtedly."

Prebble could not restrain a groan.

"A dozen doctors, captain," said he, turning in my direction, "are apt to cause tragic complications."

The doctors, just then, were a prolific source of danger for the professor and me; and, second

only to the doctors, stood Count Zylox and the Chur guard.

"The physicians will do everything possible," spoke up Lord Nylis, hoping, no doubt, to set us at our ease.

"Could you not send word to the physicians," returned Prebble, "that all the king needs is to be let alone?"

"The physicians, I presume, do not understand the king's malady," said Nylis, "but certainly they can do no harm."

"Send word, anyhow!" implored Prebble. "Tell the messenger to announce at the palace that the strangers guarantee the king's recovery, but that the physicians must not mix up in the matter."

"If I did that, and the king did not recover," said Lord Nylis, "I should be condemned to death myself."

There was no use insisting, and the minutes continued to drag. It seemed as though I had lived an age before my eyes, eagerly scanning the road, saw a small oyd car come flying to his lordship's steps.

One Chur and one Nyllite were the passengers.

Bounding to the ground, the Nyllite dashed up the slope toward us, flashing the king's ring in his hand.

"I come from Princess Ylma!" cried the courier.

Why the Princess Ylma? I asked myself. If the king was not dead, why was the Princess Ylma assuming the prerogatives of government?

CHAPTER X.

PREBBLE WORKS A SPELL.

“What of the king?” demanded the count.

“He recovers!”

“I told you so!” jubilated the professor.

“Is he well?” asked the count.

“Barring a headache. The lords in waiting are attending him.”

“What says the Princess Ylma?”

“That under no circumstances are the strangers to be injured.”

I began to breathe once more. Prebble was again his cocksure and assertive self.

The count came forward, and I thought he looked like a disappointed man. He bowed to us humbly.

“Pardon the disagreeable interruption,” said he. “When I come again it will be by his majesty’s command.”

He gave orders to his Churs, and they defiled toward their oyd car. The messenger had already

returned to his, and was racing back whence he came.

Presently the larger car got in motion, and we were left alone with our genial host, as before. Prebble, settling himself comfortably on his couch, continued to delve for facts.

"Regarding these Churs," said he, "are they animals, pure and simple, your lordship?"

"Whether or not they have souls," replied his lordship, "is a moot point. They have a certain amount of reason, but are so brutelike that only our superior minds hold them in check. A commission of our wisest men, appointed by the king, is now making experiments to discover whether the Churs are imbued with the immortal spark."

"They are all slaves?"

"Every one outside the great wall. If they were not held down with a will of iron they would rebel and seek to overthrow us. Fear alone keeps the horde of Churs back of the great wall. If they once lost this fear they would swarm over the wall and lay this kingdom in ashes."

"Wall?" queried the professor, scenting another mystery.

“Boazar I., of illustrious memory, encircled the land of the Churs with a great wall of granite. Since then our minds have developed in power to an extent that gives us no fear of our traditional enemies. The only disaster that could befall us would be a dethronement of reason, an eclipse of our faculties. This would give the Churs their opportunity.

“But”—and here his lordship straightened proudly—“our brains continue to improve, while the Churs continue to sink into barbarism and brutality. Some day we shall grow so strong that we can invade the country of the Churs, enslave them all, and after that gradually train them, and so better their condition. It is the dream of Boazar III. one day to emancipate the slaves. But this will not come for many generations, not until such an act is entirely safe.”

“You speak of the Churs as traditional enemies?”

“They were here when Lokai the Bold broke through the ice wall and settled the land, an event which took place in the night of prehistoric times. Then the Churs roamed through the sun of the

long day, and through the blackness of the long night, fighting, rending each other like beasts.

“Lokai warred with them, and drove them out with sword and spear. But sword and spear were useless against them. They multiplied amazingly and returned again and again to the attack. Only the irresistible powers of the brain were efficacious, and not until the descendants of Lokai began to develop and use these latent powers was there any peace in the land.”

“This is glorious,” murmured the professor. “It is an ideal state—a Kingdom of the Mind with the Powers of Darkness under heel. But here’s a point: Your ancestor, Lokai the Bold, penetrated the ice wall. Have your people never tried to reach the world whence he came?”

“Expedition after expedition has tried, but, in all save one instance, without success. The cultivation of mental powers has ill prepared us to cope with the rigors of ice and cold. Brute endurance is needed there.

“Nevertheless, in our own generation the ice has been successfully conquered by one Gneisen. He did not live to return, but sent back a gorr

plate tied to an eagle's leg. The gorr plate told us things of the outside world that have entirely wiped out all desire to know more about it."

"Gorr plate!" exclaimed Prebble. "The deeper we go the thicker the mysteries. What, in the name of all that's good, is a gorr plate?"

"It is a square of chalcedony, a thought record. We wish to communicate with one another, so we send thoughts and impressions, not words. On the chalcedony square we place our hands, we think, the thoughts record themselves in the plate. The plate is sent to the one we would have know our wishes or experiences, and he or she lays* hands on the plate and the thoughts of the communicant come to the brain."

Prebble jumped to his feet and walked around his couch. Then he sat down again, his head in his hands.

"Have you one of these gorr plates in your pocket?" he inquired.

Lord Nylis smiled.

"No; but if I had it would be nothing but so much chalcedony to you. Your mind—pardon me—is not cultivated along the proper lines."

At this implied doubt of his mentality, Prebble bristled up. The next moment, however, the irritation passed.

"Will you read this gorr plate sent home by Gneisen?" he asked.

"It is in the archives of the king's palace. But I have the gist of it in my mind."

"What were Gneisen's thoughts?"

"Horrible! He recorded impressions of two things in particular that filled me with disgust, and despair for the human race. One of these things was a thin silver disk, with a woman's head on one side and an eagle on the other. There was also a motto: 'In God We Trust.'

"The desire to accumulate these fetiches was so strong that people did not hesitate to betray a trust, bartering their honor and sometimes their lives for the insensate objects. There were those who had millions more of these than they needed, and others who had not one. It was a mad race, according to Gneisen, and many of the weaker were crushed, trampled on, and slain."

The professor looked at me and indulged in a

sly wink. His lordship was on ground familiar to us, but neither Prebble nor I had anything to say.

"What was the other thing that filled you with disgust and despair, Lord Nylis?" queried the professor.

"It was a brown fluid in glass receptacles," went on his lordship. "This fluid was even more insatiable in devouring honor and life than was the silver disk. It struck at the mind with sledgehammer blows, according to Gneisen, making raving beasts of sensible men, and finally brought horrible death. The wonder is that sensible men would have anything to do with it. Do you know anything about this fluid?"

"I believe I have heard of it," mumbled the professor. "Talking about gorr plates, is it possible to——"

Prebble thus deftly shifted the topic. The gorr plates were wonderful enough, but I was not particularly interested in them at that moment.

My fancies flew to Princess Ylma. Young, beautiful, only child of the reigning king—what could there be in such a fate to commend the princess to his lordship's commiseration?

I resolved to find out. At that moment Lord Nylis was deep in an earnest discussion with Prebble, and while waiting for a chance to put in a word on my own account I fell asleep.

How long I slept is of no importance. The period seemed brief, but it may have been hours in duration.

I wakened abruptly and started to a sitting posture. His lordship was gone, but on the couch nearest mine lay Prebble, Count Zylox standing over him.

Behind the count was the same detachment of soldiers that had accompanied him on his previous visit. The professor was just opening his eyes.

"You here again!" he exclaimed, starting up and casting a quick glance at the forbidding faces of the Churs.

"By the king's express command," answered the count.

"How is his royal highness?" inquired Prebble.

"He is feeling much better, and desires that you refill this flask forthwith." The captain drew the bottle from the breast of his tunic and ex-

tended it toward Prebble. "His majesty must have more of your elixir within the hour."

Blockheads that we were! Why had we not foreseen this contingency?

Still, if we *had* foreseen it, what could we have done to save ourselves? It is possible we could have stolen an oyd car, given the zellin cube free reign, and thus reached the pole.

Would we have bettered our condition by so doing? Might not the savage Churs have killed us out of hand?

There was no time to waste in useless surmises. Count Zylox represented the king, and the king meant business.

"Mercy on us, man!" gurgled the professor. "Do you think I carry a supply of the elixir around with me and have it constantly on tap?"

The count smiled sardonically.

"I think nothing at all. The king commands that I bring him the elixir within the hour. If you refuse to comply with his reasonable demand I am to convey you into the serene presence on the point of a spear. As to which I do, I am indifferent."

Zylox had educated his head at the expense of his heart. He had no kindly feeling for us, and orders were orders.

Poor old Prebble! I see him now as I saw him then, clasping his bony hands, shaking as with an ague, looking despairingly from the count to the file of Churs.

Suddenly he sank back on the couch with a muffled groan, his stony eyes upturned to the cloudless vault overhead.

"Where is Lord Nylis?" I struck in, thinking our host might devise some way out of the difficulty.

"Lord Nylis can be of no assistance to you," returned the officer frigidly. "Am I to have the elixir or am I not?"

"I must consult privately with the other prophet, my companion," said Prebble. "This is a matter of some moment. Have I your permission to engage my friend in a brief conversation?"

"Escape is impossible," warned Count Zylox sternly.

"I am not contemplating anything of that sort."

"Very well. Proceed with your conversation."

The professor got up, came over to my couch, and sat down beside me.

"Captain," said he, "were you asleep, or did you wake up in time to hear what was going on?"

"I overheard it all," I replied.

"Well, what are we to do in this case?"

"There's not a thing we can do, so far as I can discover. The king has sent an ultimatum. More elixir, or death to the strangers. It was a mistake to tell the king that the bourbon was a product of our skill."

"I presume," reflected Prebble, "that the whisky could be distilled, but it would take time."

"And the king is in a hurry!"

"We've got to fill the flask at once, or suffer the consequences."

"Then we must suffer the consequences," said I cheerlessly.

The professor's problems were growing more and more difficult of solution. Largely our present predicament was owing to the professor's extravagant claims with respect to our powers as

prophets. A prophet is not really a wizard, and yet my learned companion, in our conference with the king, had rather implied that such was the case.

While Count Zylox watched warily from a distance, and the barbarians of his guard stood ready to discourage any attempt at escape, the professor puckered up his brows and turned the matter over in his mind.

"You might as well give up, Prebble," said I. "Don't harass yourself with further posing. You can't conjure a demijohn of rum out of the air. Tell Zylox to do his worst."

"If we could secure another audience with the king," returned Prebble, "we might be able to do something that would postpone our fate."

"Don't deceive yourself. The king is thoroughly in earnest. When an appetite for bourbon is aroused, you know how difficult it is to combat it."

"I do—none better. The imperial appetite waits only upon the imperial will, and the king's word is law. But, captain, perhaps if I told his majesty that a little time would be required to

minister to his desires he would grant a stay of sentence."

"That would only prolong the agony," said I, "and what's the use."

"While there's life there's hope. So long as we can keep from being spitted on the lances of the Churs, or from being drawn and quartered by oyd and suboyd, I choose to believe that chances of ultimate escape will favor us."

"That may be. I am as anxious to live as you are, Prebble, for the object of my lifelong ambition has been to attain the pole. Now that we are so near the pole, it seems too bad that chance, and a flask of bourbon, should conspire to disappoint me."

"Suppose we could escape now," murmured the professor, with a wary glance at Zylox and the Churs.

"Such a supposition is folly!" I protested.

"No one knows what a man can do to save his life until he is put to the test. A rush, an exchange of blows, and a little of that fortune which favors the brave and the desperate, might carry us to the road and the oyd car. Then away,

captain—away!—with the screens torn from the cube of zellin, and our speed an eagle's flight!"

I stared at him in amazement. If my own action in seeking to escape from the throne room had been reckless and ill-considered, Prebble's present suggestion was even more so.

"You are out of your wits, Prebble," said I. "In the first place, we could never get clear of this press of Churs alive. Take that for granted at the outset."

"I grant you this, captain, that it is a forlorn hope, but better that than no hope at all."

"It is not even a forlorn hope," I went on severely. "Suppose we reached the car, there would remain the operating of it. What do we know about that?"

"We know what Lord Nylis told us on the way here," answered the professor confidently. "All one has to do in driving an oyd car is to lift the screen and steer."

"Admitting that we could escape from the guard and reach and successfully operate the car, where are we to go?"

"Anywhere! Safety lies in flight, Salis, and

where that flight takes us is not a particular point."

"Yes, it is—most particular. If we could get to the pole——"

"And fall into the hands of the Churs. Not that!"

"Well, I shall not join you in any such mad enterprise. If argument can't save us, force certainly cannot."

He got up and went back to his own couch. Flinging himself down on his back, he fixed his eyes thoughtfully upon the zenith.

Seeing that our interview had terminated, the impatient Zylox approached the professor.

"Have you decided?" the count demanded.

"I am waiting to be moved in the business," mumbled the professor.

"Time presses!" returned Zylox. "Again I ask you: Am I to have the elixir, or am I not?"

"You are!" screeched Prebble, hurling himself to his feet. "I told the king I was a great prophet, and you shall see I am not without honor even in this country. Observe! Watch! I shall work

a spell to fulfill the king's desire. Ah, ha! Room, there! Give me room!"

They gave him room, plenty of it. I feared that danger had suddenly turned the professor's brain, and that he had gone stark, staring mad.

He whooped, he howled; he threw himself into the most amazing attitudes, and fanned the air with his arms.

I looked on, horrified. Count Zylox gazed at the contortions of my learned friend in startled wonder. As for the Churs, their superstitious minds were imagining dire things, and they seemed more than half inclined to run.

Suddenly the air above us was rent with a terrific explosion. Simultaneously with the explosion the heavens were lighted by a flash of reddish fire, ghastly in the broad light of day.

Every eye turned aloft. A blazing balloon was dropping earthward like a lead plummet; and following the airy track of the balloon, at slower pace and with hair-raising gyrations, was a parachute.

Two men were clinging to the parachute.

recognized one of them as my rival, Griffyn; the other as Pollock, his secretary and companion.

The burning balloon dropped into the roadway, the wickerwork car, loaded with food, scientific instruments, and other impedimenta, striking the ground with a prodigious thump.

Griffyn and his companion alighted a moment later, on the terrace, and not more than a dozen feet from Prebble.

The Englishmen were stunned by the shock and lay on the ground in a state of dazed bewilderment. Without loss of a second, Prebble bounded to Griffyn, bent over him, searched his pockets, and arose triumphantly with a nickel-plated flask.

Turning upon the astounded captain of the guard, Prebble presented the flask, with a low bow.

“The elixir is not in the same flask, count,” said he, “but I do not think his majesty will be overparticular. It gives me great pleasure to comply with his majesty’s command.”

CHAPTER XI.

GRIFFYN AND POLLOCK.

Prebble was not mad; on the contrary, he was very level-headed. But what would he have done if there had been no flask in the pockets of either Griffyn or his secretary?

The professor afterward told me that in falling backward on the couch the despairing gaze he turned upward had encountered the balloon.

The airship was in difficulties, plunging wildly and making ready to fall. Griffyn and Pollock were even then taking to the void with their parachute.

“Ideas came rapidly,” continued Prebble, “for I was between the Churs and the deep sea, so to speak, and your life as well as mine hung in the balance. Chances were that either Griffyn or Pollock had a flask, and those were the chances I had to take. A special Providence watches over children and—and others, captain, and I got the flask.”

I think Count Zylox was deeply impressed. At

any rate, his hand trembled as he took the flask from Prebble.

The Churs were flat on the ground, face downward. It was their customary attitude when anything occurred which, to them, was supernatural.

Before the count entirely recovered, or the Churs arose, Griffyn was on his feet, and had advanced to where I was standing.

His face was vacuous, his eyes staring. He knew me, but it is one thing to cut a man from your balloon and launch him into eternity, and another thing to meet him again, front to front.

Finally he spoke, but there was no sense to his words. I answered him, and that he failed to understand me was evident from the blank look he wore.

What was wrong? Had I forgotten my mother tongue?

“Remove the talk ring, captain,” suggested Prebble. “He’s giving you English and you’re giving him Nyll.”

I removed the talk ring. While wearing it

I thought in Nyll, talked in it, and my own language was a dead letter.

"Captain Salis!" breathed Griffyn. "Captain C. G. Salis, U. S. A.! Can I believe my eyes?"

"You cast a brother mariner adrift in mid-heaven," said I cuttingly. "No wonder you are surprised to meet me again, alive and hearty."

"You took a base advantage of me," he protested warmly. "You attached yourselves to the drag anchor in the hope of reaching the pole neck and neck with myself."

"Rubbish!" I exploded. "You're a sane man, Griffyn, and you do not really think that Prebble and I would do such a thing, and run the risk of having our lives battered out against the top of some iceberg."

He muttered in his beard. At last he observed:

"We have been hovering over this country for hours, driven back and forth by one current and then another. The intense heat, or something else, burst our balloon, and the fire——"

"I have no interest in your misadventures," said I coldly. "You cut us adrift, and we were

saved by a miracle, only to find ourselves in the midst of a sea of dangers. It will be your business to share some of these dangers with us."

Pollock came up just then, bursting with questions. But Pollock was the kind of man I left out of my calculations.

He was the son of a rich distiller, I had been informed, and his father had helped him to a place in Griffyn's expedition by subscribing twenty thousand pounds to the exploration fund.

Count Zylox and Prebble were holding an animated conversation, and I donned my talk ring to take part in it.

"These are the two fiends spoken of in that tradition of yours, count," the wily professor was saying. "Take them back with you to the king, keep them in confinement, and watch them well."

"It shall be done," the count answered cheerfully.

He was showing a good deal of respect for us since the professor had worked his "spell."

"Tell the king," I put in, "that we request him not to deal with the prisoners in a summary manner."

Prebble threw a surprised look at me. He could not understand, I suppose, why I wished to spare the Englishmen, when they had shown no disposition to spare us.

"I will carry your message to the king," said Count Zylox.

Thereupon he ordered the Churs to make prisoners of Griffyn and Pollock, but the Englishmen set their shoulders together and prepared to resist. I had never doubted Griffyn's courage, so I was not surprised to find him showing his teeth.

"It begins to look," called the count to me, "as though these strangers would have to be roughly dealt with. Would you care to speak with them and give them a little good advice? I know of no way in which you could serve them better."

"I will see what I can do," said I.

Then, removing the mystical ring from my brows, I stepped up in front of Griffyn and Pollock.

"Don't be rash, Griffyn," I advised him. "You are outnumbered, and you have just come through a severe shaking up."

"By Jove!" he cried, brandishing his fists. "If

these swabs are sickening for something we'll do our best to oblige them. What sort of a way is this to receive strangers?"

"Be tactful, and you will find these people hospitable and kind. Resort to violence, and you will let loose a storm that will break on your own head. I know, because I have had some experience with the ways of the country."

"What sort of a country is it?"

"Really magnificent—and something of a paradox. The inhabitants are well advanced in the arts and sciences, and the labor of the ruling race is entirely on the mental order. I haven't been here long enough to make any detailed explanations, but I can assure you that a resort to fisticuffs will not prosper your cause."

"What have you in your hand, there?" he asked, surveying the object curiously.

"An example of the scientific progress we have found in this country," I answered. "This is a talk ring, and——"

"Talk ring?" he echoed, wide-eyed.

"Precisely. By adjusting it properly I am able

to think in the language of the people, and to talk to them, and to understand them."

"What bally nonsense are you giving me?"

"I am trying to tell you things which your incredulity will not allow you to believe," said I, "but, for all that, I am speaking the truth."

"He is," put in the professor, "but he is wasting his time. Count Zylox, in charge of the guard, is going to take you and Pollock, alive or dead, to the king of the country. Salis, out of a generous feeling toward you, which is not warranted by your past behavior, has volunteered to persuade you to go with the count without resistance. If you are wise, Griffyn, you will heed the advice of Captain Salis."

"Salis has something at the back of his head," declared Griffyn suspiciously. "What are you up to?" he flung at me, point-blank.

"Justified although I might be in acting and thinking otherwise," I answered, "I do not wish to see any harm come to you, Griffyn."

"You are trying to beat me out in coming at the pole. Something tells me that you are playing the game, even now."

"Where do you think you are, Griffyn?" I inquired. "In what latitude and longitude?"

"I haven't been able to take an observation for some time, and I haven't the least idea," said he.

"You will discover all about that, and many other things of interest to you, if you go peacefully with Count Zylox."

"I'll not!" he cried obstinately. "Here," he added, reaching out his hand, "let me take your talk ring. If it is all you say, I'll give this count a piece of my mind in short order."

Prebble looked at me and shook his head. He meant to signify that it would not be safe, just then, to make it possible for Griffyn to converse understandingly with Count Zylox. Griffyn might do other things besides giving the count a piece of his mind. For instance, it would have been possible for him to give information that would be a detriment to Prebble and me.

"I shall not allow you to sample the powers of my talk ring," I answered.

"Do you know what my impression is?" asked Griffyn.

"I don't know as that matters materially, but you may as well tell us."

"You and Prebble are mad. As Pollock and I came down on the parachute we saw Prebble throwing himself about in a crazy sort of way. Why did he rob me of my flask? Why did he hand it over to that fellow in the Mother Hubbard? There's a black business afoot, Salis, if it turns out that you and your friend are not mad."

"Will you go peaceably?" I asked, to cut the conference short.

"We are going to fight to the last breath!" he averred.

I put on the talk ring and stepped back.

"They won't listen to reason, Count Zylox," said I. "Take them, but do it carefully."

Again the count ordered his Churs to make prisoners of Griffyn and Pollock. Although they resisted like true Britons, they were easily overcome and borne away. Zylox would also have carried off the wreck of the balloon had not Prebble vigorously objected.

I could not imagine what Prebble wanted with

the remains of the airship. In due course, however, his ideas were communicated to me, and I found them particularly bright.

The departure of Zylox and the guard with the prisoners left Prebble and me alone, and to our own devices.

During these momentous events, Lord Nylis had not shown himself. Nor had any one issued from the palace to make inquiries, or to take part in the proceedings.

CHAPTER XII.

FLIGHT.

The hour was ripe for something of moment to transpire, and I was not kept long in suspense.

"Now, captain," said Prebble, after a swift precautionary glance around us, "we must get to work without loss of time."

"At what sort of work?" I inquired.

"You will find out presently. We must act first, and then do our talking."

He gathered up his tunic about his thin legs, and put off down the terrace toward the road. I hurried along in his wake and joined him beside the wickerwork balloon car.

Nothing remained of the basket but a jumble of broken reeds. There was a water can, knocked into a cocked hat, and trickling its contents over the road; also a number of scientific instruments, a shotgun and cartridge belt, and a bag containing pemmican and ship's biscuit.

The scientific instruments were ruined, but the

bag of food was in good condition, and the gun and ammunition appeared to be uninjured.

"Bring the biscuit and pemmican, captain," said Prebble, taking possession of the firearm and belt. "We'll stow these away where we can find them when wanted, and then hold a council of war."

The articles were hidden in a clump of bushes, and we returned to our couches on the terrace. Prebble was rubbing his hands delightedly.

"I counted on finding the food," said he, "but the shotgun and the ammunition were a stroke of luck. Just what we needed, too."

"You're thinking of making a run for it, are you?" I asked.

"Sh-h-h!" he returned, looking around apprehensively.

Coming over to my couch, he sat down beside me.

"There's nothing else for it, captain," he proceeded.

"I am of your opinion," I returned.

"Our position here is becoming untenable," he resumed. "The king will want more of the elixir, and if it is not forthcoming we will be impaled

on the same spear and conveyed into the royal presence."

"We might have reasoned that out before," said I.

"I thought it, but we needed time in which to recuperate after our long fast, and to adjust ourselves to certain conditions of the country. Food and rest have prepared us physically, and now that we are acquainted with the mechanism of the oyd car, and are possessed of a shotgun and a bag of food, we are well equipped for flight."

"We must have the car."

"Cars are plentiful. We will lie in wait along the road; then, with the aid of the shotgun, you can take possession of the first car that comes along. After that, away to the south, en route for home!"

"To the south!" I exclaimed.

"Certainly! We can't go astray, captain. The cube of iron will draw us along the proper road. We will make in the direction of least resistance."

"Good heavens!" I cried. "Do you think the

oyd car will carry us over the ice wall and the open sea?"

"How do we know there is an open sea? As for the ice wall, *que transtulit, sustinet*. Our good star is above us. South we must go—it is the only way."

"It is not the only way!" I declared. "Our hope lies in the zellin cube, and we must go whither it takes us."

"To the land of the Churs, my dear sir!" palpitated Prebble. "We would be slaughtered on sight. Have you not had sufficient experience with these man brutes?"

"Remember how superstitious the Churs are," I urged. "The report of that revolver was enough to vanquish them, and now we have a shotgun. Think of that!"

"I read you, captain," said the professor, disgruntled. "Griffyn has arrived. Your fear that he will reach the pole first impels you to take any chance, however desperate. I go south, sir!"

"And I go north!" I returned firmly. "We will divide the pemmican and the ship's biscuit."

"And the shotgun?" he asked coolly.

“We will draw straws for the shotgun. You can get your own oyd çar, and I will——”

“We cannot quarrel over this matter,” interrupted Prebble, “nor can we divide our slender force and resources in the face of such a desperate contingency. We must stand or fall together, Captain Salis.”

“I am in charge of the expedition,” said I sternly. “When you joined it you agreed to obey orders.”

“You are quite correct,” he answered. “I was overlooking that point.”

“I am resolved to bear away to the land of the Churs. That is what we shall do. You are under my orders, and you will obey whatever——”

“Hist! His lordship!”

I looked up hastily. Lord Nylis was approaching us across the terrace. Klimon, in the road below, was sitting in the point of his lordship's conveyance.

“Gentlemen,” began Lord Nylis, his face troubled, “the fame of your elixir has spread throughout the kingdom. To the lords in waiting his majesty has described its effects upon the system

so eloquently that all are wild to try the new fluid for themselves. The second flask the king claims as his own to the last drop.

“But he orders you, through me, to work another spell for one thousand keeses of the elixir. If not too much trouble to you, he desires that you have it fall at the palace steps. Menials are already waiting there with goblets.”

My heart smote wildly against my ribs. Had we been too late with our plans for flight?

“How much is a keese, your lordship?” Prebble inquired, with a businesslike air.

“Two blicks make one keese. A blick, I should say, is about the quantity contained in the second flask.”

“In other words,” said Prebble briskly, “the king wants two thousand flasks of our elixir rained down in front of his palace?”

“The menials are waiting,” his lordship repeated, “and the king’s household is impatient.”

“We shall have to repair to the king’s palace to make the incantation,” said Prebble.

While speaking, he telegraphed me a message

with his eyes. If we fled, it must be now or never.

Whether north or south made little difference. The thing was to get away before the household grew too impatient.

"I imagined as much," remarked his lordship gravely. "If you gentlemen will descend to the oyd car I will retire into the palace for ten minutes, or less, and rejoin you the moment I have finished the business that detains me. This is important, or I should not delay."

Nothing could have been more opportune. His lordship went one way, and Prebble and I the other.

"The bag of food and the gun," muttered Prebble. "We must have those before we go to the oyd car."

Proceeding to the clump of bushes, we brought out the articles. As the executive end of the expedition, I assumed charge of the gun and belt, strapping the latter over my tunic, about my waist.

Next we stole silently upon the oyd car. Approaching the unconscious Klimon from the rear

I tumbled him incontinently into the road, and jumped into his seat.

Prebble was already up behind. With the shotgun firmly held between my knees, I bent over the power box and lifted the screen.

Away jumped the car with a suddenness that almost threw the professor into the road. And not an instant too soon.

The dazed Klimon had bounded to his feet, and grabbed at the rear of the vehicle, missing it by no more than a hairbreadth. He pursued us, but he might as well have tried to overtake a whirlwind.

We were heading for the land of the Churs, and for the North Pole! All fear was lost in the excitement of the moment.

CHAPTER XIII.

PURSUIT.

My nerves were not so preyed upon that reason failed me; and while bending over the zellin box, one hand on the screen and the other on the steering lever, I had a few thoughts pertinent to the situation.

When we had left the king's palace Klimon had used the zellin cube. That meant, of course, that we had proceeded in a northerly direction.

To use the suboyd power, as represented by the iron block, would have been to drive back through the heart of the kingdom. Flight in that direction meant undoubted capture.

Another point: I was not sufficiently familiar with oyd cars to distinguish the iron box from the zellin box.

His lordship's car, however, had just come from the king's palace. The zellin cube must have been used, and, therefore, it was reasonable to infer that this cube was still ready for duty.

I did not pull out the screen to its fullest extent,

and thus give the car the full power. We could easily distance Klimon with half the oyd force, and I wanted to accustom myself to running the machine before urging it to its utmost.

The car was easily handled. The rear wheel was the rudder, and its resistance was strong in moving any way short of due north.

The "feel" of the tiller, if I may be allowed the expression, was an indication of the direction we were going. As I figured it, we were headed north by east.

Suddenly I was startled out of my reflections. Directly ahead, and bearing down on us, was the official oyd car containing Count Zylox and the detachment of the guard.

A groan came from Prebble.

"They're after us, captain!" was the burden of his lament.

I was of the same opinion. But there was no retreat for us, and we must go ahead and look pleasant.

"Keep a stiff upper lip, Prebble," I called over my shoulder. "Wave your hand and laugh as

we pass the count. He'll think we're out for a little spin, just for the fun of the thing."

"He may think we're bound for the palace," said the professor, reviving.

"He won't think that; we're going directly away from the palace."

"Then he can't be coming *from* the palace, can he?"

"No, but he may be after us, all the same. There! Now, hail him; laugh, and be hearty about it!"

The count had slowed down his car, and was watching us with surprise and suspicion.

"Ahoy, there, count!" I yelled, as we sped by. "How am I for a navigator, anyway?"

Prebble gave a laugh, but there was not much heartiness in it.

"Where are you going?" shouted the count.

"Yes," I roared back at him, pretending not to understand. Then I drew out the screen a little farther.

I could not look behind and manage the car, so I asked Prebble what the count was doing.

"He's keeping right on," returned the professor. "Great Colossus!" he sputtered, aghast. "What now?" I demanded.

"There's Klimon dashing along the road, captain!"

"He'll meet the count, of course. Tell me whether the count stops to talk with the Chur, Prebble. Look alive, now!"

"Klimon's right in front of the official car, Salis! The count has got to halt, or run over the Chur. Klimon's waving his hands. Ah-h-h!"

"Well?"

I dared not take my attention from my work to look behind, but had to depend on the professor to keep me informed of what was going on.

"We shall soon be pushed to the last extremity, captain!" cried Prebble.

"We ought to be used to that by this time," I answered grimly.

"The count has stopped his car and is talking with Klimon."

"That means pursuit by a high-powered car, a car that can walk up on us, hand over fist."

“Klimon flings himself into the official car,” went on Prebble, “and——”

There was nothing else for it—I couldn’t resist looking back. The official car was just turning to head toward us as I flung the look over my shoulder.

At that moment we sped over an uneven place in the road. I lurched wildly, and was thrown down on the zellin box. One of my hands was on the sliding screen, and as I dropped forward the screen was pushed home, abruptly shutting off the power of the cube, and bringing us to a slower pace so abruptly that Prebble, already wabbling because of the “thank-you-ma’am,” went by the board precipitately.

I had a fleeting glimpse of him standing on his head, heels in the air. Abandoning the professor was farthest from my mind, and I jammed down on the brakes, and brought the car to a standstill.

“Prebble!” I yelled.

He was lying sprawled out on the earth a dozen feet behind. As ill luck would have it, he was silent and inert, and apparently had met with

injuries which might prove serious. In the distance, approaching swiftly, was the other car. Moments were precious, but I leaped from the seat, and was about to start for Prebble when he suddenly sat up.

“Come on!” I shouted. “Hurry!”

Although dazed, he was not long in picking up the trend of events. He saw the car with its load of warlike Churs, and scrambled to his feet with more haste than grace.

“Merciful powers!” he stuttered.

He had almost gained the car when he whirled and turned back.

“What are you trying to do?” I roared.

Just at that moment I saw him bend and pick up the glittering circlet. The talk ring had dropped from his head during his fall and he had gone back after it.

“I couldn’t understand you,” he panted, as he scrambled to his place in our waiting vehicle. “If a is the count, and b is ourselves, then——”

“Never mind that!” I cut in. “Hang on, Prebble, for we’re going to start on the high speed.”

"Very good, captain! The more speed the better."

I jerked the screen half through the slot, and we shot ahead like an arrow from a bow. The machine was wrenched in every part, and I feared for a second that it would be riven to pieces. Happily, my fears were without foundation. The car held together and we flew onward like the wind.

"You're a poor navigator, captain," called the professor.

"This is my first experience with this kind of a ship," I called back to him.

"What did you do?"

"Tried to look behind. While I was about it, the machine struck a high place in the road, and the power was shut off."

He grunted. "It's a wonder I did not break my neck, captain," said he. "I was stunned for an instant. When I sat up I heard you call, but couldn't understand what you said. The sight of that other car was enough, though, to remind me of what was going forward."

"We've lost time when we had no time to lose."

"We are under the heel of fortune, and must put up with whatever comes. You should have shot Klimon. Had you done that, we might have escaped without having the official car take after us."

Dealing in such murderous fashion with even a Chur was not in me. Nevertheless, I could see now how it might have been well for us to put Klimon out of the way.

"Watch the car behind, professor!" I cautioned.

"I'm watching."

"What's going on?"

"The Churs are getting ready to use their spears."

What the professor had said about using the shotgun on Klimon had given me an idea. I was biding only the proper moment to put it into execution.

"They'll make short work of us, captain." shrilled the professor, "if they overhaul us."

"There's small doubt of that," I returned, between my teeth.

"I can see the count's eyes flaming like live

coals. Br-r-r! This race is offering him a chance to even up old scores."

"And he'll improve the opportunity if he can."

"They're gaining, gaining!" whooped Prebble.

It was useless for us to attempt to escape from the official car. It had a three-foot cube of zellin, equivalent to a drawing power of seventy-two men.

Our machine, on the contrary, was equipped with only a twenty-four-man block. Even allowing for the added bulk and heavy load of the count's car, we were greatly outclassed.

I opened the screen to its widest, and at times we seemed hardly to touch the road, so fast did we go.

"Are we holding our own, Prebble!" I cried.

"They're still gaining," he answered. "There comes a spear!"

"Where does it strike?"

"Ten feet behind us."

Half a minute passed.

"Another spear," chattered Prebble, "six feet behind."

I muttered an exclamation. The count had

gained four feet in thirty seconds, and something would have to be done at once.

"Prebble," I shouted, "come here and run the car!"

"I can't!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, you can; you'll have to!"

"What are you going to do?"

"Never mind. Time is too precious to waste in talk."

On hands and knees he crept to the forward point of the car, and slipped into the driver's seat as I vacated it.

"You've steered a boat?" I asked, my lips to his ear.

He nodded.

"This steers in the same way. Keep a firm grip on the helm, or you'll get a broken rib."

With this warning I crept back to the middle seat, the shotgun in my hand. The official car looked like a sailless junk, loaded to the gunwale with pirates.

Shields and spears bristled in the sun, and out of the center of the phalanx gleamed the white face of Count Zylox, gloomy and ominous.

“Stop!” he cried fiercely.

I paid no attention to the word, but riveted my eyes on the front of the official car. Two Churs sat in the point, one managing the steering lever and the other the screen. At their feet between them was the large box holding the zellin cube.

A quick thought plunged through my brain. I hesitated but a moment, and then, kneeling on the broad seat, I threw up the breech of the gun.

There was a cartridge in each barrel. Throwing the piece to my shoulder, I took a long and careful aim at the zellin box.

A spear clove the air, narrowly missing my head. That was my signal to pull the trigger.

Bang!

The recoil wrenched my shoulder, and nearly threw me from the seat. When the smoke lifted, I saw that I had worked havoc enough.

That single charge had torn away the front and side of the zellin box, caused trouble with the steering gear, and pricked the shins of the Churs in the point.

The driver and the helmsman, scared out of

their wits, had hurled themselves into the road. The rest of their red companions followed them and flattened out along the ground, leaving only Count Zylox in the car.

What contortions that wonderful machine went through! Jerked ahead by a force as of seventy-two Churs, the broken helm thrashing in all directions, it zigzagged here and there, jumped aloft with wheels whirring, and finally crashed into a tree at the roadside, and lay a complete wreck.

Count Zylox, I was glad to note, had hurled himself from the car before the final catastrophe, and was suffering from nothing more than a few bruises.

CHAPTER XIV.

A TERRIFYING DENOUEMENT.

A wail from the professor called my attention from the scene behind.

“It’s gone, it’s gone!”

“What’s gone?”

“The screen cover! I drew it from the box to get the entire force of the cube, and the tiller jammed sideways and knocked it out of my hand.”

I was angry, for this carelessness of the professor’s was like to cost us dear. We were not pursued, it is true, but our car was running away with us.

The only power we had over it was to guide it a little to right and left. We could not stop or diminish the speed.

Our gait was that of the Empire State Express, and the track before us had suddenly widened into all outdoors. Where we had left the road I do not know, but we were racing across a broad plain, hot, sandy, level as a floor.

There were no houses, no trees, no rocks—nothing to impede our progress. This was well, considering our limited ability in handling the oyd car.

I peered ahead. In the distance there rose from the earth a cloudlike haze, funnel-shaped, and resembling the swirling vortex of a cyclone.

What was it? I had no time to debate the question, even had I been so disposed.

“The wall! The wall!” shrieked Prebble.

Yes, there was the great wall built to hem in the Churs. It stretched across the plain as far as the eye could see, and appeared to encircle the column of smoke, or dust, or whatever it was.

As we charged toward it, and it came plainer and plainer into view, I concluded that it must be at least thirty feet in height, of solid masonry, pierced with one brazen gate, toward which we were heading.

The gate, twenty feet wide, and twenty high, looked forbidding enough, but better a collision with that than with the granite wall.

“Port your helm, Prebble!” I shouted. “Port!”

As he moved the tiller I saw a score of the red

fiends silhouetted on top of the wall. They were looking at us, whooping, dancing, and beating their spears against their shields.

Prebble began a *pater noster*, but I cut him short with the remaining barrel of the shotgun, fired into the air. The Churs melted from the wall as if by magic.

"You see!" I shouted triumphantly. "This gun is going to do the business for us, Prebble."

"That wall is going to do the business," he flung back.

"We're heading for the gate!" I answered.

"Do you think we can smash open the gate and ride through the land of the Churs straight to the pole?" he retorted grimly. "Make your peace with Heaven, Salis! There'll be a smash-up in less than a minute."

"We've got to jump," said I, as calmly as possible. "Better to jump than have our lives battered out against the gate."

While speaking, I threw out the bag of pemmican and ship's biscuit. The bag struck the ground, sprang twenty feet into the air, and fell again in a shower of sand.

"And we've got to go through that!" cried the professor. "There'll not be a whole bone left in our bodies."

"Jump!" I shouted. "Follow me!"

Out I went, shotgun in hand. When I came down I must have turned a dozen somersaults.

The gun left my hands, and the talk ring my head. I ripped my toga to rags, and would have lost it utterly had not the cartridge belt held its remnants about my waist.

After a second or two I realized that I was sitting on the sand, watching a figure fly upward from the point of the oyd car, squirm through the air, drop, and ricochet along the ground, halting at last, a mere heap of humanity, in a wrecked tunic.

Was the professor dead or alive? As I picked myself up painfully to go forward and investigate, a crashing sound reached me from the gate.

Looking toward that point, I noted with wonder that the barrier had not withstood the impact of the zellin cube. The gate was ajar, various pieces of the oyd car piled in the opening.

Prebble was on his feet before I reached him.

He still wore his buskins, and was frantically engaged in tying the remains of the tunic about his waist.

"Yes," he cried angrily, "you *would* come north, captain! Reason, circumstances, everything pointed south. But, no, you would go north or nowhere. And now look at us!"

He picked up his talk ring and jammed it down on his head.

He said something else, but as he was talking Nyll and I was listening in English, the sense of it was lost upon me. It was clear to me that he was not very seriously hurt, and I went back for my own talk ring and the gun.

The professor was sorely out of patience with everybody and everything. He had had two falls from the oyd car, and the first one alone would have soured his temper but for the excitement attending the pursuit. This second fall was far more dangerous and annoying than the first, and I could not blame him for displaying some rancor.

"What's to become of us, Salis?" the professor

demanded, surveying me as though he considered our salvation my part of the work.

"I can tell you better about that in a few minutes," I answered.

I was dizzy in brain and weak in the legs. The only way I could hold myself upright was by leaning on the shotgun.

"If it isn't one thing it's two," scowled Prebble. "How are we to get out of this?"

"I wish I knew! It strikes me, though, that the farther we can get away from that smashed gate the better it will be for us. Come on, Prebble!"

I reeled to an about face, and began staggering off along the wall. Prebble shouted an angry protest, and I turned to discover that he had plumped himself down in the sand.

"How do you think I can move?" he groaned. "Every joint in my body is unhinged. Look where I lit," and he pointed to a gouged-out spot in the earth. "No man could hit the ground like that without being half killed."

"If we linger here until the Churs come out," said I, "they'll finish the job."

"I'm willing," he declared resignedly. "I've had *quantum sufficit*. Being flesh and blood, and not whalebone and India rubber, my body tells me when I have borne hardships to the limit of endurance. If you're bound to go on, Salis, good-by! It is impossible for me to accompany you."

"Buck up!" I answered.

"I wish I could, but I can't."

"Here, let me help you."

"I decline to be interfered with! I want to stay right here so that the Churs can have a good chance at me. Why are they hanging back? Why don't they show themselves?"

I looked toward the broken gate. The oyd car was heaped fantastically in the middle of it, but there was no sign of Churs to be seen.

"The roar of the gun has frightened them," I explained.

"It couldn't frighten all the Churs, but only those who were on the wall. Where are the rest?"

"I'm not theorizing about the rest. It's the present situation that concerns me."

"Remember what happened at the lake when

that revolver was fired. Those who heard the report dropped prone on their faces, but those who didn't hear the report refused to be awed by the description the others gave of it. There'll be a smother of the hairy demons all around us before long. Some messenger has revived and gone after them."

The professor's voice was hopeful. He appeared to be honestly glad that our misadventures were soon to be terminated.

His voice was strong and robust. From that I gathered that he was not so severely injured as he was trying to make me believe.

"Let me lift you to your feet, professor," I suggested, "and then I can support you while we make our escape."

He stared at me blankly.

"Escape?" he echoed. "Why do you talk about such a thing? Where are we to escape to? Is there any haven of refuge in all this region for you and me? If we go back, the Nyllites will catch us; if we go forward, then we fall into the hands of the Churs. There's not a spot in all this benighted country where we can call our-

selves safe. We should have gone south, in the direction of the ice wall."

I saw that I must reason with my companion and get him back into a normal state of mind.

"I'll admit, professor," said I, "that our situation seems hopeless; but has it not seemed equally hopeless several times before this? And haven't we always managed to slip through the gathering dangers?"

"There's got to be a first time, captain, when we fail to slip through," he answered, shaking his head forebodingly. "Personally, I think we have come to that time."

"I had hoped," I went on, taking another tack, "that you would live to give to the world your proof regarding the meteoric theory of the aurora. Possibly there is more glory in that, for you, than for me in discovering the pole."

"That's what I dislike about this Chur business," said he, a flash of pride crossing his dusty face. "That's proof," he added fondly, "which scientific men cannot dodge. They'll have to believe it! I intend to write a book that will place my name high on the scroll of fame." He got

up quite briskly while he was talking. "I am absolutely certain that my word is the very last on this meteoric theory of the aurora. From that *ipse dixit* there is no escape."

"Right you are!" I cried enthusiastically. "Suppose we stroll off along the wall and see what we can discover!"

He leaned on me for a space while he adjusted his glasses.

"I ought to feel grateful to you, captain," he maundered, "for giving me the chance to settle a question which has bothered scientific minds for years. I *am* grateful, believe me!"

"How are you feeling?" I asked solicitously.

"Better. I am not so much of a wreck as I had imagined. There are no fractures. Naturally, my dignity has suffered somewhat, but I——"

His voice trailed off into silence, for just at that moment an army of Churs had begun fairly to boil out of the gate in the wall.

These were not the ones who had heard the terrifying report of the shotgun and dropped

from the wall a short time before, but others, undaunted, and eager to fall upon us.

With fierce yells and spears clashing against shields, they literally swarmed in our direction.

"Quick!" panted Prebble. "The gun—the gun!"

I threw up the breech and the empty shells were automatically ejected. Then I plucked from the belt one of the few cartridges that had remained in it after my tumble from the car.

I pressed the shell to the breech. The next moment it is possible I swore, for I am a sailor, and the provocation was great.

"What?" faltered Prebble whisperingly. "Oh-h-h, what *now?*"

I looked at him with dilated eyes.

"These shells," I replied hoarsely, "are too large! I can't get them into the gun! Griffyn must have had two shotguns—we got the belt that goes with the other weapon!"

The professor tossed his arms and fell to the ground. I stood over him, the muzzle of the gun in my hands, sweeping a circle about me with the stock.

I forget how many of those rabid Churs I mowed down with the clubbed firearm. I can only remember that we were taken, tied together with thongs, and driven beyond the great wall, spear points pricking us at every step.

CHAPTER XV.

PRISONERS.

Prebble and I had been on tenterhooks ever since our arrival in this circumpolar region, but we had not faced a more desperate situation than the one that now confronted us. Personally, I would not have given a copper cent for our chances.

My learned companion, as was so often the case with him, was lost in contemplation of our strange surroundings, to the exclusion of the animal instinct of fear. His mind was grappling with scientific data, and was therefore too busy to consider our perils.

"Here," I heard him mutter, "we see the human faculties emerging through their chrysalis of brutality; primordial, obscure, but very pronounced nevertheless. How these heads and these faces would delight a Lombroso! There are no other savages in the world like these! If I could abduct one of the creatures, and take it

back to our own country, what a stir would be caused in the scientific world!"

"Unless I am greatly mistaken, professor," I observed dryly, "you will have a splendid chance to study these interesting savages at close quarters."

"I hope so, I do indeed!" he answered absently, and was off again with his mumbling. "How do they live? What do they eat? Are they monogamous? Do they have villages? That prognathous visage predicates cruelty and determination. Ah, very absorbing, very!"

"I don't see anything in the nature of tilled fields, professor," said I.

He lifted his bowed head, and became suddenly aware that I was marching at his side.

"No, captain," he returned, in an attempt to be sociable, "these savages are not agricultural. In one way or another, most savages are found to take a certain toll from Mother Earth, and I presume that these Churs must raise something in the nature of food, even though none of their fields are in evidence. The arts of the husbandman are very primitive in origin." Admiration

filled his face as he bent his gaze on a tall savage marching just ahead of him. "What perfect physical development!" he exclaimed.

"I can see little in these hairy scoundrels," said I testily, "but vast powers for evil. They are mere brutes—at the bottom of the scale, while the Nyllites are at the top."

"The Nyllites symbolize the mind, even as these Churs are symbolical of the matter," remarked Prebble. "The brilliant mentality of the Nyll kingdom reaches here for its physical power, takes it by sheer force of the will, humbles it and shapes it to various uses. Where could you happen upon a finer commentary on the power of mind over matter?"

"You are getting in too deep for me, professor," said I. "I'll warrant you, however, that if these Churs only realized their power, they could overrun the Kingdom of Nyll and lay it waste."

The professor shuddered.

"What a catastrophe that would be!" he murmured. "Think of the gorgeous palaces, the beautiful gardens, the wondrous inventions and discoveries of Nyll all lying under the strangling

hands of these brutes! Such a calamity is too monstrous, captain. It could never happen."

"What caused the downfall of the Roman Empire?" I asked.

"Luxury, effeminacy, too much wealth and power. All the empire became drunk with prosperity."

"And, as a result, the Roman eagle had its neck wrung, and was cast to the vultures. Am I right?"

"You express it very tersely, captain."

"Doesn't Nyll strike you as being much in the same way?"

He threw me a startled look.

"At times, captain," said he, "you uncover a rich vein of thought that strikes into profound depths. Yes, you are right. Nyll bases its power upon faculties of the mind that have been most astonishingly developed. If anything were to becloud those powers, the whole kingdom would be pillaged by these brutes, who are now confined within the great wall. The possibility is terrible to contemplate, and it quite unnerves me. But Nyllites are not exact replicas of the ancient

Romans. Although a land of idleness, the other kingdom is not 'lapped in sensuous ease.' Our experiences with the Nyllites have not been pleasant, yet we must grant them their due. I know personally that labors of the mind are more exhausting than labors of the body."

The professor was intensely interested in our captors. Without the wall, he had been willing to bide in hopelessness while the Churs sallied forth and dispatched him; but now he was in another mood.

"You realize, I suppose," said I grimly, "that we are prisoners?"

"These ropes that bind my arms at my back," he replied, "serve to remind me of that fact, captain."

"Do you also realize that we may be doomed to death?"

"That is quite possible," he returned gravely, "but I hope they will spare us long enough so that I may make some inquiries regarding their mode of life. An examination into their tribal customs, their language, the limitations of their intellect and their ways of war would be highly

diverting. They are but a step above the beasts of the forest, and may prove to be the true Missing Link that unites man to the lower orders of creation. If we could take one of them back with us, captain——”

“We have no visible means for getting ourselves away to our own country,” I broke in, “so let us say nothing of burdening our return with savages like these.”

He saw that I was out of sympathy with his aspirations, and I saw plainly that he was in a trancelike condition where his scientific knowledge was wrestling with recondite enigmas to the complete exclusion of his present unhappy state.

I watched the Churs, striding swiftly along and forcing us to hurry in their midst. Their faces reflected a purpose which was ominous, and aroused disagreeable thoughts of what was to happen to the professor and me.

There was nothing to be done, however, except to submit passively and face the end with fortitude. Something might happen to make the end more pleasant than the present situation promised.

I saw no buildings, nothing in the way of shelter even of the rudest description. There were no evidences of art and craft beyond the shields and the spears. These were well-made weapons of offense and defense, but suggested nothing more than war and savagery. I listened to the professor discoursing to himself:

“The facial angle, retreating from the prognathous jaws to the low forehead, prove these Churs to be bestial. They are cruel, merciless, superstitious—primitive children, as yet untouched by the faintest ray of real knowledge.”

Thus he mumbled, scarcely heeding the spear that accelerated his lagging pace. I also took notice of many things, but only in a perfunctory and general way.

For instance, in passing through the gate, I judged the wall of masonry to be twenty feet in thickness; I saw that the land of the Churs was ridged with rocky hills, for the most part barren; I felt the earth to be uncomfortably warm under my feet, and when we waded a small stream, the water was hot to my flesh.

In the distance that column of cloudlike vapor

trailed skyward, bending and twisting at the crest, and spreading out so that the sun resembled a fiery ball in a drifting shroud. On and on we walked, until we turned into a defile among the gaunt rocks.

Spears struck shields in a ringing clamor, and, presto, the bowlders spewed out a perfect mob of unkempt creatures, who ran toward us, some erect and some on all fours.

"Women and children," droned Prebble; "very curious, very. Evidently these creatures are cave dwellers; possibly survivors of the Stone Age, and, as such, our progenitors. I should like their measurements on the Bertillon system."

The women and children surveyed us in awe. The professor, however, claimed most of their attention, their eyes being focused on his head and spectacles—the spectacles and buskins being about all that remained to him of his former state.

We were goaded into a vile-smelling hole in the rocky hillside, and were made to sit down while our feet were pinioned. Then, perfectly helpless, we were left to our own devices.

One of the Churs—so tall that he stood head and shoulders above the rest—barked out a series of orders. Immediately the creatures scattered, women and children with the rest, and began fetching armfuls of dry wood and throwing it down in a heap.

While this was going forward, other Churs arrived. Two carried the shotgun across their spears in front of them, not daring to touch it with their hands.

Four, with spears elevated, had our bag of pemmican and ship's biscuit on the spear points. That, also, I suppose, was a fetich, and to be handled warily.

Lastly came a train of grizzled warriors, each with a lost cartridge on the flat of his spear head. These were thrown in a heap beside the gun and bag of food.

"We're in for it," I muttered gloomily. "Don't you think so, Prebble?"

"Monosyllabic," he answered absently.

"What?" I queried.

He gave a start.

"Their speech, captain, is of the one-syllable

variety; that is, rudimentary. Now, the ancient Aryans——”

“Belay!” I interrupted, out of temper. “I want none of your homilies now. We have plenty of food for thought of a different kind.”

“Yes, yes,” he answered eagerly; “I should call it homonymous, or, rather——”

I lurched against him and brought him out of his vagary.

“Eh!” he exclaimed. “Did you say something, captain?”

“Look out there!” I answered brutally. “Lord Nylis said these creatures were cannibals, and they appear to be collecting wood. There’s a chain of reasoning to claim your immediate attention.”

“You think——” The professor grew pallid.

“I don’t think,” I answered, “I *know!*”

He pressed his clawlike hands together, bound as they were.

CHAPTER XVI.

A TRYING ORDEAL.

At last the professor was completely *en rapport* with our desperate situation.

"The world will lose my demonstration of the meteoric theory," he cried bitterly, "and you, Salis, are the cause. Outside the wall you offered hope. Hope! And look at us now! Upon your head, sir, will fall the consequences."

"I guess we're both in for the consequences," I returned. "By the mizzentruck of the great Harry!" I added, looking toward the wood gatherers; "there's a Nyllite!"

"A prisoner?" asked Prebble.

"No; he acts as though he had some authority among them."

"Strange!" muttered my companion, his eyes on the man. "He wears the skin of a wild beast, like the Churs, and there is not the same intelligence shown in his face as in the faces of others of his race. Here comes the tall man; he's a chief, I suppose."

The leader of the pack made toward the cave, followed by four others.

"They're ready for us, I take it," said I, trying to speak calmly.

"I beg your pardon, captain," said Prebble.

"For what?"

"For accusing you of leading me into this predicament. It has just flashed over me that we could not have gone south if we had wanted to."

"I thought it would come to you," I answered.

"We will meet our fate shoulder to shoulder," he went on. "It's not death that terrifies me; it's—it's what follows, in this case."

I laid my bound hands against his, which was as near a handshake as we could come. We differed often, Prebble and I, for we were two of diverse natures; yet I never doubted his innate manhood nor do I think he ever doubted mine.

There was something incongruous in Prebble's remark, just made, when compared with other remarks, remembered by me, of which he had relieved himself while we were on the ice cap. But I have yet to find a man who is, at all times,

perfectly consistent. Surely no scientific man can lay claim to such an honor.

Through the opening of our cave we watched the tall man and the four others. Suddenly the tall man came to a halt, grouped the four around him, and began a harangue. The guttural voice was pitched so low that we could not distinguish anything except husky syllables and staccato pauses between them.

“They are devising ways and means, I suppose?” said the professor.

“One supposition is as good as another,” I answered. “It all comes to one thing in the end.”

“This is a bad dream, an exceedingly disagreeable dream.”

“You still cling to that notion, do you?”

“Why not, if it pleases me? All life, my dear captain, is a dream. At least, so my fancy runs. An immortal falls asleep in Elysium, and what he dreams is a human life. Sometimes his dream is short, and sometimes long; sometimes it is sad and bitter, and sometimes full of happiness and hopes realized. But the immortal wakes, whether

his dream is bright or dull, and again he discovers himself in Elysium; and he realizes that he has been in Elysium all the time."

With my eyes on the gabbling Churs, I gave rather deep attention to this odd conceit of Prebble's. I had never suspected that he had a vein of poetry in his make-up.

"Very pretty," said I, "and, what is better and more to the point, there may be a little truth in it. But Elysium must be full of sleepers."

He muttered a few words under his breath, and I feared he was tinkering up another equation. But, no. Presently he lifted his head, removed his spectacles, and began cleaning them on a rag of his tunic.

At that moment, the chief came on with his four Churs, and the professor came to a pause.

The Chur chieftain unbound our ankles and motioned to us to rise. We obeyed, and walked out among the ragged rabble that surrounded the pyre.

There we were cut asunder, and the professor was led aside and made to seat himself on a bear-

skin. After this, the Nyllite stepped in front of me.

"You are from Nyll?" he asked.

"Recently," I answered.

"Where from originally? There are no black-haired men in Nyll, and no hairless men like the one yonder."

He turned and indicated Prebble.

"We come from beyond the ice wall. Who are you, if I may inquire?"

"Sertez, I am called. Banished from Nyll by King Boazar on the morning of the long day. Banished," he added acrimoniously, "because I dared to make love to the Princess Ylma."

He struck a note that made my hearstrings vibrate. I eyed him keenly.

"Princess Ylma would not receive your advances?" I queried.

"No," he answered, "but that is nothing. She does not know her own mind. Apart from that, however, she is promised to a man she hates."

"Who?"

"To Count Zylox, captain of the king's guard"

At last I knew why his lordship felt pity for Princess Ylma.

"Why will the king force her to a marriage against her will?" I proceeded, feigning carelessness.

"Because Zylox is head of the house of Almik, rivals of the Boazars. On his death the king fears Ylma will be set aside in favor of Zylox, and he wishes to unite the two houses."

Sertez turned and shook his clenched fist southward.

"I bide my time!" he hissed. "Some day I shall lead a horde of Churs into Nyll and steal the princess."

The next moment he shrugged his shoulders and tossed his hands deprecatingly.

"But enough of this. I suppose you know the fate for which you are intended?"

"I can imagine what it is to be. Have you any power among these people? Can you not persuade them to give over their horrible designs?"

He shook his head.

"Your companion will be spared," said he. "He is taboo among the Churs because of his

hairless head. We can none of us understand the reason; and what we cannot understand we believe to be supernatural."

I laughed bitterly at the inconsistency of the Churs. The professor would live. He might never be able to return to our own country, but his bald pate saved him from the disaster that threatened me.

I was near the shotgun, the small heap of cartridges, and the food bag. My despondent eyes fell upon them, and I noticed something, small in itself, but of great importance just then.

The cartridges differed in size! Had there been two sizes of loaded shells in the belt? And had I, in my haste at the great wall, plucked out one of the larger shells?

"I will ask you," said I to the Nyllite, "to take this cord from my wrists."

"You cannot escape," said he.

"Therefore, the less reason for you to hesitate in granting my request."

He removed the bonds. Instantly I picked up the shotgun, threw up the breech, and tried one of the smaller shells.

I tremble even now to think of that agonizing moment. Would it fit, or had I tried the smaller kind just without the wall?

The shell slid into the barrel, and I snapped the breech back into place.

“Glory!” shouted Prebble, leaping to his feet and waving frantically the bearskin on which he had been sitting.

He performed a dance, bizarre enough considering his regalia. The Churs, thinking I was about to make some attempt at escape, began closing in on me with savage cries and ferocious gestures.

I fired the single barrel into the air, and stood quietly under the smoke wreath, noting the effect. The result was all that I had dared to hope.

Down went the Churs, even Sertez sinking to one knee. Silence followed, disturbed only by the gabbling old professor, who, not knowing his bald head had saved him, believed the gun had proved the salvation of both of us.

Presently the chief got up on his hands and knees, crawled to my feet, and lifted a handful

of sand, and threw it over his head. Then he rose and yelped at the rest of his hairy followers.

Immediately a long line of the creatures began creeping past me, every one of them performing the same operation.

"What is the meaning of this, Sertez?" I inquired.

"As long as you remain on earth, O Thunder Maker," returned the Nyllite fulsomely, "you and your companion are the honored guests of the pack! Koz, the chieftain, tenders his abject apologies for the manner in which you have been treated.

"Those on the wall prior to the breaking of the gate averred stoutly that you were the Thunder Maker, but Koz would not believe. Now that he has heard with his own ears, and seen with his own eyes, he declares that he and his pack will be your slaves until you depart from the land."

"'Tis well," I answered, with dignity. "Tell Koz that we are put out somewhat at the manner of our reception, but that we harbor no ill will."

"He shall be informed."

"I also wish you to tell him," I continued, "that I and my companion are merely human, like the Nyllites. But we have power to requite evil for evil and good for good."

"There is no such word as 'good' in the Chur language."

"Then repeat the substance of my remarks in your own way."

Chief Koz, leader of the pack, seemed overjoyed when my words were translated by Sertez for his benefit. From condemned strangers we rose at one leap to the rank of honored guests.

The best cave in the hills was placed at our disposal, and two of the chief's sons were told off to serve us.

One of our first acts was to send for the bag of pemmican and biscuit, and to fortify ourselves with a hearty meal against other emergencies which we knew would be sure to arise.

CHAPTER XVII.

SERTEZ, THE RENEGADE.

Soon after we had finished our meal, Sertez looked in on us for a little chat. Prebble and I had just been discussing Sertez.

He was, by his own admission, a banished man; but I regarded him in the light of a renegade. He had said Princess Ylma did not like him—for which I commended her warmly—and that, in the face of this, it was his desire to abduct her.

No gentleman would express himself in such a manner. Prebble was of one mind with me, but advised that we tolerate the fellow because of his value to us in our dealings with the Churs.

So, when Sertez crept through the low entrance into our cave and then got up and advanced into the glare of the torch that lighted the interior, we welcomed him civilly.

He remarked upon the head room to be had in our quarters, saying it was the only cave in the district where a man could stand upright without fear of knocking out his brains.

He lolled on a bearskin, and we presented him with a bit of pemmican and a ship's biscuit, both of which he appeared to relish.

"I should think," said I, "that if the Churs can climb to the top of the great wall on one side they could drop over on the other."

"So they could," he answered, "but there is no need of any climbing. You gentlemen have demolished the gate, and it is now possible to walk through with perfect ease."

"Then why don't they do it?" struck in Prebble. "From the little I have seen of both countries, Nyll is far preferable to this."

"The Churs are cowed by the superiority of the Nyllites," said Sertez. "With one look a Nyllite can make a Chur drop his spear and run howling back to his wilderness."

"Then how can you ever hope to make a raid into the other country?" I asked.

"I have been waiting for King Boazar and the Almiks to come to daggers drawn. But now I have another plan. I propose to coöperate with you."

"In what way?"

"You seem to be possessed of wonderful powers," Sertez proceeded audaciously, "and if you could by some means blight the minds of the Nyllites, the Churs would immediately overrun their country and I could get the princess."

The shotgun was within reach, and I put out my hand toward it. Prebble halted me with a look.

"That is out of our power," said he.

Disappointment overspread the villainous-face of Sertez.

"There is no way you can help me?" he queried.

"No," I replied shortly.

"What is the extent of the Chur possessions?" asked the professor, at his old trade of delving for facts.

"Twenty miles from wall to wall."

"And what causes that pillar of smoke which we see to the north?"

Sertez looked surprised.

"I supposed everybody knew that," said he. "The earth, grinding around its great spindle, causes much heat, so that smoke and minute particles of dust arise and mingle with the clouds."

The professor grabbed at his head. After a moment he continued:

“What is the diameter of the North Pole?”

“One-half a geographical mile.”

“Round on top?”

“No, flat—flat as a floor. The Great Ziff lives there.”

“Who under the canopy is the Great Ziff?” I demanded.

Again the surprised look filtered across Sertez's face.

“Your ignorance astonishes me!” he exclaimed. “The Great Ziff, gentlemen, is head chief of all the packs. When the time comes to raid the land of the Nyllites, he will head the packs in person.”

“He is a warrior of prowess?”

“He is invincible in combat, a veritable lion. But the eyes of the Nyllites are too much for him, as for the rest of his followers. There are some peculiar things about the Great Ziff, gentlemen. For instance, he is not subject to the influence of time. He has lived many thousands of years, and will, no doubt, last as long as the earth endures.”

I saw a grin forming about the professor's thin lips.

"How do you account for this—er—remarkable longevity?"

"Very easily. What makes time? Days, of course; the succession of light and darkness. What makes days? The rotation of the earth on its axis. The Great Ziff lives on the end of the axis and doesn't rotate. Therefore, he is not subject to the influence of time."

The professor reached for the gun this time, but I grabbed it from him.

"Sophistry!" he cried. "The rotation of the earth, as you say, makes what we call a day; but neither days, nor months, nor years make time. They are but way stations on the eternal path."

"When you have been longer in the country you will know more about it," was Sertez's unruffled rejoinder.

Prebble grew red in the face, and only succeeded in calming himself after a great effort.

"How far is the North Pole from here?" I asked.

“An hour’s journey.”

“I am anxious to pay my respects to the Great Ziff——”

“Impossible!”

“Why impossible?”

“At a distance of fifty feet from the pole the terrific heat would scorch you to a cinder.”

“How does the Great Ziff get on and off the pole?”

“He rarely gets off. As for getting on, he was there when the earth began to rotate.”

“Nonsense!” whooped the professor.

“The longer you stay the more you’ll know,” said Sertez laconically.

“If the Great Ziff leads his subjects on their raid into the land of Nyll,” I put in, “he’ll have to get off the pole, won’t he?”

“He will,” answered Sertez. “When ready, he’ll come. Fire has no effect on him, and that is another of his peculiarities. It is said he is very fond of blue fire. He is served by little boys in red caps——”

“What folly is the man talking!” exclaimed the disgusted professor.

"And by monsters all head and no tail," continued Sertez, "and by hideous, slimy things that creep on the earth and slide through the air, and by——"

"Hold!" ordered Prebble. "We have enough of that. We're after facts, not fancies."

"The longer you're with us, the more——"

"Yes, yes, you said that before."

"The Churs believe these things about the Great Ziff."

"About what I would expect of their primitive minds," sniffed the professor.

"They run to physical, rather than to mental power," said Sertez, rising. "If I can be of assistance to you at any time, gentlemen," he added, "do not fail to call on me." Thereupon he crawled out on all fours, as he had crawled in.

"There goes the biggest——" began the professor, but paused abruptly. "No," he went on, "I won't say it. What he tells is hardly more incredible than the things we have seen with our own eyes since reaching these circumpolar regions.

"If we were to put our experiences down in

black and white for the benefit of our fellow countrymen, captain, they would call us monumental—I refrain again. The term grates on a sensitive ear.”

“Truth is stranger than fiction ever dared to be,” said I sagely.

A few minutes later, accompanied by our servitors Bigoll and Xit, we emerged from our cavern and started for the pole. Our den opened on a rocky defile, with steep sides, which it was necessary for us to traverse.

At the end of the defile we came upon a group of warriors who, grinning behind their couched spears, disputed our advance. I motioned them aside, but they would not stir.

We looked around for Sertez, thinking to make our wishes known through him. He was not in sight, however.

As a last resort, I fired the gun. The Churs quaked in their tracks, but did not fall, as had heretofore been their invariable custom.

“Let’s try the other end of the defile,” said the professor.

We did, and were met by more of the Churs,

who blockaded us as effectually as the others had done.

"We are honored guests, with a vengeance," I fumed. "What does this mean, anyway?"

"It means," replied the professor, "that they prize our company so highly they can't let us go. We must return to the cave."

This we did, and for one hundred and sixty-eight hours—which would have been seven days in a country where night and day recur in accepted order—we slept, ate, conversed, and made essays to begin our journey poleward. But we were unable to leave the defile.

The outlook was discouraging. Sertez kept himself in the background the whole time, and whenever we questioned Bigoll and Xit, by signs, to tell us about him, they shook their heads and grinned blankly.

Finally, in the hundred and sixty-eighth hour, Sertez materialized. He brought with him a silver box.

"You told us to call on you," said I, with some heat, "whenever we desired your services."

"I am here, gentlemen," he answered blandly.

"Where have you been?"

"Abroad, in the land of the Churs, organizing and preparing for the coming of the Great Ziff."

I noticed that he was highly pleased over something, and repressed his jubilant feelings with difficulty.

"What's on foot?" I asked.

"A messenger, one of the Churs, has come from the land of Boazar. He says the blight has fallen, and that the mental powers of the Nyllites are dethroned. They have become gibbering idiots, doddering fools!

"And now, *now* the accepted time approaches. You do not believe in the Great Ziff. But you shall see him come in a cloud of blue fire, with the little boys in red caps, and monsters all head and no tail, and hideous things that creep on earth and slide through air. You shall witness the gathering of the packs under the Great Ziff, and then, if you follow, you shall observe the overthrow of the Nyllites and behold Sertez and Princess Ylma united and holding sway under protection of the high chief of the Churs!"

He drew a picture which horrified me. For the moment Prebble was dumb.

Sertez laughed diabolically, and handed me the silver box and a little golden key.

"For you," said he; "the messenger brought it. He said it was for the stranger with the black hair and eyes."

I was all agog with curiosity. And so was Prebble, for that matter. Both he and Sertez watched eagerly while I unlocked the casket and threw back the lid.

"A gorr plate with the royal arms!" exclaimed the astonished Sertez. "Carnelian!" he added. "The plate is from a woman."

In the box was a square, thin block of a flesh-red color. I was excited, and my hands shook as I removed the plate.

"How do you know it is from a woman?" I asked.

"Young, unmarried women use carnelian for communicating their thoughts," answered Sertez; "grass widows use chrysoprase, the green variety of chalcedony; bachelors use a vari-

colored block of agate, and all other men employ onyx."

"How do you contrive to learn the secrets of the plate?" I asked.

"I will show you."

He reached for the carnelian block, but I thrust it behind me.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE GORR PLATE.

“This is mine, I believe you said,” I remarked.

“Very well,” he simpered, but I detected a flash of his eyes which made me distrustful. “Try for yourself, and you learn nothing. You are not educated up to it. Take the plate between your palms, so.”

He held his palms close together, illustrating how I was to hold the thing.

I did as directed. A delightful sensation, the very poetry of exquisite feeling sped along my nerves and centered in my brain.

Apart from this, however, no tangible thought impressed itself on my mind. What mysteries were locked in the plate? I burned to know, yet dreaded using the only channel lying open to me.

Sertez was a villain. Still, he was a Nyllite, and had been brought up on gorr plates, so to speak.

My impatience to receive the message over-

came my repugnance of the means. I handed the royal block to the renegade.

"Tell me what it says," I requested.

A gleam of satisfaction darted through his blue eyes. I knew I was playing into his hands, but I also knew there was nothing else for it.

He sank on a bearskin, the plate between his palms. Bending his head, he began in a low voice:

"The thoughts of Ylma, Princess of Nyll, daughter of Boazar III., concerning momentous events taking place in the kingdom, and concerning the black-haired, black-eyed stranger from beyond the ice wall, who is often in her mind and always abides in her heart!"

I was for snatching the plate from this renegade, my rival; but what he had said only made me wildly eager for more. I could learn more through him alone, so I suffered him to proceed:

"Wondrous and unheard-of things are happening in the land of Nyllites, and I am filled with fearful forebodings. The other strangers, conjured from the sky by the hairless prophet, were condemned to death by oyd, but saved themselves

by offering to deliver to the king and his people thousands of keeses of the elixir introduced by the little prophet with the glass eyes.

“Whereto the foreigners last to arrive have reared a strange structure filled with wonderful vats and called by them a distillery. Into this structure maize is carried, and from it keese upon keese of the elixir is taken, to the end that the whole kingdom may renew its youth.

“But if youth must be renewed at such a price, it is my prayer that the All Wise will suffer me to age quickly and die, that I may no longer witness the orgies of these, my people.

“The king, my father, lies constantly in a state of torpor, the gentlemen in waiting sing songs and hold wassail from hour to hour, the ministers have lackluster eyes and mumble to themselves, and the business of state is at a standstill.

“The people are even as the Churs, dull, besotted, reeling along the roads shouting, raving, filling the air with hideous sounds. They have become beasts and worse than beasts.

“Princess Ylma cries aloud in her despair to the black-eyed stranger from the land beyond the ice wall. Will he come to the rescue of the Hyperboreans, save this distressed people, and gain the eternal gratitude of his unhappy Ylma?

Something tells me he will not ignore this prayer, and that I am as much in his heart as he is in mine."

The voice of Sertez ceased. While speaking his tones had become soft and gentle, as though he appropriated for himself the thoughts of the carnelian block.

Then abruptly he leaped erect, with flaming face, and flung the gorr plate at my feet. In a voice husky with anger he cried:

"You, black-haired interloper from the antipodes, dare to raise your eyes to the Princess Ylma! You have the unblushing audacity to rival one of her own race! Miscreant!"

"Renegade!" cried I hotly.

"Captain, captain," implored Prebble, observing my clenched fists, "be calm!"

"Calm," I cried, "calm, when this banished scoundrel speaks to me in the manner he does? By the mizzentruck of the great Harry, he's the worst enemy King Boazar has! I'll do my first stroke of work for Princess Ylma. I'll attend to this beggar so his pretty plan for raiding the country will fall through."

Prebble stepped in front of me.

"Enough of this, captain," said he. "Remove your talk ring so that we may converse without letting Sertez understand our words."

I removed the ring, and strung it on my arm, meanwhile keeping wary and wrathful eyes on the renegade. I will say for him that he held his ground with great firmness, giving every indication of being a knave of courage—rather unusual qualities to find together.

"Now," went on Prebble, his own ring in his hand, "let me tell you, captain, that it is unwise to arouse Sertez against us. Our safety among the Churs is problematical. We are alive by grace of your being esteemed the Thunder Maker, but the renegade has power with the Churs, and might at any moment withdraw us from their favor. We cannot afford to take chances."

"The scoundrel has designs upon the Princess Ylma!" I flared.

Prebble looked at me keenly.

"Have you any designs on the princess, captain?" he asked bluntly.

"I am a man of honor," said I, drawing up

to my full height, "and that question is leading and highly personal."

"Be sensible, captain," begged Prebble.

"Am I not?" I growled, glowering into the saturnine face of Sertez.

"You are not, if you contemplate an alliance by marriage with the princess. She is not of your people, and she is of the royal family. Such a union would be a misalliance, and result in disaster. Believe me, Salis!"

"She is a beautiful girl, and as good as she is beautiful," I answered.

"And you have seen her twice, and talked with her not at all. Much you know about her, captain."

"I am an explorer, Prebble, but that does not deny some small amount of sentiment in my soul."

"Strangle this bit of sentiment. It has warped your judgment. Continue to harbor it, and you will suffer."

"Suffer?" I echoed angrily.

"Yes, suffer! Suppose you could get away from this part of the earth and return to other

parts we know better. Would you take Princess Ylma with you?"

"As Mrs. Salis, yes—if she would go."

"What would happen to the throne, in that event? When the times comes for Boazar to die, with Princess Ylma gone, the kingdom would fall into the hands of Sertez. Could there be a greater disaster?"

"And if Ylma were in.Nyll she would fall into the hands of Sertez. That, Prebble, is an infinitely greater disaster."

He smiled.

"You look at the princess through the small end of the telescope, captain," said he, "and at the kingdom through the big end. As a consequence, the importance of the princess is magnified out of all proportion."

"There is no use arguing with me, Prebble," I stormed. "I know my heart, man, and I will go my own way. As for this scoundrel, Sertez, I will save Nyll from his lawless intentions. When I am done with him there will be no chance of the kingdom, or of the princess, ever falling into

his unworthy hands. I consider it a duty to put Sertez out of the way!"

"And all this," muttered Prebble, "because of the thought waves imbedded in one gorr plate! Are we all mad?"

"Call it what you will, my mind is made up. Ylma has called upon me to save her father's kingdom. Pollock has released an evil which had its inception with us; we are at fault, and the least we can do is to pay heed to the cry sent us by the princess in that carnelian block!"

"Listen!" counseled the professor. "There is a possibility that Sertez did not translate the thought waves of the princess correctly."

"No possibility of that at all. He wanted to learn what thoughts the princess was sending to me."

"He may have repeated to you a message which is not in the plate."

"No, Prebble; the message proves itself to be correct. There's no side-stepping all that about Pollock, the distiller's son, flooding Nyll with that confounded elixir. It has happened, and all the rest has happened, just as Sertez told us. The

sentiments of the princess were correctly translated, and I'll lay my life on it. That gorr plate is a call to action—a command—and we cannot ignore it.”

“I am as eager for action as you are, captain,” said Prebble, “but what can we do if we tie our hands by antagonizing Sertez?”

“He is already antagonized. In me he recognizes a rival, and that is more than enough to set him against the two of us. Stand aside! I tell you, professor, I am determined to see this through to the bitter end. We must strike a blow for Nyll!”

“You are subordinating the welfare of Nyll to that of the princess. If you slay Sertez, captain, every Chur will be at our throats. Reflect, please, on that phase of the matter.”

“I have reflected, and I tell you there is no time to lose!”

Over the professor's shoulder was the evil, leering face of the renegade, taunting me and giving me a dare to do my worst.

In order to stop the professor's arguments, I

clapped on the talk ring; then I started, by a detour, for Sertez.

Prebble sought to hold me, but I shook him off. The next moment I hurled myself at the renegade.

He was slender, and quick of movement, and managed to avoid me. Ducking under my fist, he raced for the entrance to the cave, picking up the gun and cartridge belt as he fled.

"There he goes!" screamed Prebble. "He's stealing our thunder! Don't let him steal our thunder, captain!"

I tried my best to overhaul the rascal, but he clawed through the opening a dozen feet in the lead.

Down I went on my marrow bones to follow, and then, just as I was close to the exit, there came a crash, and the light of day was shut from my eyes.

A huge boulder, which had been kept in readiness, as I afterward learned, was knocked free, and fell across the entrance.

Prebble and I were imprisoned in the cave! Imprisoned and rendered helpless when we were

needed elsewhere. For my sole wish now was to get back to the princess and save her and her people from the doom that threatened them.

I could have imitated the army in Flanders. It is possible I did, although the memory escapes me.

CHAPTER XIX.

ESCAPE.

"What is that?" harped the querulous voice of the professor.

"A boulder blocks the entrance," I answered.

"Push it aside."

I had tried, without avail.

"A locomotive couldn't move it," I panted.

"Can't you squeeze around the edge?"

"The opening is hermetically sealed. That scoundrel designed this for a living grave, Prebble."

I crept back to the torch beside which my companion crouched, wringing his hands.

"Think of Nyll!" I said, in a hollow voice.

"What noble minds are there o'erthrown."

"Captain," replied Prebble, in an awesome whisper, "we were the demons referred to in the legend."

"Aye," I returned; "we saved our miserable lives with a flask of bourbon, and Pollock, the distiller's son, has completed the work. They

have built a gin mill, and the kingdom of Boazar is steeped in debauchery. The serpent has crawled into paradise! And the Princess Ylma! Merciful Heaven, what will become of her?"

I staggered erect and beat my brow with my clenched fists.

"The opportunity of the Churs has arrived," said Prebble, still in his awed whisper. "Led by the Great Ziff, the allied packs will sweep through the broken gate and lay Boazar's domains in waste. Awful, captain! My soul shrinks at the thought."

"And that arch fiend, Sertez, will bear away the Princess Ylma!" I raved. "We must get out of here. We *must*, I tell you!"

I crawled to the rock again and pushed until I saw stars. Not an inch could I move it.

"Come back, captain," called Prebble calmly. "Don't waste your strength. Come back and let us think."

"Can we think ourselves out of this hole in the hillside?" I retorted. "Action is what we want."

"Thought must precede action. Come here and be quiet."

There was a command in his voice, and I crawled back to the torch once more, and crouched opposite him, watching his face in the sickly glare.

It was a thin, strong face, the face of a thinker. His eyes gleamed and glowed as he cogitated.

I was in the mood for quick and decisive action, and the necessity of inaction galled and fretted me.

"First," said the professor, "we must calm ourselves. A passive brain evolves the most fruitful suggestions."

"This is not the first time you have asked me to be calm," I returned. "If my feelings were yours, Prebble, you would understand the uselessness of the request."

"I am as much concerned as you are, captain, over the troubles that menace Nyll. Sertez, the renegade, seems destined to have his day. If Boazar dies, and the kingdom falls into the hands of Sertez——"

"You have already spoken of that, Prebble," I interrupted. "If Boazār dies, and if Princess Ylma does not reign as queen, regal authority falls into the hands of Count Zylox. We were told, you remember, that Zylox is the head of another branch of the royal family. He is the pretender."

"You have not grasped my meaning, captain. Sertez, for his reward in helping the Great Ziff against his own people, will be given the hand of Ylma in marriage. Thus he will be the queen's consort, and undoubtedly elevated to a high place in the wrecked kingdom."

After the Great Ziff gets through with Nyll," I answered, in a hollow tone, "there will be nothing left to rule."

"The Churs will occupy the fertile plains of Nyll and will overrun and desecrate the palaces and the temples. Everything worth while will be trampled underfoot and destroyed, and the conquering brutes will brutalize everything good and noble with which they come in contact. In time, however, the Nyllites will shake off the stupor, recover their brilliant mental powers, and

reconquer their kingdom. It may require years, perhaps decades, but that result will be evolved ultimately out of the wreck. Nyll will have learned a lesson, and can rebuild its glory on a firmer foundation."

"Let's not forget, professor," I reminded him, "that our present business is to escape from this cavern. We are needed, and we must not delay or waste our time in idle talk."

"The talk is not idle, captain," replied Prebble. "My wits are at work upon this problem, and discourse merely sharpens them. I had no liking for this Sertez from the first."

"Nor I," was my response, "but we found ourselves of one mind on that point very soon after we fell into the hands of the Churs. In what way do you think we can effect our escape from this hole in the hillside?"

"An idea has not yet offered itself, captain, but I have an instinctive feeling that I am close to a solution of the problem. Let the talk go on; while it flows I shall suddenly see the light."

Here was another inconsistency of Prebble's. At times, while he was busy with his problems, he

wanted to be alone, and would bear with nothing that might distract him; here, at this time, he was eager for conversation, and declared it an aid to quick and effective thinking!

As my mind was entirely wrapped up in the princess and the sorry plight of her father and his kingdom, I was at a loss to put forward any subject for discourse. The professor stepped into the breach.

“What do you think of the Great Ziff?” he inquired.

“Why, that he is a great fake. He is a myth, professor, and the myth has been developed as a sort of check on the wild Churs.”

The professor shook his head.

“He is no myth,” he declared. “He is a symbol, indeed, but a living symbol. There is a vast amount of folk lore and tradition surrounding the Great Ziff, but the person himself is a reality. He is the real king of the Churs, and he keeps himself hidden because he knows that will bind his authority more closely around his savage subjects.”

“Why all that tommyrot about the little boys

in red caps, and monsters all head and no tail, and so on? "When Sertez was talking to us about those things you yourself halted him and asked for facts, not fancies."

"The fancies, as I now believe, captain, symbolize facts."

"I'm beyond my depth," I observed helplessly. "I see in the stories about the Great Ziff nothing but fairy tales—chronicles of the Cid and Alice in Wonderland. Surely you don't agree with the Churs that time has no effect upon the Ziff, and that he has lived always and will always live?"

"I believe the fact which that statement symbolizes," asserted Prebble. "Since man inhabited the earth the idea for which the Ziff stands has been in the background, immutable, eternal."

"But what is that idea?"

Prebble stared at me.

"There is sentiment in your soul, captain, and surely your wits should be able to match themselves against the nimble fancies of a lot of hairy demons like these Churs?"

"It's a puzzle which I have no time to work on, at present. We must do something, Prebble,

and at once. Haven't you thought of any way out of here?"

"I am close to something, captain."

His eyes, for several moments, had been fixed on the torch flame.

"That," said he, pointing to the flare, "offers the suggestion that may lead us to freedom."

"How?"

"The opening, you say, is hermetically sealed?"

"Yes."

"You are sure?"

"Positive."

"Then what causes that flame to bend toward the rear of the cavern? There is a draft, and there could be no draft without an opening?"

"Right!" I cried, overjoyed. "There is an exit somewhere."

He pulled the torch from its socket. Holding it in his hand, he walked slowly toward the back part of the cavern, watching the flame as it bent forward, directing him with flickering finger.

The roof dipped toward the floor. Prebble went down on hands and knees, still holding the torch and following as it commanded.

He trailed away, and I saw him weaving to and fro in the distance, the fluttering torch like a star. It was a star; our Star of Hope, if ever we had one.

Suddenly the little, reddish dot came to a standstill, and Prebble's voice floated back to me.

"Eureka!" he called. "Bring what's left of the biscuits and pemmican, captain."

I snatched up the bag—it was now light and of small dimensions—and followed my companion. He waited for me.

"You'll have a tight squeeze of it," said he. "When the great primordial cataclysm fashioned this hill it had the forethought to leave a narrow passage through from the cavern to the top. I can see daylight ahead."

"Crawl for it," I returned. "I'll be close after you."

In some way I pushed and dragged myself through, and at last we emerged on the hillside overlooking the defile that lay at our cavern's mouth. From our position we could look down and see the great boulder that had been balanced over the entrance.

The gully was full of Churs, and the center of interest seemed to be Sertez. The renegade had the gun, and was handling it with dangerous carelessness.

"If he's not careful," said I, "he'll kill somebody."

The words were barely out of my mouth when the piece exploded, and one of the Churs fell in his tracks. Consternation seized upon every one, Sertez along with the rest.

The destructive power of the gun had not before been brought home to these creatures, for the mere report of it had been sufficient to compass my ends. Now, however, the bungling of Sertez had wrought a catastrophe which caused the "thunder maker" to be doubly feared.

The Churs prostrated themselves, and Sertez dropped the firearm as though it had been a serpent, flinging the belt down upon it, and then retreating to a respectful distance.

"This is our opportunity, professor," said I, and we hurried down the slope and made our way to where the gun and belt were lying.

CHAPTER XX.

THE GREAT ZIFF.

It would be difficult to decide whether our appearance in the defile, having apparently issued through the solid boulder blocking our cave, or the fatal use of the shotgun, frightened these savage creatures the more.

On several occasions I had seen their primitive minds overcome, but never to the extent that they were now.

"How—how were you able to get out of the cave?" faltered Sertez.

"It is not necessary for you to know," said I sternly, picking up the belt and buckling it around me and then possessing myself of the gun. "Inform Koz that we desire to go to the pole and interview the Great Ziff."

"But you cannot——"

"Do as I tell you!" I broke in sternly, and emphasized the command by pointing the gun in his direction.

He gave a shout of horror, and ran to the chief.

Koz listened attentively while Sertez told our wishes, and then approached us with our two servitors, Bigoll and Xit.

Sertez did not venture in our proximity. From a distance he called:

“Koz and his sons will accompany you.”

“See to it, Sertez,” I shouted, “that you head no foray into the Kingdom of Nyll, otherwise the ‘thunder maker’ shall speak in terms you cannot fail to understand.”

He showed his teeth in a snarling smile, and from that I knew that we were not yet done with him. Koz himself took the food bag and carried it across his shoulder, but neither he nor Bigoll nor Xit could be induced to bear the “thunder maker.”

With the three Churs in the lead, our course led us down the defile and out through a country where Titans had at one time been at play, hurling mountains at each other, piling them up fantastically.

Steadily but surely we advanced upon the pillar of smoke and dust.

As we went on, the ground grew hotter be-

neath us. Often we struck a spot where our feet were compelled to fly upward in a wild dance, or bear the weight of our bodies on their toes.

Everywhere was desolation. Contiguous to the great wall were areas where plants and trees grew and streams of warm water had their courses.

But here the heat was fatal to plant life, and what moisture the ground contained was given off in steam. Still onward we kept our course, although it seemed every moment as though we must turn back.

A weird exaltation thrilled me. For the present I forgot that I was seeking the Great Ziff to threaten him in case he seized upon the misfortunes of Nyll to make an invasion of the country.

Again I was the polar explorer, searching for that baffling and elusive thing called the North Pole. With my eyes turned straight ahead of me, I pressed on and on.

At last we reached a point beyond which it would have been suicide to venture. And there before us arose the goal of my ambition.

Adequately to describe the soul-inspiring spec-

tacle is beyond me. No pen could do justice to the scene, least of all mine, which heretofore has been confined to the simple annals of the log book.

I have seen a volcano in eruption, and the vomiting forth of fire, and smoke, and dust bear some resemblance to this polar phenomenon. Here the zone of activity was half a mile in diameter, completely circular.

Within the vortex, as the veil shifted, the great spindle was disclosed, a mighty bulwark of celestial law and order—without which there could be no night, no day—no certainty of recurring seasons—no life on this fruitful planet.

Entranced, we stood and watched the wondrous whirligig perform its mighty evolution.

Nearly three hundred and fifty feet per hour it moved, more than five feet per minute—the grand, majestic sweep of a vast world, set spinning in the night of ages by the Creator's all-powerful hand.

Prebble and I stood dumb in the presence of the stupendous mechanism, Kōz and his sons lying prostrate, pouring upon their heads the dust

of humility and reverence. Thus, in our several ways, did the finite pay tribute to the Infinite.

"We must build a cairn," said I hoarsely, turning my bloodshot eyes upon Prebble.

"Why a cairn?" he asked.

"As a mark to commemorate this visit, a proof to any who follow that Captain Salis and Phineas Prebble have been here before them."

"The Churs were here before any of us," said Prebble. "Can you go away and claim the discovery of the North Pole when human eyes have already looked upon it?"

His eyes, looking out at me from lids inflamed by the heat, twinkled oddly.

"We have been first to pierce the ice wall," I answered, "and are entitled to be called discoverers."

"*Suaviter in modo, fortiter in re,*" murmured my learned companion. "You might just as well claim the discovery without seeing the thing discovered. I see small difference in the ethics of the case."

He hopped around to ease his stewing feet.

"If we were on cooler ground, professor," said I, "we might go into that subject more exhaustively. Let's give our attention to the cairn, however."

"Who will know what the cairn stands for, in case it happens to be found?"

"We will leave a tablet and a flag."

"It is hot for such work," and the professor drew a hand across his dripping forehead, "and I fail to see the usefulness of it."

"Explorers always build cairns," I cried irritably.

"Then, *mirabile dictu*, let us build one!"

"Set the Churs to collecting stones," I ordered, "while I prepare the tablet."

He hopped away over the steaming stones, and got the Churs at work. After a short search I discovered a piece of flat, slatelike rock, soft enough to take the sharp point of a piece of agate. With great care I scratched the following on the slate tablet:

"At this point, during the summer of 1901, arrived Captain C. G. Salis, U. S. A., and Professor Phineas Prebble, having set out from

America in the year 1900 on a voyage of discovery and exploration."

I showed the inscription to Prebble.

"You have left out the most important point!" he cried.

"What is that?"

"You have said nothing about my own discoveries, the proof I have developed regarding the meteoric theory of the aurora."

"I'll add that as a postscript," said I, by way of humoring him.

So I appended the following:

"During the progress of the polar expedition, said Professor Prebble demonstrated the truth of the meteoric theory of the aurora."

"Will that do?" I inquired.

"Very well," he answered, greatly pleased. "Now, if neither of us live to return to our own country, and some other explorer is able to come to this benighted region, I shall have my niche in the hall of fame. But the tablet is still incomplete."

The tablet already had scorched my fingers,

and was becoming altogether too hot for any more inscriptions.

“What else is there?” I asked impatiently.

“My theory concerning the failure of the human mind north of the arctic circle,” said he. “Put that in.”

“I will not,” I answered, and went down on my knees to affix the piece of slate in the hot earth.

Upon this we piled our gathered rocks. I superintended the laying of the stones, and, considering the difficulties under which we worked, I believe that a most excellent cairn was constructed, and one that must still remain on that very spot.

It was trying labor, and we sweated over the task. The Churs labored in a state of awe and apprehension, pausing constantly to look around them as though they expected something to happen, they scarcely knew what.

Their actions communicated to me a certain uncanny feeling which had begun with the vast mechanism of the pole itself.

“I’m getting nervous,” confided the professor.

"We are in a region well qualified to make any one nervous," I answered, making ready to lay the final stone on the apex of the heap.

"Let's have done with this cairn building, captain, and move to some other place."

"We must continue our examination of the pole," said I. "I greatly regret that we have not the instruments necessary to make an observation."

"It's too torrid for observations, and we've already lingered here so long that the soles of my feet are literally done to a turn."

"Perhaps we shall never be able to come here again, and we ought to make the most of our visit."

At the precise moment the final stone was added to the heap my attention was attracted by fearful cries from the Churs.

I faced about, and at once my startled gaze encountered a sight that froze my blood. The veil of smoke, dust, and flame was parted by a form that plunged through it like a swimmer through the sea, separating the red billows with his naked hands.

The figure was that of a Chur of gigantic proportions. His face was the face of the archfiend, monstrous in its every feature.

The eyes were like diamonds; the teeth long, yellow, and two of them overhanging the nether lip like tusks; the long, red hair writhed as so many tongues of fire about head and shoulders, and the long, furry limbs moved with marvelous rapidity.

A whip seemed lashing my brain with stinging force; and at every blow the voice of Sertez rang in my ears:

“The Great Ziff! *Now* will you believe?”

In one hand this hideous giant carried a skull; in the other hand a thigh bone. Again and again he would strike the skull, and a dull, sepulchral sound would be the result.

As he pounded his horrid drum he would roar, in monotonous tones, syllables which sounded like *Us-kwee-baw, Us-kwee-baw!* Then, at intervals, he would lift the thigh bone and point southward.

It must not be supposed that we saw this frightful creature long. At one leap he cleared

the pole and touched earth, then away he flew at a Brobdingnagian pace, pointing southward, beating the skull and roaring his *Us-krocc-bate!*

I looked at Prebble. His head was in his hands. I turned to where the Churs had been lying, and saw that they had departed, following the Great Ziff at top speed.

CHAPTER XXI.

BACK TO NYLL.

Had our series of remarkable adventures in this circumpolar country not hardened us to the improbable and the unexpected, Prebble and I would have thought ourselves gone daft.

“Let’s get out of this,” said the professor huskily, picking up the biscuit and pemmican bag.

I grabbed the shotgun from the rocks, scarcely noticing that the barrels blistered my hands. Then away we went on the track of the Great Ziff, Koz, Bigoll, and Xit.

“What is your present opinion of the Great Ziff, Prebble?” I asked, when we had reached cooler ground, and could walk and talk with some little comfort.

“Don’t ask me,” he begged. “Imagination appears to have taken the place of sober sense. Event follows event so swiftly that all seems a riot of the imagination. The scientific mind finds nothing firm enough to stand on, and hence all

scientific deduction falls flat. I behold and marvel, captain; I make no attempt to explain."

"The furies are unleashed," said I sadly. "Nyll will be overrun, and all her magnificent civilization laid waste. The Great Ziff heads the allied packs, and every Chur is like a ravening wolf."

"We must hasten back to Nyll," averred the professor.

"But what can we do?"

"We can save the kingdom," he answered promptly, "or as much of it as is left when we arrive."

"How?"

"Leave that to me. Let your care be the rescue of Princess Ylma."

Our apprehensions spurred us on to greatest effort. Just before we reached the defile from which we had issued to begin our journey to the pole, we surmounted an elevation that afforded us a view of the wall, the broken gate, and the plain beyond.

A host of Churs was flowing southward. The passage through the wall was like a strait, the

animated billows crushing through and spreading out once more on reaching the sandy stretch.

As far as the eye could reach the inundation rolled, and we had no doubt that in the lead rushed the Great Ziff, sounding his infernal tocsin and roaring his mysterious slogan.

"Thus ignorance overwhelms learning," muttered Prebble, "and brute force subdues the mind."

"Let us not halt," I cried, in fierce impatience; "on, Prebble, on!"

We could not overtake the procession of warriors, but we came among the women and children, straggling along in the rear.

It was hours before we reached the populous portion of Nyll, and what a melancholy spectacle greeted us on every hand! Houses were burning, and the Churs were everywhere like the red imps of Satan, carrying their spoils upon their backs, or driving Nyllites before them, loaded with the loot of their own dwellings.

It appeared to have been the policy of the Great Ziff, to spare, that the Churs might enslave;

Everywhere there was brutality, but nowhere could we see bloodshed.

As we made along the road toward the king's palace an oyd car came tearing toward us. In the car were two men whom I recognized as Griffyn and Pollock.

"Halt!" I commanded, placing myself in the middle of the roadway and raising my hand.

They did not slacken speed, and would have cut me down but for the shotgun. I raised it to my shoulder and aimed carefully.

"Halt, or I fire!" I cried again.

This time I was obeyed.

"Great Heaven!" cried Griffyn, as he stopped the car. "Can this be Salis and—and Prebble?"

"Don't say you failed to recognize us," I answered.

"But I did, though. What has happened to you?"

"There's no time to talk of ourselves," I cried; "we must do something to stem this tide of invasion."

"What can be done? The men of the king-

dom are confounded, and have fallen easy victims to their old-time enemies."

"Where are you going, Griffyn?"

"To the distillery on a mission for Princess Ylma."

"Ha! Where is the princess?"

"Locked in a room in the king's palace."

"What are you going to do?"

"Burn that accursed distillery to the ground."

"You are mad!" broke in the professor passionately.

I looked at him in amazement.

"What do you mean?" asked Griffyn and Pollock in one breath.

"If that distillery had never been built," said I, "this awful invasion would never have happened. You"—and I leveled a trembling forefinger at Pollock—"are responsible for all!"

"You and Prebble are responsible," flung back Pollock. "You taught King Boazar to use the elixir, in the first place."

"We gave him the flask in order to save our lives."

"And we," spoke up Pollock, "built the distillery to save our own."

"Have done with this wrangling," interrupted the professor. "We are all of us at fault; but we are human, life is dear to us, and sometimes we buy it at too great a price. Have you any elixir on hand, Pollock?"

"Several thousand keeses."

"Any tanks and oyd cars at the distillery?"

"Half a dozen, at least."

"Then I will go with you, and we will save the kingdom!"

He turned on me with a hearty grip of the hand.

"I must leave you, captain. It is necessary, for you have your work to do, as I have mine. You remember what his lordship told us about the Nyllite who penetrated the ice wall? The work now going on is strictly according to Gneisen. Shrewd fellow, that Gneisen!"

He sprang into the oyd car.

"*Similia similibus curantur!* To the distillery, Griffyn, top speed."

While we had stood in the road talking, many

Churs passed us, but gave us little notice. Possibly they were too intent on the nefarious work before them.

I journeyed on, the horrors thickening about me as I proceeded. A whirl of wheels from behind claimed my attention, and I turned just as a familiar voice called my name.

A car was darting in my direction; to the broad seat in its center Lord Nylis was bound, and in the front point was Klimon—faithful Klimon!—shrieking like a fiend.

“Save me, captain!” implored Lord Nylis. “Klimon is taking me to the Great Ziff!”

I ordered the rebellious slave to halt. His answer was a defiant yelp. I fired at him, and he tumbled over the iron box into the road, closing the screen with his falling body.

The car stopped. At once I sprang aboard and tore the ropes from his lordship’s hands.

“You have saved me from a fate worse than death, captain,” said his lordship, “and I thank you.”

Suddenly his body stiffened, and he eyed me sharply.

"It was reported that you and the professor had gone over to the Churs. Are you concerned in this raid?"

"We are concerned in it, sir, to the extent of trying to save the kingdom," I answered. "As to going over to the Churs, it was either that or death by oyd. The Churs spared us, and we have returned to be of all the assistance to King Boazar that we can."

Lord Nylis shook his head sadly.

"You can do nothing, I fear. The king and nine-tenths of the nobles and people have succumbed to your elixir, and its baneful effects are everywhere apparent. Our powers of mind have suffered eclipse. The kingdom is doomed!"

"The case is hardly as bad as that, I hope."

"The condition of affairs could not be worse. Every slave in the country has risen, and even the slaves outnumber the Nyllites two to one. Add their numbers to the horde that has swept down on us from the north, and you will understand how desperate is the situation. Klimon, whom I have owned for years, turned on me, and was conveying me to the Great Ziff!"

“What for?”

“To present me to him as a slave.”

“Horrible!” I looked back at the still form in the road. “He will have no further part in the insurrection,” I added.

“I tried to conquer him with my will, but his fanaticism was aroused by the coming of the Great Ziff, and he turned my glances as though clad in armor.” He laid his hand on my knee as he asked: “Where is the professor, captain?”

“Gone to rescue the kingdom,” I answered. “Griffyn and Pollock are with him.”

“What can they do?”

“They can turn the weapon that has cost you so dear against your enemies. We have a saying in our country that ‘like cures like.’ If this is true, and if the Churs take to the elixir, and the Nyllites abstain from it, the country may yet be saved.”

Hope darted into his face.

“I had not thought of that,” he said. “But let us on to the palace. I am worried about his majesty.”

CHAPTER XXII.

“ACCORDING TO GNEISEN.”

Lord Nylis took the driver's seat, and drove the car at full speed along the road. Many attempts were made to interfere with us, but the shotgún stood us in good stead, and we finally reached the palace steps unmolested.

The king's guard, to the last warrior, had turned against Count Zylox, and he had been compelled to barricade himself in one of the state apartments.

The count was another of those who had resisted the temptations of the elixir, and from one of the palace windows he called down and acquainted us with his predicament.

“Where is the king?” asked Lord Nylis.

“In the throne room. The Princess Ylma is with him, and has barricaded the doors. Hark!”

Count Zylox raised his hand.

“Can you not hear them?” he asked. “Sertez, with a score of Churs at his back, is endeavoring to batter down the doors and capture the king.

I will descend and join you. Perhaps we may be able to exert our power over some of the slaves and the guard. Wait for me in the grand hallway."

There were no Churs on the steps or in the hallway. All in the vicinity of the palace were helping Sertez force entrance into the audience chamber.

The count carried a spear, and Lord Nylis picked up another from the floor.

"What does the foreigner here?" asked the count, vouchsafing me a harsh look.

"Cherish no animosity, count," said his lordship. "The captain is truly our friend. His companion, the professor, has gone to save the kingdom."

"How?"

"There is no time for explanations. Let it suffice for you to know that this man is my friend, and has recently preserved me from my enemies. The thunder machine he carries is to stand us in good stead. To the throne room, count, before it is too late."

We started forthwith, the sound of a heavy

blow and a crash accelerating our steps. A wild scream echoed through the apartments.

"The princess!" cried the count, beginning to run.

"They have demolished the doors!" gasped his lordship.

Presently we flung into the vast chamber. The sun was gleaming through the windows and reflecting a fiery color from the blood-red tiles of the floor.

Backward and forward, as in a crimson tide, swerved the hairy, seminude forms of the Churs. Their yelping tones, the clashing of their implements of war, caused a deafening din in the room.

King Boazar occupied the massive chair on the dais. His hands hung listlessly over the arms, and his head was bowed forward. It might have been an attitude of sorrow and despair, but I attributed it to another cause.

Before him, at the top of the short flight of steps, stood Princess Ylma, her eyes glowing and her arms outspread to block the advance of Sertez. The renegade stood below, his foot on

the first step and his gloating gaze turned upward.

"Nothing can keep us apart now, Ylma!" he cried. "I have leveled every barrier that stood between us."

"Except one;" she qualified, gazing at him scornfully.

"What is that?"

"My loathing for you, Sertez!"

A mocking laugh rang from his lips.

"I shall level that, my lady—trample it underfoot along with the foolish pride that has made you look down on me. You are to be mine, my princess, *mine!*"

He started to mount the steps. I was almost upon him, but Count Zylox was a little in advance of me.

Catching Sertez about the neck with one arm, the count hurled him backward. The renegade saved himself a fall by clutching at one of the Churs.

He whirled about, gripping his spear, and fixed his glaring eyes on Count Zylox. The count returned the glare with steady intensity.

Our entrance into the throne room had been silently made, and we had reached the foot of the dais almost before our presence was discovered.

These Churs happened to be from the pack of Koz. Thus I was known to them, and the terrors of the "thunder maker," which I carried, threw over them a spell of silence and inaction.

Princess Ylma was gazing at me as though she dared not credit her senses. Facing Lord Nylis, I exchanged the shotgun for his spear, and crept closer to Sertez and Count Zylox.

"Traitor!" cried the count. "Your lying lips have given insult to the daughter of your sovereign——"

"I am a banished man; I have no sovereign."

"Nor will you have any country but hell when I am done with you! Cross spears with me if you dare."

The count was a man after my own heart. He showed a spirit that aroused my admiration, and I was sorry he was not a friend of mine.

Sertez sprang to the fray with a laugh and a

taunt, the count met him bravely, and spear struck spear.

Then it was thrust, parry, thrust, parry—now high, now low—the spear heads shimmering as they darted toward each other like serpents' tongues—the count forcing Sertez back, step by step, and again Sertez pressing the count.

There was a monotony about it all in spite of the fascination which a battle to the death will always call forth. But the monotony was suddenly varied.

Sertez leaned forward like lightning. His spear point fell, rose, and there was a reddish stain marring the brightness of it.

With a muttered anathema, the count caught the haft of his weapon in his left hand, and continued the battle, his right arm hanging limp at his side. I tried to press forward and draw the attention of Sertez.

"One at a time!" cried the renegade.

"Back!" commanded the count fiercely. "No man shall rob me of the pleasure of running this traitor through the heart."

I was eager to be at Sertez, for we had a score

to settle on account of that little affair in the cave. Still, I could not insist on displacing the count.

The combat went on. Zylox fought at a terrible disadvantage, as was apparent to all of us, and from the throne Princess Ylma watched with breathless lips and pallid cheeks.

The stertorous breathing of the king came to our ears through the dead silence, and now and again he would move restlessly and mutter incoherently.

Once more there was the monotony of thrust and parry, above, below, and clash, clash as the spear heads met and sent ringing echoes through the vaulted chamber.

A diversion came, and came quickly. The count slipped on the jasper tiles, and went down, his weapon flying from his hand.

A slight scream escaped Princess Ylma. With a cry of triumph, Sertez plunged at his opponent's breast, but I struck the long shaft aside, thereby earning curses from both Sertez and the count.

Then Sertez and I went at it. The renegade was not as fresh as I was, but, on the contrary,

he had not the same unpracticed hand which I was compelled to use.

A repetition of the previous performance was begun. I was more awkward than the count, however.

Every moment was a close shave for me, but after some fashion I bungled out of the traps set for my 'prentice skill. I fought blindly, persistently, pressing my foe at every point, in spite of the perilous play of his spear head.

I remembered only the insult in the cave, and even forgot that the eyes of the princess were upon me. Z-z-z-z-ip, swish! I had caught a chiseling blow in the shoulder.

A scream reminded me of the presence of Princess Ylma.

"Lord Nylis, end this!" she cried. "I beg you save the stranger's life!"

"Hands off, your lordship!" I shouted. "You don't know what I owe this fellow!"

Sertez was at me again, cool, diabolical, wearing a crafty smile. By now there was blood on the floor. I retreated, coaxing him over the pool.

He followed. I sank to one knee, presenting my spear point. He slipped, as I had anticipated.

But he did not fall backward, as I believed he would. He pitched forward upon my weapon and it impaled him to the heart.

Prone on the floor he lay, the long shaft clinging to his breast. As we stood over him, an appalling sound floated to us from the distant corridor.

Poom, poom, poom!

"Us-kwee-baw, Us-kwee-baw, Us-kwee-baw!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

PECULIARITIES OF THE ZIFF.

The Churs dropped in a flash. Zylox, Nylis, and I sprang to the throne steps, and ranged ourselves abreast for the defense of the king and Princess Ylma.

I had no spear, but I picked up the one wielded by Sertez, gave it to his lordship, and took from him the gun.

"The Great Ziff!" whispered the count hoarsely.

"He will excite these Churs to frenzy," muttered Lord Nylis.

"Supposing he were killed?" I asked.

"That, at one blow, would settle the insurrection," declared the count.

"But he can't be killed," supplemented his lordship.

"We shall see," I responded.

The next moment the hideous giant bounded into the chamber, beating his gruesome drum and roaring his horrid war cry.

Princess Ylma sank to her knees, with her face in her hands. The king roused himself and staggered to his feet, his bleared eyes resting on the monster.

"There," he cried, "see them!"

"See what?" asked the count.

"The little boys in the red caps! Ha! Take 'em away! They're on my back, on my head, holding my arms, dragging me down! Have I any loyal subjects left? The monsters, the creeping things, the—the——"

With a gurgling cry, his majesty dropped back into the throne chair, thrashing his arms wildly. The princess sprang up and threw her arms about his neck protectingly.

Poom, poom, poom! echoed the grinning skull.

"*Us-kwec-baw!*" roared the Great Ziff, and pointed the thigh bone at the king.

The Churs sprang erect.

"Now, captain, if you can do anything," whispered his lordship frantically, "*now!*"

The giant was advancing upon the throne. In a trice I raised the gun and gave him both barrels.

The roar in that confined space was awful beyond words. As the smoke cleared, we saw the Great Ziff sprawled on the floor.

We gazed, and—I am telling what I beheld with my own eyes—even as we looked his form faded into thin air, so that we saw nothing but the blood-red tiles.

And then from without we heard the sepulchral sounds of bone and skull, and the roar of the Ziff as strong as ever.

The Churs rushed from the throne room and from the palace, while the count, his lordship, and I hastened to one of the windows.

There this colossal creature stood, gathering his cohorts, unharmed in body or limb.

I was sorry the professor was not a witness of this proceeding, for he afterward told me I must have been frightened out of my wits, so that fear colored my account of the extraordinary event. Those who have followed me so far, I trust, will know me better than that.

“Barricade the palace doors!” cried Count Zylox. “We three will hold the place against the invaders!”

We hurried to follow out his suggestion. After every door had been secured, we looked down from a lofty window, and, to our intense surprise, found that the Great Ziff and his followers had left the vicinity of the palace.

"We are safe for the present," said Lord Nylis, heaving a sigh of relief.

"The Ziff will return," averred the count.

"Until he does," went on his lordship, turning to me, "there will be little for you to do, captain. If you would like to go to the lavatory and make a change of garments, I will be glad to conduct you."

He made the suggestion out of the kindness of his heart, and I was grateful to him for it. In truth, I was a sorry-looking representative of the United States Army as I stood before him.

I still wore what remained of my buskins, but they were the sole relics of my former state. In the land of the Churs, Prebble and I had both donned the prevailing bearskin, and while mine covered me from shoulders to knees, and was respectable enough, yet it was hardly a court costume, even for those trying times.

While I was engaged in making myself more presentable, Lord Nylis, from an adjoining room, beguiled my labors with conversation.

"I always knew we should hear from Sertez in some such manner," said he.

"Who is this Sertez?" I inquired.

"A scoundrel and a renegade."

"I have discovered that much for myself, your lordship. I have also learned that he has been among the Churs since the beginning of the long day. He was banished?"

"Yes. That was a mistake, however."

"Mistake?"

"In this way, captain: He should have been condemned to death by oyd instead of merely being banished. Count Zylox and I were anxious to see him receive the death penalty, but Princess Ylma prevailed with the king, and sentence of banishment was pronounced."

I was washing the red stain from my shoulder. The wound was merely a scratch, and in no wise interfered with my usefulness. Eagerly I caught at his lordship's mention of the princess.

"Why did the princess interfere in behalf of Sertez?" I queried.

"That trenches upon the matter for which Sertez was sent away," was the reply. "There is no reason why I should not tell you about it, captain. You have been of great service to the king and the princess, and the kingdom is under a vast obligation to you."

"I shall be glad to hear about it," said I.

"Sertez," his lordship went on, "was made much of by King Boazar. The fortune of Sertez was small, but wealth is no bar to advancement in the Kingdom of Nyll. His majesty conceived a liking for Sertez, and took him into the palace as one of the gentlemen in waiting. The possession of twenty Churs entitles a Nyllite to a patent of nobility, for, in the old times, to rule a score of Churs one proved the possession of a powerful intellect, and intellect alone admitted to the peerage. One who aspired to be a noble was required to capture his Churs with his own hands, and subdue them. Sertez, with great bravery, won his twenty slaves, and was taken into the palace as one of the king's household."

His lordship paused for a moment, and I had a little time to dwell upon the peculiar abilities necessary before one could become a noble of that queer kingdom.

“Once in the palace,” proceeded Lord Nylis, “Sertez had the presumption to lift his eyes to the princess. Thus, in a way, he proved himself a serpent, and struck at the hand which fed him. Princess Ylma is designed by the king as a mate for Count Zylox, thus welding the two branches of the royal family together and averting discord when the time comes for the king to pass. Sertez——”

“Is that right, Lord Nylis?” I demanded. “Should the king use his power to consummate such an alliance? Is not Princess Ylma to have a choice in the matter?”

“Princesses of the blood, captain,” came sadly from his lordship, “are but pawns in the game of royalty. Their lots are cast wherever policy may elect. In this case, and I quite coincide with his majesty, the two branches of the royal family must be united. From what I have said about the king’s plans for his daughter, you will under-

stand more clearly the presumption of Sertez in aspiring to the hand of the princess. She repulsed him, and placed the matter before the king. His majesty was enraged, and summoned Sertez before him to answer for his actions. Sertez was found guilty and condemned to death by oyd. Princess Ylma interfered, and the sentence was commuted to banishment."

"The princess should not have interfered," said I.

"Most assuredly not; but she has a tender heart, and could not bear to think that Sertez was to suffer death on her account."

"It is all one with Sertez now, Lord Nylis. He was spared to plan with the Churs the destruction of the kingdom, but his end has finally overtaken him."

"The evil has been accomplished," commented Lord Nylis, with a heavy sigh, "and it will be long before my country recovers from the blow."

"It is a lesson to your country," said I. "It should teach all of you to beware of anything indulgence in which will tend to becloud your faculties."

“We did not know the powers of this elixir.”

“For which the professor and I are guilty, I acknowledge the debt we owe your people, Nyllis, and we are doing what we can to atone for our misguided actions.”

“I lay nothing at your door, captain. You and your companion had to do something to preserve your lives, and you took the readiest means at hand. I am hopeful, as you say, that my country will profit by the grievous lesson. Do you think the professor will succeed in his work?”

“I am positive of it,” said I, with conviction. “Prebble is an able man, and when he sets his hand to a piece of work he usually accomplishes it. The elixir is a weapon that works both ways. Savages are especially partial to it. The Churs are not gifted with the reasoning powers of the Nyllites, and will easily fall victims to the insidious beverage. You and your people, on the other hand, will profit by the lesson and abstain from such elixirs in future.”

“The easiest way to make us abstain is to remove the elixir from among us. The place where

it is manufactured must be destroyed at the earliest possible moment."

"That will be attended to. Is the process of manufacture known to any of the Nyllites?"

"No; Pollock and Griffyn have kept the process a secret."

"Good!" I exclaimed.

Before another hour had passed I felt a different man. Immediately after emerging from the lavatory and dressing chamber I repaired to the throne room.

Princess Ylma was still beside the king, who was recovering slightly, and calling for more of the elixir. The moment I entered, she descended and came toward me with outstretched hands.

The count, as I observed, had thoughtfully dragged the body of Sertez from the apartment, and only the stains of blood remained to mark the spot where the sanguinary struggle had taken place.

Save for the king, we were alone, the princess and I. I caught her hands and held them for a moment, peering into her wonderful blue eyes.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A PERILOUS ATTACHMENT.

"I knew you would come," she said softly, her lids drooping and the color coming and going in her full, round cheeks.

"I came quickly, my princess," said I, "but could not arrive before the Churs."

"You are a stranger," she said, flashing a quick look at me, "and I cannot be your princess."

"Nevertheless," I returned, dropping on one knee and pressing her hands to my lips, "you *are* my princess, and I must call you so."

She raised me gently.

"I was told that you would not be able to learn the secrets of the gorr plate," she proceeded, as I stood at her side.

"I learned them," I answered, not thinking it necessary to describe the means.

"Then, am I——" She hesitated, her lips trembling.

"You are ever in my heart," I whispered.

"And you think of me in the same manner that I think of you?"

"Yes," I replied. "Ever since you saved my companion and myself at the lake you have never been absent from either mind or heart."

A lover must be allowed some latitude, even at the pole, where latitude is stretched to its farthest limit.

She withdrew her hands quickly. Turning, she made her way back to the throne, and sat on the steps.

"Come," she said, making a place beside her. "I wish to ask you if you and your companion can be of any aid to this poor country in its present plight."

"We shall do our best to save the country," was my response, "and I believe that success will attend our efforts. The professor is now engaged in the work. Griffyn and Pollock are with him."

"Nothing can be done," she declared, with spirit, "until this elixir is destroyed to the last drop! I have given orders for the burning of the building in which it is made."

"The professor countermanded your orders."

Her eyes flashed.

“Why?” she asked imperiously.

“Because, although it has been the means of bringing woe and unhappiness to Nyll, it may yet be employed in saving the country. The elixir is a good servant, but a bad master.”

“How may the elixir be employed?”

“Let the Churs partake of it, and it will render them helpless. Then the Nyllites may rise, conquer the savages——”

“And resume their use of the elixir,” she interrupted sorrowfully.

“No. After the Churs have been conquered, *then* burn the distillery, and let every keese of the elixir be poured on the ground.”

She clapped her hands, and a joyful look overspread her face. But the joy was short-lived.

“And then,” she resumed, “the king will order the other strangers to build a new distillery, as they call it, and they will have to comply in order to save their lives.”

“Princess,” I returned, “our poor lives have been the cause of all this misery. Had the professor and I not valued our existence so highly,

the king would never have tasted the contents of that first flask, nor would the second flask have been given him, nor would the distillery have been built. Are you sure he will demand more of the elixir when he recovers reason and sees what direful consequences have followed its use?"

"The taste is strong upon him," she answered. "He drinks the brown fluid continually. I am sure he will order more of it."

"In that event," said I grimly, "Griffyn, Pollock, the professor, and I must leave the country."

"Where will you go?" she asked tremulously.

"Back to our own land."

"Beyond the ice wall?" Her hand crept toward mine and caught it clingly.

"Yes."

"Will there not be danger in the attempt?"

"I suppose so," was my glum rejoinder.

"Will you not dread to face it?"

Her cheek was close to mine, her starry eyes fixed upon my own and burning with a light that thrilled me.

I placed my other hand about her waist.

"I shall dread facing the danger much less than leaving the Princess Ylma!"

She sighed.

"Tell me of your own country," she said. "Is it a wonderful land like ours?"

"In some ways more wonderful, but in others less so. We have no gorr plates, no oyd cars, no kings, no princesses; but we have our Ziffs, many of them, and all fully as terrible as the one we have lately seen."

"Do they not destroy the minds of the people?"

"The brown fluid does that; then come the Ziffs."

"Does the Ziff bring his Churs?"

"We have no Churs, princess. Every man is his own Chur. These shaggy monsters skulk in the trail of the brown fluid, and battle with the man's better self until the Ziff comes and finishes the work."

She shuddered.

"I should not like your country," she said. "Only, if you were there, even such a land might be paradise for me!"

The words were still on her lips as I plucked the last one with a kiss.

“You scoundrel!”

Count Zylox! The princess pushed from me with a little cry, and we both looked up, to find the captain of the guard regarding us with a scowl.

I arose haughtily.

“I cannot forget that I am in the presence of a lady,” said I, “or I should answer your speech in kind. Eavesdroppers rarely hear anything to their liking.”

“You introduce a curse into the land,” sneered the count, “and after destroying the people you attempt the destruction of the king’s only daughter, so——”

“Liar!” I cried.

His base insinuations were too much for my hot blood. I launched myself toward him, and, had not the princess interfered, would have taught him a lesson then and there.

The king’s daughter was between us. My hands fell, and I stepped back.

“Your pardon, Princess Ylma,” I murmured.

“At some other time and in some other place he shall yield me satisfaction for his words.”

“He shall not!” she returned, a very queen in speech and bearing. “You shall prove your manhood by ignoring a man who forgets himself as Count Zylox has done.”

She faced the count.

“I desire you to leave this room. There are other things to command your attention at the present moment.”

“Nothing more important than this,” he answered.

She bent her eyes upon his steadily.

“Withdraw!” she commanded.

For the first time, I saw that the count had the shotgun in his hands.

“Let him first give me that weapon, Princess Ylma,” I requested.

“Take it!” said the count savagely, and flung it with all the force of his left arm down on the tiles.

The piece was broken beyond repair. My heart sank, for I had counted on using the gun in defense of the palace, should we be attacked.

As the count turned on his heel, a loud commotion was heard at the palace entrance. He hurried away, and I started to follow.

"Promise me before you go," said Princess Ylma, "that you will not renew this quarrel."

"I promise," said I, and hastened on.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PALACE DUNGEON.

We were unnecessarily alarmed by the noise on the palace steps. The Great Ziff had not returned with the Churs; but Pollock had come with an oyd car and a tank of elixir.

He reported that Prebble, Griffyn, and himself had started in different directions through the kingdom, each with a car containing a large quantity of the "brown fluid."

This was being judiciously distributed among the Churs.

"They are wild after the stuff," said Pollock, "and are casting aside their loot, their shields, and spears, and even allowing their prisoners to escape, so that they may drink more and more of the fire water. In twenty-four hours, if the Nyllites will rise, Nyll will be theirs once more."

Pollock left, after being reassured as to the safety of the king and the princess. I ran back to the throne room to acquaint the princess with

the progress of the good work, but the apartment was deserted.

Since there was no danger to threaten, I threw myself down in one of the reclining rooms to rest after the exciting events of the last few hours. Worn out, I fell asleep.

When I awoke I was not in the reclining room. All around me was blackest darkness, and a dank smell as from moldy walls.

What had happened to me? I dashed my hand across my face to free my brain from the evil spell that seemed to encompass it.

Still the darkness would not lift. Was I mad? I reached out on either side. On my right, space; on my left, a blank, slippery wall.

I felt below. I was lying on a slab of stone.

Staggering erect, I groped my way aimlessly about. Presently I came to another wall.

Turning, I paced to the wall opposite. Twenty paces. Between walls, the other way, I also counted twenty paces.

Then I climbed upon the block of stone and reached upward, my fingers touching the roof. Under me, around, above, nothing but granite.

Sitting down on the slab, I bowed my head in my hands. I was a prisoner, there was no doubt of that.

But how had they been able to carry me off without waking me? I am not a heavy sleeper, and the croon of a rope through an oil sheave has more than once sent me from my bunk.

I smelled an odor strange to my nostrils. Ah, I had been drugged!

Resistance was feared, and these men, who were wide awake for six months of the year, had taken advantage of me in my sleep, and drugged and imprisoned me.

It was Zylox, of course. He had seen me with the princess, had heard our conversation, and it had increased his enmity toward me.

He was a brave man, and had the good of the kingdom at heart. But brave men are weakest when struck on the side of their affections.

He loved the princess, and she cared nothing for him. He would not brook interference on my part, and death was to be my portion.

I wondered how long an interval had passed since I lay down in the reclining room. I also

thought of Prebble, and wondered if he had succeeded in saving the kingdom.

What would he do when he heard that I was a prisoner? What could he do?

Possibly he would not hear. No doubt I was in the stronghold of Count Zylox, where I could be dealt with at my enemy's pleasure.

And the princess! Would she ever know my fate?

As I sat there with bowed head, a door opened raspingly, and light struck across the gloom. I looked up and saw the count entering, accompanied by four armed Churs.

I sprang erect and rushed toward him, but two spears crossed in front of my breast and stayed me.

"Keep your distance," said the count.

"Is there a spark of honor or manhood about you?" I cried. "Will you not grant me the satisfaction one gentleman may yield another, face to face?"

"I would not soil my hands fighting with you."

"Coward!"

He smiled.

“A caged rat may rage at a lion,” said he coolly.

“Where am I?”

“In a dungeon of the king’s palace.”

“Why am I here?”

“For lese majesty.”

“High treason!” I exclaimed. “A trumped-up charge, Zylox. No stranger in the country can commit treason.”

“No; but he can do worse and plan odious things.”

I trembled with anger.

“It is not the part of a brave man to taunt a prisoner unable to defend himself,” said I.

“Then don’t force me with your questions.”

“Does the king know I am here?”

“You are here by his orders.”

“Then you have poisoned his mind against me.”

“I have simply told him the truth, and he has drawn his own conclusions.”

“What is to be done with me?”

“What should have been done when you and

your comrade first showed yourselves in the land." He added laconically: "Death by oyd."

I sank down on the stone slab.

"When?" I asked, after a moment.

"In two hours."

"Where?"

"Here in this cell."

My impending doom, strange as it may seem, had a quieting effect upon my nerves.

"What of the kingdom?" I asked.

"It survives, and will live to the end of time under the reign of the Almik-Boazars. The Churs are all enslaved, and the Great Ziff has fled to the Unknown."

"Heaven be praised for that! The professor was successful in his attempt to save the land."

"The weapon that wrought the havoc was turned upon our foes. Small credit to this professor of yours! He and you introduced the evil, so it was his business to stamp it out if he could."

"He is safe?" I asked.

"Yes, he and the other two. They will be

given safe conduct to the ice wall. If they return to the country your fate will be theirs."

"Leave me in peace," said I.

"Will you have more peace with a light?" he sneered. "I have brought you one."

One of the slaves carried two luminous globes. At a signal from the count he laid one of the globes on the floor.

"Two hours," said Zylox, with a grim laugh, and passed out with his attendants.

The door was secured, and again I was left alone. The light, however, made my situation more endurable.

Even when confronted by death, a man's mind will deal with trivial things. I marveled at the luminous globe, for it was not fed with oil, nor had it a wick.

It resembled a sphere of glass, but if it was glass it was the first specimen of it I had seen in Nyll. I walked to the globe, bent over it, and picked it up.

Something white lay under it. Hastily I put down the globe, and possessed myself of the object.

It was a bit of folded linen. I unfolded it, and found that it bore queer marks upon its surface, made with a yellow pigment.

Long and earnestly I studied the marks, but could make nothing of them. I turned the square of linen upside down, and still the characters were not legible.

Suddenly a thought struck me, and I removed the talk ring. I had found the key to the situation, for the words were written in English; and, of course, I could not read them while thinking in Nyll.

“Keep a stiff upper lip, captain. Your friends have not abandoned you. I will be with you presently.”

The note was unsigned, but I knew it must come from Prebble. The light bearer had been bribed to lay down the note with the luminous globe.

Hope revived in my breast, although, for the life of me, I could not understand how getting out of the dungeon would save me from my impending doom.

After escaping from the palace, I would still have to leave the kingdom, and to do that unseen, in the broad glare of that long day, would be impossible.

For some time I continued to rack my brain with doubts. Then again came the creak of the door, and Prebble stood before me.

He, also, was clad in a new tunic, and through the lenses of his spectacles his eyes beamed encouragingly. I rushed to him and caught him by both hands.

“Prebble!” I exclaimed. “How have you managed to come to me?”

“Lord Nylis requested it of the king as a personal favor,” he answered.

“The king is determined on my death?”

“He is adamant.”

“If that flask of bourbon is to be blamed for it, it is strange the rest of you are not here with me.”

“It is not on account of the flask of bourbon, captain. The rest of us have not dared to make love to Princess Ylma.”

“Then, as I expected, Zylox is the moving force against me.”

“Not only Zylox, but the whole kingdom—except Lord Nylis. He regrets the occurrence, but you have made him your friend, and he stands by you.”

“What of the princess?” I smiled.

“She stands by you, too, and there have been stormy times in the palace, the princess entreating her father to spare you, and her father only wishing you had nine lives, like a cat, so he could take them all. You have committed a very heinous offense, captain.”

“I could not help it; nor would I have helped it if I could.”

“That’s like you. But I must not squander anything so valuable as time at the present moment. Plans have been made to rescue you.”

“To get me out of the palace?”

“Yes.”

“What will they avail? Suppose I do get out of the palace, what then? Must I hide myself somewhere until the long night, while all Nyll sleeps?”

"Hardly. Griffyn has constructed a new balloon——"

"Constructed a balloon?" I gasped.

"That is it. He has made it out of a royal cloth woven from thread spun by spiders. Griffyn has really done remarkably well. The structure used as a distillery formed his workroom, and, while he was ostensibly assisting Pollock in the manufacture of spirits, he was really constructing this airship.

"He utilized what materials he could take from the wreck of the old balloon, and the result is most creditable. The bag is now being inflated in an open space near where the distillery used to be.

"The gin mill has been burned to the ground, you know, and there is not a drop of elixir to be had anywhere in the kingdom."

"Will Griffyn, feeling as he does toward us, take us with him?" I inquired doubtfully.

"Misfortune has drawn us all together, captain, and Griffyn's feelings toward you have undergone a change. Besides, I insured our passage in the agreement."

"What agreement?"

"A balloon is not of much use without gas. Griffyn could make the balloon, but he could not make the gas. I have done that in return for the privilege of our being allowed to go with him in the airship."

"And the balloon is being inflated, you say?"

"It will be ready for use by the time we are ready to use it."

"But I am to meet my fate within two hours!"

He laughed.

"So you are, but not in the way you imagine. Now listen, captain: Shortly after I leave, a slave will come to you with food. When he goes out, you will accompany him. He understands, and there will be no trouble.

"When you part from the Chur some one else will take you in charge. That is all. It is thought that I have come to say good-by to you, so I must not linger too long, or suspicion will be aroused."

"I will do everything I am told to do," said I, pressing Prebble's hand.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM.

Prebble went away, and I paced the confines of the dungeon impatiently while waiting for the Chur with whom I was to depart. He came in due course, nervous to a degree, and frightened almost out of his wits by the part he was playing.

Through damp and tortuous underground passages I was conducted until it seemed as though we had traversed several miles of labyrinth. When we reached the end we were at a flight of stone steps leading upward.

The Chur ascended the steps and pushed at an iron door. After some effort he succeeded in throwing the door open, and daylight penetrated the gloom.

As the slave stood on the topmost step I saw hands reach over and lay a golden chain around his neck. His face quivered with joy, and he kissed the hands before they were withdrawn.

Then he beckoned me, and stood aside while I passed up and out.

The exit let me out of doors. A grove stretched around me, and I could see no one, not even the person who had conferred the gold necklace upon the Chur.

I turned to question the slave by signs, but he had disappeared. Earth covered the spot where I had gained the surface from below, and so nicely was the door fitted into the turf that no eye could detect its presence.

As I stood waiting I heard a soft voice:

“Captain!”

Behind me stood Princess Ylma, having just stepped out from among the trees. I hurried to her, caught her in my arms, and pressed my lips to hers.

“I was not expecting you, Ylma,” I said.

“Did you think I would abandon you?” she returned, a surprised look on her face.

“No, no—not that. I was sure you could do nothing. The professor, in fact, told me how hard you had labored with the king, and how unsuccessful you were.”

"My father was very unkind to me," she said, with trembling lip. "He does not appreciate what you and the professor have done for the kingdom."

"We wrought the evil, Ylma, and it was our duty to repair it as well as we could. His majesty owes us nothing on that score. But where are we? Had I not better be hastening to the air-ship?"

"Are you so anxious to leave me, then?" she pouted.

"I wish that I might never leave you!" I answered fervently. "I am forsaking Nyll for the good of the kingdom, Ylma. You understand. We talked of it in the throne room."

"I understand," said she, with mock pathos, "that I would not abandon you, but that you willingly abandon me. How ungrateful, captain!"

"Not willingly, dearest," I insisted. "You would not have me stay when all the people, except yourself and Lord Nylis, are crying for my blood because——" I hesitated.

"Because," she finished, "you have dared to love the princess!"

"Yes," I proceeded. "And I would willingly barter one hour of happiness with the princess for this death by oyd. If you say so, dear one——"

"No, no!" she whispered, placing one small hand over my lips. "I do not say so. Forgive me if I tease you, captain. These are the palace gardens, and we are not more than a stone's throw from the lake where I saved your life, so many, many hours ago. Lord Nylis is coming for us with an oyd car, and we are to remain here and listen for his signal. Until we hear the signal we may talk."

"I hope the signal will be long in coming," said I, as she led me to a stone seat. "You realize, do you not, that we are parting forever?"

"No," she returned. "I cannot realize it, captain."

"You must realize it, Ylma," I persisted. "It will be beyond my power to return here. I trust the sacrifice I am making for this kingdom will

long be remembered. It is costing me more than I can tell you."

"Then why make the sacrifice, captain?" she murmured, leaning against me and looking up into my eyes.

Her mood perplexed me. There was no understanding her.

"There must be a sacrifice, Ylma, whatever I do," said I. "If I leave the country, I sacrifice you; if I remain, I yield up my life. I will do as you tell me, my princess. Shall I go, or stay?"

"You must neither leave me nor remain here," said she enigmatically.

Then she laughed in my bewildered face.

"Is this airship of yours, captain, unable to carry one more? Why may not Princess Ylma go with you?"

"Ylma!" I cried, and caught her to my breast. "You would leave your kingdom, your father, all for me?"

"My happiness lies with you, dear," she answered simply. "If I remained here I should be unhappy. Your people shall be my people, your country my country."

"It is you, then, who are making the sacrifice," said I fondly.

"Neither of us shall make a sacrifice," she replied. "Do you not know that I am promised to Count Zylox, a man I loathe and abhor? My father has a will of iron, and is determined to unite the two royal houses of Nyll.

"You are to be slain, and, immediately afterward, while your blood is still red on the count's hands, our nuptials are to be celebrated. Can you imagine a more horrible fate? By leaving my country with you I shall be the happiest woman in the world."

Life was bright for me then. Not only had I discovered the North Pole, but I had won a bride, the fairest and most lovable of women.

While we sat there and talked a voice called from a distance.

"His lordship!" exclaimed Ylma, starting to her feet. "Come!" she added, catching my hand. "Lord Nyllis is taking desperate chances to aid us. The Chur who brought you through the underground passages to the grove won his free-

dom; but we can only requite Lord Nylis by giving him our love and gratitude.”

Together we hurried toward the road. As we pushed through the bushes we saw an oyd car drawn up and waiting for us.

The car contained but one passenger, who, muffled to the eyes in a white robe, sat in the driver's seat.

“Is the coast clear, your lordship?” I asked.

He nodded.

“What you are doing for us in this hour,” I went on, “I shall never forget!”

I was standing beside the oyd car, assisting Ylma to mount. Suddenly the muffled figure uprose and cast aside the cloak.

It was not Lord Nylis at all, but Zylox. Ylma screamed, and the count struck at me savagely with a short sword.

“Don't forget!” he cried. “Up, Churs! This way, guard!”

The captain of the guard had every advantage, and it is a wonder he did not cleave me to the chin with his sword. Ylma dropped on the seat

of the oyd car, and I jumped back, the sword grazing my arm.

Meantime the Churs began pouring into the road from among the trees before and behind the car. Zylox, baffled in his attempt to cut me down, stood looking at me, the sword in his left hand.

“Well it was,” he shouted, “that we discovered the plot of Lord Nylis to help you! But you are not out of the country yet, and you shall not leave this spot alive!”

In the breast of my tunic was the little silver box with the gorr plate sent to me, in the land of the Churs, by Princess Ylma. I treasured it above diamonds and rubies, but I saw immediately that I must part with it.

Drawing it forth I poised it a second in my hands, and then hurled it at the count. It struck him in the forehead, and he threw up his hands and fell backward from the car.

The sword left his grasp and dropped clattering into the roadway. I secured it in a flash, leaped aboard the car, drew up the screen, and

wielded the tiller with my left hand and the sword with my right.

Like an arrow from a bowstring we darted away, mowing a swath through the ranks of the Churs. Leaning over the forward point of the vehicle, I slashed furiously with the blade.

In almost less time than it takes to tell of it we had left Zylox and his detachment of the guard far behind.

"This is awful, awful!" moaned Ylma.

"If we could have helped it, Ylma," I answered, "I would have been happy. The count discovered your plans in some way and took his lordship's place in the oyd car."

"There are several cars pursuing us," said my companion.

"Have we far to go?" I asked, drawing out the screen and giving the car more speed.

"Only a little way. There! Ahead of us is the airship."

A low hill, bare of trees, lay directly before us. On the crest of the hill arose the four ruined walls of Pollock's distillery, and near the walls was the huge, swaying bulk of the balloon.

In the sunlight the great globe looked like frosted silver. About the basket I could see the forms of Prebble, Griffyn, and Pollock looking down on us with frantically waving arms.

What was the matter with them, I was asking myself. Certainly the mere excitement attending our flight and pursuit could not cause such strange actions on their part.

Presently the road angled to the right, and when we dashed around we came upon six oyd cars drawn up abreast of each other across our path.

There was no getting between the cars, and no swerving to right or left to pass them. Thick woods flanked each side of the way.

In order to avoid a wreck, I was forced to draw to a halt.

"In the name of the king!" shouted a voice, as a man arose in one of the cars that confronted us.

The whirl and rumble of the other cars could be heard advancing upon us from behind.

"Lost!" exclaimed Ylma, in a heartbreaking tone. "All is lost, captain!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

A BEWILDERING SENSATION.

In that dread moment when, as Ylma said, all seemed lost, I cast a quick look upward toward the hilltop, where the balloon was swaying. Prebble was executing a war dance and pointing with his hand toward the roadside.

I understood then that we were to leave the car and take to the woods.

"Not lost, Ylma!" I panted, springing to the ground, the sword gripped tightly in my right hand. "Come! We will gain the hill if Heaven so wills it, or I shall die making the attempt."

Her courage rose grandly to the occasion, and she leaped lightly to my side.

"Do you think there is hope?" she asked.

"While there is life there is always hope!"

With hands clasped we hurried into the deep shadow of the woods. We were within spear throw, but none of the ugly darts was launched at us.

Me they were willing enough to spear, but the

princess was at my side, and none dared risk a throw.

"Follow them!" ordered a voice. "Rescue the princess—not a hair of her head must be injured—but slay the foreign devil—slay him!"

"Slay the foreign devil! Slay him!" shouted other voices.

"Faster, faster!" panted Ylma. "Oh, captain, can't you go faster?"

I was running my best, and dragging her after me. She was sobbing breathlessly, but urging me to swifter pace at every bound.

From behind us came a triumphant cry. I paused, turned, and saw that a Chur had overtaken us. Warding a spear thrust with one hand, I passed the sword through his body, and whirled to renew our flight.

Ylma, overcome with fear and fatigue, had fallen.

"I can go no farther, captain," she cried, throwing her arms around my neck convulsively. "Leave me! Save yourself!"

"If I go, Ylma," I answered, "you go with me."

Then I picked her up in my arms and ran on blindly. We were ascending the hill now. There was no timber, and we were in plain view of our pursuers.

But still no spears were thrown—the danger to the princess was too great. A hundred yards more and we would be at the balloon.

Could I make it? The Churs were bounding up the hillside from rock to rock, coming closer and closer at every spring.

The sweat stood out on my forehead in great drops, my heart pounded furiously, and I could hear the roar of rushing blood in my ears. Another of the Churs was right at my heels.

Then I perceived that Griffyn and Pollock were beside me. A lusty right-hander from Pollock laid the Chur in his tracks.

“Let me help you, captain,” said Griffyn.

Between us we bore Ylma the remaining distance, and placed her in the basket.

“In with you!” cried Prebble. “For Heaven’s sake, hurry!”

The professor was standing on the rim of the

basket, knife in hand, waiting to cut the rope that held the balloon to earth.

I was thrown into the basket by Griffyn, who piled in after me. Prebble cut the rope, and we shot skyward, with Pollock clinging to the edge of the car.

I looked over and downward. Nyll and the Nyllites were receding rapidly. As I gazed, the Churs hurled an impotent shower of spears, which fell far short of us.

Zylox was below, and his was the last face I saw. Its expression of hate and baffled rage was awful to behold. As his figure faded and blurred on my sight he was shaking his fist upward at the mounting airship.

“Saved!” cried Prebble jubilantly. “I told you that when you left the dungeon, captain, you would meet your fate.”

Ylma smiled and held out her hand to me.

“I did not think of your words in this light,” said I, taking the little hand in mine.

“I think the lot of us have had a time of it,” said Griffyn.

"So we have, my hearty," I returned, "but all's well that ends well."

"May I look over, captain?" asked Ylma.

"Certainly you may," said I, and I held my arm about her while she took a final look at her country and her people.

When she turned to me a moment later there was a smile of joy on her lips and tears of sorrow in her eyes.

"The wind favors our return southward," said Griffyn. "If nothing unforeseen happens we shall reach the land beyond the ice wall before the——"

Griffyn paused. He could not calculate the length of time that would be required for crossing the kingdom and the frozen plains beyond.

"I can make no guess about the length of time necessary to place us in comfort and safety," said he, "but the present breeze seems to be as strong, or stronger, than the wind that carried us north."

"How many hours were you in the air on the other occasion?" inquired Prebble.

"It was twenty-five hours, professor, from the

time we left the spot where the balloon was inflated until Pollock and I landed in the parachute."

"Then by to-morrow, if this wind holds, and nothing goes wrong with the gas bag, we should be among the Eskimo settlements," said I.

"Yes," nodded Griffyn. "I don't think anything will go wrong with the balloon. It has been strongly constructed, and if the professor has furnished us with a good brand of gas we should make a landfall safely and quickly."

"You and the professor have done exceedingly well, Griffyn," said I approvingly.

The Englishman laughed.

"Our lives depended on our efforts, and you may be sure that we labored like a lot of bally slaves. We tried to think of everything—food, water, ballast, and good, warm clothing against our passage over the ice fields."

I had not had time, as yet, to note the equipment of the car. Now, however, I took occasion to look around me, and found that we were snugly ensconced among many packages.

"I regret exceedingly," said I, "that we were

obliged to resort to so much violence in getting away."

"The Nyllites and the Churs got their whack," returned Griffyn easily. "Our lives were at stake, Salis, and we could not be expected to stand on ceremony." His voice took on a note of reproach as he added: "Your affection for the princess was hardly wise. But for that there would have been no violence and no trouble."

"You will kindly leave the princess out of the question," I answered him sharply.

"I maintain, however," said he steadily, "that it is well that we left your princess behind."

"What's that?" I demanded, thinking I had not heard aright.

"It would have been a calamity for all concerned had you brought Princess Ylma away with you. Nyll is her home, and the Nyllites are her people. She would not thrive in a foreign land, and to spirit her away was hardly the fair thing for the kingdom."

I stared at the man. He could talk in that inexplicable strain with the princess in the car with us!

From him I turned to the professor.

"My dear captain," said Prebble commiseratingly, "I am quite of Griffyn's opinion. We did well to leave Princess Ylma behind. She was unhurt, in spite of the violent scenes you both passed through, and, let us hope, she will soon forget you, and turn a more favoring eye upon Zylox."

I turned to look toward the place where the princess—my princess—was standing. She smiled brightly at me, and I whirled upon the professor and Griffyn.

"Are you mad?" I shouted. "Or am I? You talk of leaving the princess behind when she is here with us, in plain view of all of you. Speak, Ylma!" I asked, looking around at her.

"It is quite true, captain," Ylma answered softly. "I am with you, and shall always be with you."

"There!" I exclaimed triumphantly.

Griffyn and Prebble merely smiled at me—smiled tolerantly and kindly.

"I trust with all my heart," said Prebble, "that no ill will come to Nylis for the aid he gave us."

“He has powerful friends at court,” spoke up the princess, “and his lordship cannot be harmed.”

To my anger and surprise, no one in the car, aside from myself, paid any attention to the princess’ words.

I began to experience a bewildering sensation, a sensation which filled me with an astonishment that remains even to this day.

I stepped to the side of Ylma, I spoke to her, I tried to touch her with my hand. Where she had stood, she was not; the words I addressed to her received no answer; the hand I put forth touched only space.

“Where is she?” I shouted angrily. “What have you done with her? Griffyn! Prebble! What has become of Princess Ylma?”

I was angry, for I felt that some trick had been played upon me. In my bewilderment and wrath I laid hands upon Griffyn. Instantly he, and Prebble, and Pollock seized me in a fierce grip, and while the car swayed with the struggle I was borne down upon the bales and packages, doubled up in the confined space, and held by sheer force.

Was I the victim of a plot? What plot could there be in which Prebble, always loyal, could take part against me?

Suddenly a weight seemed lifted. Something snapped in my brain, or else the two ends of a mental chain were reunited with a flashing as of live wires.

My anger fell from me, and my lifted hands dropped nerveless.

"What are you men trying to do?" I inquired.

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Prebble. "He will be all right now, Griffyn. Let him sleep."

And, somehow, I *did* sleep.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

I have now come to a part of this chronicle which has always been a mystery to me. The events surrounding the escape from the Land of Nyll, and especially those which have to do with the princess at that time, have faded into the wrack left by a weird—and, in many respects, a delightful—dream.

When I opened my eyes, after falling asleep in the car, I experienced a disagreeable feeling of cold and discomfort. Griffyn, Prebble, and Pollock, swathed in heavy garments, were releasing bags of ballast with their mittened hands.

“Have we ballast enough?” I heard Prebble inquire.

“I think so, professor,” Griffyn answered. “You see, I had counted upon the effect the frigid air over the ice fields would have on the gas in the envelope. The only way to counteract the loss of buoyancy was by hurling ballast out of

the car. Therefore, I made the balloon large and equipped it with plenty of sandbags."

"Where is the princess?" I demanded, sitting up.

Pollock had as little interest in me as I had in him. He kept to his work without paying the slightest attention. Griffyn and Prebble, however, faced around and gave me encouraging smiles.

"If you don't feel warm enough, captain," said Prebble, "wrap another bearskin around you. This climate is vastly different from that of Nyll."

"But where is the princess?" I persisted.

"Safely in the palace, I make no doubt, and I hope there is peace between her and her father, and that Count Zylox is finding favor. He is a worthy gentleman, in spite of the fact that we had our differences, and he deserves the best of fortune."

I looked around the car, confused and wondering.

"I knocked Zylox off his lordship's car with the gorr plate," I observed. "That was when we

found him waiting for us instead of Lord Nylis. It was no insignificant blow, I can tell you.”

The professor cackled.

“Then, captain, you have left with him a memento,” said he. “Probably he will not treasure it.”

“Will you not tell me what has become of the princess?” I begged, passing a mittened hand over my brows.

“You remember bounding up the rocks, carrying Princess Ylma in your arms?” asked the professor.

“I remember that, yes,” I answered eagerly.

“And do you remember that Griffyn and Pollock came to your rescue just as a Chur had knocked you flat with a blow from behind?”

“I remember about Griffyn and Pollock, but I was not struck down by the Chur.”

Blank astonishment crossed the professor’s face. I proceeded to recite the progress of events from that point.

“It was Pollock who bowled over the Chur. Then Griffyn helped me carry Ylma to the balloon, and we placed her in the basket. We tum-

bled in after her. You, Prebble, were standing on the rim of the basket, a knife in your hand, and the moment we were all aboard you slashed a rope in twain, and the balloon sailed away into space. The Churs flung a shower of spears after us, but they fell short. Zylox was below, and his face was the last one I saw that I can distinctly remember. Ylma was with us—there can be no doubt on that score. She wanted to take a final look at the Kingdom of Nyll as we swept over it, and I remember steadying her as she peered over the edge of the basket.”

Pollock had looked around in considerable astonishment. Prebble and Griffyn were exchanging puzzled looks. Prebble’s face was first to clear.

“Why,” said he, with a laugh, “from the moment Griffyn and Pollock went to your rescue, captain, your fancies have been playing weird pranks. It proves,” he added jubilantly, “that my theory regarding the irresponsible condition of the mind north of the arctic circle is correct.”

“You mean to say,” I cried protestingly, “that

I imagined all that about my escape with the princess?"

"Exactly that," said Prebble. "What really happened, captain, is this: We were waiting for you at the balloon, and we hardly thought it possible for you to get clear of your enemies. But you did manage to force a way through them by leaving the road and taking to the woods. We saw you, hard beset, climbing the rocks with the princess in your arms. Griffyn and Pollock sallied out to do what they could. Just as they reached you, a Chur floored you with a blow. You fell, and the princess dropped from your arms. Griffyn and Pollock could not bear away both you and the princess, so they picked you up and carried you to the balloon. You were half dazed and wholly irrational. The princess was not here, but you insisted on talking to her just as though she was here. You grew angry when we tried to explain, and it was necessary for us to use force. While we were holding you down you seemed to recover your wits; but the delusion regarding the princess had not been dis-

pelled. I trust I have made that matter clear to you now, however."

"I can't understand it," I muttered.

Although I could not understand, yet I was forced to accept Prebble's explanation. Princess Ylma was not in the car. This one fact proved me in error.

"I would almost as readily think that our experiences in the Land of Nyll and among the Churs were equally a product of my imagination," said I.

"Not at all," spoke up Griffyn, "for you have the testimony of the rest of us to adduce in proof. That blow on the head, dealt by the Chur, is what did the business for you, Salis."

"I have no recollection of it."

"Your head is bandaged. That ought to be sufficient proof, even though the hurt is causing you no discomfort."

I was conscious, then, of a throbbing at the back of my head.

"The joke of it all is," cackled the professor, "that the captain knocked Count Zylox off the oyd car with a love letter from the princess. That

letter was impressed in a block of carnelian, and weighed a pound."

Griffyn smiled, and Pollock laughed outright. I leaned back against the framework of the car and wondered if I had really recovered my senses.

My romance with the princess had come to a most unsatisfactory conclusion. My heart was deeply involved, and the disappointment was bitter.

Prebble, seeing how hard I took the affair, knelt down beside me.

"Let me assure you, captain," said he, "that it is well the affair ended in this way."

I shook my head. He went on with his reasons:

"It is best that Princess Ylma should remain in her own land, among her own people. Best for her, and best for the kingdom. The line of the Boazars ends with Ylma. Had we borne the princess away the kingdom would indeed have had cause to consider us demons of destruction. You may find it hard to reconcile yourself to the fact now, but in years to come you will be glad the matter turned out as it has."

I kept my head bowed in gloomy silence.

“Besides,” proceeded Prebble, “we have left behind us a few good friends. If the princess remains to intercede for them—for Lord Nylis particularly—we may console ourselves with a well-grounded hope that they will not suffer for aiding in our escape. Then there is——”

“My word!” came in startled tones from Grif-fyn.

Prebble scrambled to his feet and joined Grif-fyn, who was looking excitedly over the rim of the basket. Pollock also was containing himself only with great difficulty.

“Glory!” cried the professor exultantly. “Look, captain! See who are below! Some of our Eskimo guides, as I live, and with them are several of the crew from the ship!”

Here was something to take my mind off the amazing tangle in which it had become involved. Scrambling erect, I leaned on the rim of the car and looked down.

We were perhaps five hundred feet in the air, and only maintaining that height by the expenditure of vast quantities of ballast. Below, and a

little way to the south, were dog sledges, heaped high with provisions. Around the sledges were the Eskimos, and in front of the leading sledge stood the fur-clad men from the ship. I recognized Lieutenant Corson, my second in command, and Bentnick, our doctor.

"They are on the way to the ice cap," said I, waving my hand to the startled men below. "After the Eskimos got back to the ship Corson lost no time in starting out. We'll make a landing, Griffyn, you and Pollock," said I.

I turned to Prebble and gripped his hand.

"Our dangers are nearly over with, Prebble!" said I. "We'll soon be aboard ship and under the flag."

"Which puts us a long step toward home!" cried the professor delightedly.

"I wonder where our ship is, Pollock?" asked Griffyn of his secretary.

"Heaven knows!" Pollock answered.

"You are welcome to sail south with us, Griffyn, and you, Pollock," said I.

"We accept your offer, Sališ," returned Griffyn heartily. "You may need our testimony to

substantiate your claims. We can help you there."

He caught the valve cord. Standing at the edge of the basket, I watched while we settled slowly toward the gleaming plains of white.

Almost I fancied that Princess Ylma was beside me, and almost I could hear her voice giving its final message:

"It is quite true, captain; I am with you, and shall always be with you."

It was a message for me alone, and I treasured it as a promise.

THE END.

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To be published in January, 1926.

- 1175—Nick Carter's Double CatchBy Nicholas Carter
1176—Doctor Quartz's Quick MoveBy Nicholas Carter

To be published in February, 1926.

- 1177—The Vial of DeathBy Nicholas Carter
1178—Nick Carter's Star PupilsBy Nicholas Carter

To be published in March, 1926.

- 1179—Nick Carter's Girl DetectiveBy Nicholas Carter
1180—A Baffled OathBy Nicholas Carter

To be published in April, 1926.

- 1181—A Royal ThiefBy Nicholas Carter
1182—Down and OutBy Nicholas Carter

To be published in May, 1926.

- 1183—A Syndicate of RascalsBy Nicholas Carter
1184—Played to a FinishBy Nicholas Carter

To be published in June, 1926.

- 1185—A Tangled CaseBy Nicholas Carter
1186—In Letters of FireBy Nicholas Carter

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130—Dick Merriwell's Five	By Burt L. Standish

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To be published in January, 1926.

131—Frank Merriwell's Tigers	By Burt L. Standish
132—Dick Merriwell's Polo Team	By Burt L. Standish

To be published in February, 1926.

133—Frank Merriwell's Pupils	By Burt L. Standish
134—Frank Merriwell's New Boy	By Burt L. Standish

To be published in March, 1926.

135—Dick Merriwell's Home Run	By Burt L. Standish
136—Dick Merriwell's Dare	By Burt L. Standish
137—Frank Merriwell's Son	By Burt L. Standish

To be published in April, 1926.

138—Dick Merriwell's Team Mate	By Burt L. Standish
139—Frank Merriwell's Leaguers	By Burt L. Standish

To be published in May, 1926.

140—Frank Merriwell's Happy Camp	By Burt L. Standish
141—Dick Merriwell's Influence	By Burt L. Standish

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