

The Queen of the Extinct Volcano

by Charles Dudley Lampen, 1859-1943

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Illustrations

IV	„Look there!“ he said.
VI	He seized the queen... and made for the door.
X	She guided our progress by voice and hand.



Chapter I

The Map.

"IT has always struck me as a wonderful thing," said Bob Halliard, "that, in spite of all our inquiries, we have never been able to find the slightest trace of the gov'nor. I thought that Captain Clearstory would have brought home some news; but his information was of the most scanty and unsatisfactory description."

"How long is it since your father left England?"

"Nine years to-morrow."

"And to-morrow you are twenty-one?" I said.

Bob nodded, and sent a long wreath of smoke from his cigarette, which dissolved slowly above his head.

We were seated in my nephew's room—a very comfortably furnished one—overlooking the quadrangle. He was an undergraduate in his third year, and I, a medical man of independent means, not in practice, and residing near London, had been "doing" the University under his guidance, and was now enjoying the solace of a pipe within the hospitable walls of his "den."

"You see," I resumed, "it will now be necessary for some steps to be taken with regard to the property. If your father be no longer alive then you come into possession to-morrow; but if he should turn up, then—"

"Why, then I am where I am," said Bob, laughing. "The fact is I don't care a scrap about coming into the estate, but I do care very much about the gov'nor, and would give a good deal if I could find him. Jack Brace has a theory that one of these days he will turn up—a millionaire, having made an enormous fortune in some remote gold-field."

I smiled, knowing that millionaires were not so easily manufactured.

"Your father may certainly come back," I said, "though I doubt the accompaniment of the enormous fortune, but, after all, he will be comfortably off. Above a certain amount, wealth is a source rather of anxiety than of happiness. But with regard to Captain Clearstory's statements, it is very important that we should have them in mind. Now what did he tell you?"

"Not very much," replied Bob, "but quite enough to rouse my interest and curiosity. He informed me that during the voyage my father was very quiet and uncommunicative, merely telling him that his object in going to the Pacific Islands was to investigate certain problems connected with their natural features. The captain told me, that the gov'nor often spoke of me and said that some day I should be proud of being his son."

"This is all very well," I said, as Bob paused to take another whiff; "but it doesn't help us very much, does it? Now if old Clearstory had only told us which way your father went after he landed him at Tahiti in the Society Islands, we should now be in a better position to prosecute a search. We must interview the old man—he lives at Kingston, I believe—and see if he can tell us anything more."

"'The long' begins next week," said Bob, "and we might run down and interview the Captain. But tell me," he added, "whether you think, candidly, that we ought to go out to the South Seas?"

"Not unless we have some very definite information," I replied.

A week later found us at the house of Captain Clearstory, Kingston-on-Thames.

He was a fine hearty man of about sixty years of age, who, having married a well-to-do widow, had abandoned the ocean and was now the master and owner of a smart little villa, where everything was as ship-shape and spick and span as possible.

He received us with much ceremony.

"Bless my stars, how you've grown," he remarked, eyeing my nephew from head to foot. "So this is your uncle. How do ye do, sir? Sit down. Now, what'll ye take? Cigars—yes, I've some prime ones. No duty paid on these!" and he slowly and good-humouredly winked one eye.

We told him our business.

"You will remember, captain," began Bob, "that after your return from the Pacific three years ago, you told me something about my father, who sailed with you. As I am very anxious for further information I have come with my uncle, Mr. Abel Halliard, to consult you again."

Here I struck in, and informed the captain that, as my nephew was now of age, it was very necessary, either that we should be sure that my brother was dead, or that we should take some more active steps than hitherto to find him. "You see we

have inquired through Lloyd's agents and other officials everywhere," I said, "but so far with no result."

The captain was very quiet for a few minutes, and then, rising, he thrust his huge hands deep into his capacious pockets.

"I've *one*—just *one* little thing to tell ye, he said; "but it won't help ye a bit!"

"It may be interesting, all the same," said Bob.

"Well, then—here goes!"

So saying the captain strode across the room to a bookshelf protected by glazed doors, from which he took a book.

"You see this?" he said, holding it up before us.

"Yes—it looks like a Bible," I remarked.

"And it looks what it is. Yes, gentlemen, this is a Bible, and it belonged to your father," he said, turning to Bob.

"Then how came it into your possession?" inquired my nephew, not looking very pleased to find this relic of his long-lost father in the hands of Captain Clearstory.

"Well, it'll be an easy job to tell ye, Mr. Halliard; I'll just light up again, and then I'll spin ye the yarn—for there's a bit of a tale to tell with regard to this same book.

"Now, you must know," he began, "that at the time this Bible came into my possession I was in command of the barque *Empress of India* trading between the Port of London, the west coast of America, and certain other parts of the Pacific. One morning, just as we were about to sail, I received a note from the owners that a certain Mr. George Halliard was about to sail with us, and ordering me to make preparation for his reception. He arrived the same afternoon, and I soon found him to be very pleasant company. His object, he said, in making the voyage was to obtain information for The Incorporated Society of Naturalists concerning the beasts and birds of those parts—a rum occupation, I thought; but he believed in his mission, I can tell ye. Lor, how enthusiastic that man would get over a flea or a bug!

"Things went well, and on the west coast we did a bit of trading, and at last shipped a cargo for the Sandwich Islands. Afore we landed the Professor—as we called your father—I had a bit of a talk with him. He told me that he might be there a month—more or less, and then he thought of going to some other groups of islands in the Pacific, and that you know is a large order, because three or four thousand miles is nothing in that ocean.

"Well, we left him at Tahiti and sailed for other parts. It would be some eight months later when we touched there again. There was a small brig lying at anchor near us, and the captain, being an old friend o' mine, invited me to dine with him. He told me he had been to the Marquesas and had had a bit o' a scrimmage wi' the natives, and they had captured and made off with two of his men. Having failed to discover whether they were alive or dead, he made a raid on a village and found a Bible in one of the huts. Within the cover was written the name *George Halliard!* The captain gave the book to me when he learnt that it had belonged to my friend."

"Did you go to the Marquesas?" inquired Bob, eagerly.

Captain Clearstory shook his head.

"It was too far out of our course," he said; "but I've got the Bible, and here it is."

Bob took up the Bible from the table. It was a plainly bound volume, in embossed brown leather and fastened by a nickel clasp.

"I've not opened it beyond the cover," remarked the captain, in an apologetic tone.

Bob had some difficulty in opening the clasp, for it fitted tight, and had not been moved for some years.

"Ah, here it goes," he said, as he opened the book. "But what's this?"

On the one side of the fly-leaf was written: "*George Halliard, from his affectionate wife.*" But what arrested Bob's attention, and interested the captain and myself too, as we looked over his shoulder, was the following diagram drawn on the other side of the page:

[Map]

Underneath the map was written in my brother's handwriting—

N.B.—If ever this Bible should come into the hands of R. H. let him seek me at C. Or, if he be captured by the natives and wishes to escape, let him do so by D. or P., and thence to I. The Mouth and Hand. No safety but for those marked; but beware of the Red Petticoat.

G.H.

"What on earth does all this mean?" I exclaimed, bending down and scanning the page closely.

"If ever this Bible should come into the hands of R. H.," read Bob aloud. "Why!" he cried, "'R. H.' must mean myself—Robert Halliard!"

"Exactly; couldn't be any one else," chimed in Captain Clearstory, smiting his thigh energetically. "So this 'ere map was intended for my young friend, and, as I never turned over that leaf, I've not seen it till this very hour! Darn my buttons, but to think I should ha' missed it in such a way!" and he stroked his chin reflectively.

"Can you tell us what it means?" I inquired.

But the captain shook his head slowly. "It doesn't answer to any island that I can remember."

"Island!" we both exclaimed.

"Why, yes," he continued; "it's the map of some island, to my thinking, and very fairly drawn too. See, here are the points of the compass, and here the soundings, I take it—in fathoms quite in the usual way—and these letters I should say mark the towns or villages, or places of note."

"But there is no name—and, in fact, no indication whatever that your guess is correct," said Bob. "No indications of latitude or longitude, no names, no anything of real service."

I took up the Bible and looked attentively at the map. My nephew was quite right. It was an interesting discovery; but, so far as I saw, could lead to nothing. The only thing about it of which we could at all be certain being that it was the map of some island—at least that seemed to be the only likely explanation of the marks and figures thereon.

"Will you lend me this book?" asked Bob, looking up anxiously into the sailor's honest face.

"Give it to ye, my lad! Ay, who should sooner have it but yourself? If it'll be of any service in finding the Professor—yes, I'll gladly give it. But I sadly fear," he added, "that the map will not be of any advantage to ye."

We had a long talk with the captain over the subsequent pipes, concerning the possibility and probability of finding my lost brother. The captain pointed out the enormous extent of the Pacific Ocean—exceeding in area all the land on the globe, and the enormous number of islands of all sizes.

"But have not most of them, if not all, been marked on the Admiralty and other charts?" inquired Bob.

"Quite true, sir," said our host; "and the coast of most of them has been surveyed and mapped; but there are, no doubt, still some islands which do not see the sails of a vessel, or the smoke of a steamer, once in a dozen years. They are altogether out of the track of navigators, because they lie on the road to nowhere. In many cases they consist of a mere ring of coral on which a few trees grow, surrounding an inner lake or saltwater lagoon."

"But are not very many islands of a totally different formation?" I asked.

"Undoubtedly," replied the captain. "A vast number of them are of volcanic origin, such as the Feejee and Samoa groups. Then there are others, such as the Society Islands, which lie north-east of the Hervey group, which have coral reefs surrounding the volcanic land. But a little further east there is the Low Archipelago, consisting of an immense number of coral islands, some of them being only just visible above the water."

"I suppose you have had many adventures among the natives of those seas?" asked Bob, who had inherited from his father, as I could plainly perceive, a love of adventure, and was evidently inclined to "draw" the captain.

"I've seen a good deal; and, in days gone by, when the natives were not so civilized as they are to-day, it was considered a very dangerous business to trade with them. For instance, I have been nearly eaten."

"Eaten!" we both exclaimed.

He smiled, and nodded to us in a knowing manner, as if to emphasize his sagacity in retaining the flesh on his well-covered bones.

"Yes, I've been well-nigh cooked and eaten," he repeated. "It'll be more'n twenty years ago, I was first mate aboard the Victoria Regina, a tidy four-hundred-ton brig. We were trading from island to island, and were at the time pretty full of cocoa-nut oil, arrowroot, pearl-shell, and other products of those parts.

"Then our captain, John MacCreedy by name, a Scotchman, as you may guess, took it into his head to visit the Marquesas. These are quite nine hundred miles nor' east of Tahiti, where we then lay. I told the old fellow that we should run some risk, as the inhabitants of those islands bore a very bad character; but he only laughed, and called me an old woman, and so we sailed.

"Well, to cut the story short, we landed and did some trade; and as the brown fellows seemed to be on their best behaviour, MacCreedy ordered me to take a boat's crew round to one of the landing places for a supply of cocoa-nuts, while the ship remained at anchor.

"That expedition nearly cost us our lives. No sooner had we set foot on the shore, where we were out of sight of the ship, than swarms of natives rushed out of the shelter of the trees and low bushes, and attacked us with murderous-

looking carved clubs. Five of us, including your humble servant, were overcome after a stiff fight, but the other three escaped to the boat, and pushing off, made for the ship.

"Seeing this, the people seized us and hurried us away into the interior—I cannot say how far, but I know it was a considerable distance up one of the mountains, which rise to a great height. Here they made a fire, and prepared to kill and roast us. My only fear was lest they should begin by roasting us alive.

"Presently we heard the report of a gun and recognized the distant shouts of English voices. The natives heard the sounds also, and skedaddled in quick style, leaving us by the fire, like so many huge fowls trussed ready for roasting; I forgot to say that the wretches had taken off our clothes, and had tied our necks to our knees.

"Well, at last we were discovered, and with great rejoicing taken back to the ship. The captain hung about the island for two days, hoping to have a chance of revenge; but the natives kept well out of sight, so we sailed for the Sandwich Islands, and I have never since been in the neighbourhood of the Marquesas."

Chapter II

We Make Our Plans.

FOR some weeks nothing further happened. Bob was spending the vacation with his friend Jack Brace, and I was busy in other ways, and had just prepared to run down to North Wales for a few weeks when the following telegram was placed in my hands—

BRACE THINKS FOUND CLUE. WILL ACCOMPANY US. CAN YOU START IMMEDIATELY?

I read it several times before I fully grasped its meaning, and realized that my impetuous nephew actually proposed an expedition in search of his father. It was quite natural that he should be eager; but still, caution was equally necessary, and I had no desire to start on a wild-goose chase at his bidding. For I fully understood the strength of the youthful love of adventure and change, and felt that it would be wisdom to make them realize, if possible, the necessity of careful investigation of details, and the most minute elaboration of plans before the starting of any expedition.

Accordingly, I telegraphed to Captain Clearstory that we would come to his house the next day, and replied to my nephew asking him and Jack Brace to meet me there.

"Ha, ha! a regular committee meeting, I declare!" cried the good-tempered old salt, as we assembled around his table; "quite a Board of Admiralty! Now, sir, you are the President," he said, turning to me, "so please be seated here!" and he pointed to his capacious high-backed chair at the head of the table.

"As I shall have to provide the munitions of war in case we embark on this expedition, I suppose I may as well accept your offer," I replied. "Now, Mr. Brace," I continued, "we are in a position to hear what you have to say."

At this point Bob laid the Bible on the table, and Jack produced a tracing of the map. He was a tall, large-limbed, and fair young man, some two years Bob's senior, and very different from him in appearance, for Bob is short and rather thick-set. Jack Brace had just been elected "third" in the Trinity boat, and was considered one of the most promising oars of the University, while my nephew, though active enough, had not especially distinguished himself in athletic affairs, being more of a student than his friend.

"I have not done very much, I fear," said Jack, in modest tones; "but it struck me that the map would prove a sufficient guide if properly used, so I asked my father to advise me in the matter."

I here explained to Captain Clearstory that my young friend was the son of the well-known Admiral Brace, and I noticed that the captain looked upon Jack, after this, with increasing respect.

"My father took a great interest in my account of the discovery of the map," continued Jack, "and suggested that I should look over some of the charts at the Admiralty. It took me a long time to do it, but at last I found what may be of help to you."

Here he took from his pocket a tracing, and handed it to me. There was of a certainty a most remarkable similarity in shape to the outline drawn in the Bible. In fact, at first sight, I thought they were identical, until Captain Clearstory pointed out an important particular wherein they differed, namely, that on the tracing from the Admiralty chart there was no indication of a sound or inlet such as was indicated on the southern side of the island (if an island it were) in the map on the fly-leaf of the Bible, nor were there any figures or marks on the island such as appeared in the Bible.

"This is a poser!" remarked the captain, "because, you see, the tracing answers exactly in every other particular. What is the name of this island of yours?" he said, addressing Jack Brace.

By way of reply Jack read us the following:

"Island on North-western extremity of Marquesas group. Name unknown, though by some called Johnson's Land. Latitude 140 W.; Longitude 9 S.' That is all the information I have," he said, handing the captain the paper from which he had read.

"Do you know this island?" inquired Bob, turning to him.

"I cannot say that I do," said the captain. "Ye see, I was not very long at the Marquesas. In those days the few who visited the islands didn't care to stay there, and I've heard that even nowadays people are afraid of the terrible natives."

We looked at each other for a few minutes without speaking. But I felt sure that the same thought was revolving in all our minds, namely, would it be possible for us to do anything on such scanty and seemingly unreliable information? For my own part I feared that we should only spend large sums and perhaps endanger our lives without any corresponding advantageous result.

But Bob was more sanguine than the rest of us. He had evidently made up his mind to do something, though perhaps he did not very clearly see what that something was to be.

"You see," he exclaimed, "this map contains a call—yes, a definite call, I take it— from my father, and one which I am bound to obey. Why should he have written all this under the map if he did not feel certain that I should act upon it? Probably"—and here Bob spoke with increasing earnestness—" he has for years waited and hoped and wondered. He may even now be alive and yet despairing of help! I tell you all," he cried, smiting the table with his fist, "that I will ship before the mast for these Islands, or get there in some other way, and alone, if no one will go with me!"

The captain smiled a huge smile as Bob spoke, and patted him approvingly on the back when he concluded.

"If ye go, it'll not be alone, my lad," he cried; "leastways not so long as Jonathan Clearstory has a pair o' legs."

"For my own part," I remarked, "I should be most unwilling to neglect any clue to the mystery of my brother's disappearance; and having the means, and nothing to keep me at home, I will gladly pay the cost of an expedition to the Island indicated on the tracing brought by Mr. Brace. Will you accept my offer, Bob?" I said.

Bob's reply was a cordial grasp of the hand. His heart was too full for him to speak, and I could see tears in his eyes.

"Who is to go?" asked Jack Brace, in a tone that seemed to indicate his anxiety to become one of the number.

"I suppose," I remarked, "that we had better at once make our plans and determine the number and functions of the party and its members. First, we want a capable and reliable leader."

"Yourself," suggested the captain, with an emphatic nod.

I shook my head.

"I shall be willing—nay, I am anxious to go—and will act as treasurer, as I have said. In fact, you may leave matters of pure business to me, and I will see that the expedition is properly equipped, but I cannot undertake the post of leader. Why not lead us yourself, Captain Clearstory?"

As I spoke the door opened, and a smart little woman of some forty years of age entered. It was the captain's wife.

"I was in the passage, and the door was ajar," she remarked. "I could not help overhearing. You will not go?" she said, laying her hand pleadingly on her husband's arm.

"Well, you see, my dear," he replied, in a hesitating tone, "these gentlemen know nothing about the sea and less about those islands. Now, as I've told 'em, I had at one time a small amount of experience in the Marquesas and have been introduced to some of their chief men—"

"But you cannot leave me alone, Jonathan," she interrupted; "and if you are eaten—"

"I shall not trouble the undertaker," he said, with a laugh.

"If you will spare the captain for this voyage, Mrs. Clearstory," I said, "I will ask my sister, who keeps house for me, to stay with you, or you can come to stay with

her while we are away." I then brought forward sundry forcible arguments why the captain should accompany us, arguments which he supported in a way which showed that he was very anxious to go; and she at length consented. Whereupon her good- man heaved a huge sigh of relief, greatly to our amusement.

"But we have not yet settled the question of leader," I said, resuming our discussion. "Captain, will you undertake the post?"

He shook his head ponderously.

"I'm hardly young enough for *that*, sir!" he said; "though I don't mind having a try, if this company insists. But why not put the command upon Mr. Halliard here?" And he laid his hand on Bob's shoulder.

"We'll advise him, we'll help him, and we'll follow him through thick and thin in all things except making ourselves into roast pig, at which, for one, I should draw the line!"

We all laughed except my nephew; and he was evidently turning over in his mind the captain's suggestion.

"I am in your hands," he said, looking round. "If it is your unanimous opinion that I should be the leader of the expedition, I will undertake it. But I promise to consult you in all matters of importance. In mere matters of detail or routine, I shall, of course, think and act for myself. Do you agree to this?"

"We agree!" we cried.

"So the matter is settled," I said. "Now for the arrangements—Captain Halliard, when do you propose to start?"

Then came a long discussion concerning date of sailing, route, outfit, *et cetera*, till late in the evening all matters of immediate importance were satisfactorily arranged, and we retired to rest under the captain's hospitable roof, to dream that we were being roasted and eaten by the cannibals of the Marquesas Islands.

Chapter III

The Island.

LAND ahead!" shouted the lookout at the mast- head.

"At last!" exclaimed Bob Halliard, who was standing by my side and looking out over the sun-lit waters, as they danced and sparkled in the tropical sunshine under the action of the brisk breeze.

So the good ship ENTERPRISE—a barque of six hundred tons—was, as we hoped, drawing near to her destination. It was some time before the land became visible from the deck; but at length Captain Clearstory pointed out something which looked like a low dark-blue cloud in the distance.

That's land!" he said.

"But is it our land?" I asked.

"That remains to be proved—as the schoolmaster said when the boy brought him a long-division sum," replied the captain. "We have a good deal to do before we can be certain that it's the island mapped in the Bible," he added.

"And a good deal to do afterwards," I rejoined.

Bob did not speak; but I saw that his lips were compressed, and there was a look of quiet determination on his face. His work was now about to begin. Hitherto Captain Clearstory had commanded, for at Bob's request, he had taken charge of the ship which I had hired for the sole use of the expedition. True it was an expensive way of doing things; but after weighing pros and cons, we had decided that as there were no vessels to be found sailing for these islands which would also wait for us during the indefinite period of our search, it would be greatly to our comfort and safety if we had entire control of the vessel and her movements.

The first mate was an old comrade of the captain's, and one who had sailed with him on previous voyages, Thomas Thudduck by name, a fine brawny specimen of a Scotchman, hailing from the port of Aberdeen, and who had more recently been engaged in the whaling trade; but, owing to the gradual failure of that occupation, was only too glad to join his old friend in this expedition.

As Thudduck played a by no means unimportant part in the wonderful events I am about to narrate, it would be as well that I should here describe him more particularly. He was about six feet two inches in height and correspondingly broad. His head and face were thickly clothed with wiry red hair, which also was in strong evidence on his brawny arms and hands; in fact, he was a veritable Esau for hairiness. Even his own mother could never have called 'Tammass' handsome—unless he had wonderfully changed since his babyhood, for he had the ugliest and most baboon-like face I ever beheld. The chief peculiarity about him, however, was neither his hair nor his features, but his arms and hands. These were of enormous length and abnormal strength. In fact, his arms were so long that as he stood upright his fingers touched his knees, while his hands were so big that he was able to grasp objects twice the size graspable by ordinary people; and woe betide any one who should be gripped in anger by 'Tammass Thudduck.'

Yet, in spite of his ugliness and vast strength, he was one of the most lovable men I have ever known, and as I came to know him better I was repeatedly reminded that, while weak and puny fellows are often overbearing and cruel, such big hulking men as 'Tammass' are not infrequently as gentle as women.

The plan of operations on which we had decided was as follows: The ship was to be sailed round the island as near to the shore as Captain Clearstory might consider to be safe. If the general outline answered to that indicated on the map drawn on the fly-leaf of my brother's Bible, it was then arranged that we should proceed to make a more detailed examination of the southern shore by means of our boats, while the ship stood by to render assistance in case there should be need. We had on board a plentiful supply of firearms of the most approved modern pattern, as well as cutlasses; and on the quarter-deck was a rifled brass gun which worked on a swivel. In addition to these weapons we had a supply of hand-grenades or bombs, for use in case we were attacked by a fleet of the islanders.

Our intentions, however, being by no means militant, we were also provided with a plentiful store of articles for barter. There were mirrors to delight the hearts of the dusky ladies; beads, knives, and gewgaws of all kinds for their lords, as well as coloured cloths and kerchiefs; our object being both to conciliate the natives on our landing as well as to do some trade with them, so that the expenses of our

voyage might be lightened. For I must confess that I had invested quite half my fortune in the venture.

The distant mass of blue cloud gradually resolved itself into a more defined form. The land before us was now seen to be by no means a mere coral reef or lagoon island. In the centre rose a mountain to the height of some three thousand feet, and as we approached we could see that it was clothed to the summit with rich and luxuriant vegetation which seemed to increase in beauty as each hour brought us nearer. At length we were able quite clearly to distinguish the features of the country before us. There was no coral reef guarding the shore, as I am informed by the captain is the case in the Society Islands about a thousand miles further south, as well as in some other volcanic groups in the South Pacific; and the waves were breaking gently on the yellow sand which extended on either side of us, except where the trees and undergrowth came right down to the water's edge. But further along the shore we could see that the cliffs rose abruptly, at the foot of which the waves of the great ocean were breaking with considerable violence, in spite of the calmness of the weather.

"So this is the island, Bob." I remarked again, anxious to know what were his thoughts at this time.

"I hope so," said he; "but we must be certain of it before anything can be done."

He was leaning upon the rail with the Bible open before him at the map.

"I have asked the captain to sail west," he said, "thus we shall soon discover whether the inlet marked on this map exists, and if it is not to be found—"

"Then this is *not* the island we want," chimed in Jack Brace, who was standing near.

In a few minutes the captain gave orders to alter the ship's course and we were soon standing in a south-westerly direction, under easy sail.

"Now, sir-r," cried the first mate, in the broadest Scotch accent, "keep your een along the shoor, and noo and thin pit this spyglass anent your neb. Maybe ye'll vara soon mak oot a neece harbour fur the ship."

I smiled at Tammas's anxiety about the ship, for I must confess that my thoughts had been entirely taken up with other matters. But I did as he advised, and made good use of the glass as we skirted the shore. After a few miles the coast line trended in a more north-westerly direction, and the captain, who was consulting his chart, remarked that this was the place where a depth of ten fathoms was marked.

"Such deep water is an evidence of the volcanic origin of the island," he said.

"Do you see any inlet or gulf?" inquired Bob, anxiously.

"We have passed the place where it is indicated in the Professor's map " (for so he always termed my brother). "See, there is the spot where the opening should be. A depth of four fathoms is marked at the entrance to it."

We turned our eyes in the direction in which the captain was pointing, and could see nothing but an abrupt cliff beaten at the foot by the surf. At one point, palm trees and smaller vegetation grew on the slope of a rocky promontory, but there was no sign of any creek or estuary or other opening.

Bob heaved a sigh as he looked into my face.

"I fear this is not the place," he said, with a sad shake of his head.

I feared the same, but did not like to crush his enthusiasm.

"At any rate, we will sail round the island," I replied cheerfully. "The captain considers we may safely do so while the weather continues to be so favourable. We can then land and examine the interior."

At this moment we heard an exclamation from Jack Brace.

"Look there!" he cried, pointing landwards.

We followed the direction of his finger, and beheld a column of thick smoke slowly ascending from among the trees which covered a low hill not far from the shore. Presently another column arose from a hill a little distance away, and more towards the interior. This was answered by smoke-wreaths which arose in quick succession on hills higher and still further inland, till, as we rounded the point ahead of us, and faced north, we could see smoke ascending from the wooded summit of the highest point some miles away.

"What does it mean?" asked Bob.

The captain, to whom the question was addressed, shook his head slowly.

"I cannot tell," He answered; " but if the customs of the people are at all like those who very nearly made a meal off myself, I should say that it is a warning signal, and has something to do with our coming."

"Is it an unfriendly signal?"

"If they were friendly why should they circulate such news throughout the island?" said the captain. "No, I fear it bodes us no good."

When night fell we were off the northern-most point, and the captain deemed it wisdom that we should stand off the land under close-reefed sail.

"I have taken the bearings of the island," said he, "so that even if we lose sight of it, we shall not take long in running back here again as soon as it is daylight."

That evening, before we retired to rest, a council was held in the captain's cabin.

"When do you propose that we should land?" I inquired of Bob Halliard.

"As soon as the Captain has circumnavigated the island, I propose that we shall land a party and explore. But it must be done in force, and with great caution, now that we know that the natives are on the alert."

"What do you mean by 'in force'?" inquired Captain Clearstory.

"I mean that such of the seamen as you can spare should accompany us well armed, so that we should be capable of defending ourselves in case of attack."

"Besides, some must be left in charge of the boats," said the captain.

It was ultimately arranged that a party, consisting of ten of the most active of the crew, should accompany the expedition, which should consist of Bob Halliard, Jack Brace, Thomas Thudduck, and myself, the captain remaining in charge of the ship, which was only proper. He was to stand as near to the shore as he considered to be safe, and, if possible, where he would cover our landing-place with the swivel gun. Two of the men were to be left in charge of each of the two quarter boats which they were to keep just afloat, if the shore and sea permitted, and ready to push off at a moment's notice.

After this came a discussion concerning our plan of operations on landing. I was for making a survey of the coast first, but was eventually overruled by the others, though they lived to regret that they had not acted on my advice. My nephew was for venturing some distance up into the country.

"We shall be armed, and can take with us sufficient provision for a couple of days, at the least," said he.

"And what shall we do if we encounter natives?" suggested Jack Brace.

"We will make them understand that we are in search of a lost friend."

"But *how* can you make them understand?" asked the captain.

"Oh, there must be some way of asking for information," replied Bob, impatiently.

"Hoot, mon, and i' they ken ye meaning they wull jist point doon their ain throats!" cried the mate.

Bob looked as if he were about to make an angry reply, but thought better of it, for he only remarked that if none of us would go with him he would go alone. Upon which we all avowed our intention of supporting him through thick and thin.

It is quite wonderful how quickly a sense of responsibility imparts the tone and appearance of age even to the young. I could see that my nephew, who had never known in England the burden of responsibility, now that he fully realized his position, was rapidly becoming as thoughtful and self-restrained as the veriest grey-beard amongst us, and I could not help acknowledging to myself, that we had made by no means an unwise choice when we elected him to be leader.

I do not think that any of us slept very soundly that night. At any rate, when I came on deck soon after day-break, I found the whole party there before me gazing at the island towards which the ship's head was now turned. In two hours we were sufficiently near for our coasting voyage to be re-commenced, and accordingly, the captain headed the vessel towards the east, and we slowly skirted the northern shore. It was not nearly so indented as the southern one, and we had no difficulty in observing its features.

The island was a very small one, probably not more than thirty miles in circumference. The interior seemed to consist of irregular ground on the eastern side, ending in a long sandy strip, which projected itself for a considerable distance into the sea. But the western side was more mountainous, and there were deep valleys which divided the lower hills, while above them rose the great central mountain. It was not by any means high as mountains go, but then, we were on the sea, and the height seemed to us to be immense, as it rose above the surrounding dead level plain of water.

"What do you think of it?" asked the captain after breakfast, when Bob and Jack Brace had returned to the deck. "My own opinion," he said, "if it is worth having, is, that we should sail for some of the other and better known islands of the group. If we cannot find what we want there, we may, at least, be able to pick up some information from the inhabitants."

"I fear that my nephew would never consent, captain," I said. "You see, he has quite made up his mind that this is the island. And, as we have made him leader, we shall be obliged to follow him until there is no longer room for doubt. At present I am in a thorough fog, and know not what to think. Here is an island, the outline of which agrees exactly with the map in all particulars but one; and yet, in an all-important particular, fails. Right opposite to us ought to be an inlet. No such inlet exists. Therefore this cannot be the land indicated in my brother's Bible."

"You are right—quite right," remarked the captain, thoughtfully. "Yet I don't like to suggest that we should sail away, especially while the weather is so favourable."

"But we are to have an expedition ashore," I said.

Captain Clearstory shook his head doubtfully. "I don't half like it," he replied. "If the natives had been friendly disposed they ought to have been seen on the shore. Why, I remember in the old days that they used to come down to the water's edge in crowds, and beckon us with green branches as a token of friendliness. Now, since we came here, have we seen any natives?"

"Not one," I replied.

"Which means," he continued—"at least, so I take it—that they are hostile. And my firm opinion is that the proposed expedition will be attended with considerable danger. But there is another remarkable thing—"

"What is that?"

"Where are their canoes? You may see them on other islands in these seas, drawn up in rows on the beach. But there are none here."

"Then what can have become of them?"

"I cannot say. But I am very suspicious—it means mischief!"

"Do you think I had better warn my nephew?"

"You are welcome to tell him what I have said," replied the captain, as he arose to go on deck.

I sat for a while pondering his words. It seemed a thousand pities to leave the island without making further investigations. And yet, on the other hand, such investigations might result in no useful discoveries, and might involve us in considerable dangers. So I determined to have a conversation with my nephew without delay. He should, at least, be informed of the captain's views, with which, as I was forced to acknowledge, I cordially agreed.

Chapter IV

The Mysterious Sign.

"I FULLY admit that there are grave difficulties, and probably dangers," said Bob, when I told him what the captain had said; "but I am resolved to land, nevertheless. And there is no time like the present. The weather is favourable, and the ship can stand a very short distance off the shore. I propose, therefore, to start at once."

"As you will," said I. "Give your orders, and they shall be obeyed."

It was not long before the two quarter-boats were lowered, and the party was on its way to the shore. If any Europeans could have seen us, they would have undoubtedly imagined that we were a crew of most bloodthirsty pirates, for we were armed to the teeth. For instance, Bob Halliard wore over his shoulder a cartridge carrier, while a formidable revolver was stuck in his belt. The first mate, who had petitioned to be allowed to accompany us, and whose presence we gladly welcomed, was similarly armed with the addition of a huge ship's cutlass buckled to his waist. Jack Brace disdained revolvers and swords, but, being reputed a crack shot, had provided himself with a rifle, and, like his friend, wore a cartridge-

belt. While I also carried a rifle, and had placed a revolver in my pocket by way of reserve.

The seamen were variously provided; most of them carrying firearms; and in the locker of each boat were placed some hand-grenades, to be used in case of emergency.

The crew gave us a cheer as we pushed off, and we replied right heartily; though it was hardly wise of us to make so much noise, for the sound must have been carried, by the light breeze, some distance inland. We were in the best of spirits; and, though it was hot, the atmosphere was not oppressive, and there was a delightful breeze shore-wards.

In less than half an hour we had run safely through the surf, which on the southern side of the island seemed to be lighter, than on the more rocky northern and western sides, and jumped out briskly into the shallow water as soon as our keels grated on the sand. Our plan was to keep well together, and to march inland, keeping the ship in sight, so far as was possible, while we made for the eminence which rose in the centre. We had no doubt that a couple of hours would see us not far from the summit, from whence we hoped to be able to get a view of the whole island.

"What is the time?" inquired Bob, as soon as we had landed.

"Eleven o'clock," I replied, looking at my watch.

"Then, say we are up there before two o'clock," he replied, pointing to the mountain; "that is, if we are able to find anything of a track among the trees."

"We must be at the boats an' awa' by five o'clock," said Thudduck.

"All right, Scottie!" exclaimed Bob. "The captain will give a warning gun if he thinks we are driving it too close."

"Yes, we must not forget that there is no twilight in these latitudes," suggested Jack Brace.

"But there is a moon," I added.

"Which will no' rise till twal' o' the clock the nicht," remarked Tammis, dryly.

Whereat we all laughed, though, I must confess, it struck me that it would be no laughing matter if we were stranded on the island after dark.

Leaving two of the seamen in each boat, with instructions that they were to keep a sharp look-out, and fire a gun if natives appeared, and two guns if danger threatened, we left the beach and began to thread our way among the bushes which closely fringed the shore.

"I say!" cried Jack Brace, "one need not starve here." And he pointed to a gigantic cocoa-nut palm, which spread its broad head over our path. I had heard, indeed, that the soil of these islands was exceedingly fertile, but was not prepared for the splendid and luxuriant vegetation which was spread around us as we slowly made our way towards the foot of the mountain. Here was an unlimited supply of tropical fruit; while lovely flowers and shrubs filled the glades and valleys, and made the island a perfect paradise.

Bob Halliard and I marched in front. He led; and the others, including the seamen, followed us in single file; for it was in many places quite impossible for us to march two abreast.

"Is it not a little remarkable," I said, after we had advanced about a mile, "that we have not come across any sign of the natives? The fires we saw yesterday are a proof that the island is inhabited."

"Do you suppose that there are any but natives on the island?" asked Bob.

"It is hardly probable," I replied. "True, the Marquesas are claimed by the French, and I believe that they call it a colony, but hitherto we have seen no trace of a settlement. Then, this island is so far removed from the rest of the group, that it may have been neglected hitherto."

"I wonder at that," said Bob, "for it is so extraordinarily fertile that one would have imagined they could have planted a thriving colony here."

We talked away in this strain until the ascent began. Gradually we arose out of the valley, up which we had made our way from the sea until we could see our good ship and the boats on the beach. The panorama around us was of great loveliness, and I heard frequent exclamations of surprise and admiration from the other members of the party as they turned to gaze at the radiant tropical landscape.

The pathway—if such it could be called, for we had seen no traces of human feet—now became very steep, and we were soon panting for breath as we toiled up the ascent, which was rendered all the more difficult by the presence of numerous creepers and low bushes.

All at once I heard an exclamation from Bob.

"Look there!" he said, in a whisper, looking back over his shoulder while he pointed ahead.

Illustration:

„Look there!“ he said.

I looked in the direction in which he was pointing, and saw a great boulder of rock which seemed to block up our path. It might have rolled down at one time from the heights above, and had probably lain there for ages; but what had arrested Bob's attention was a drawing on the face of it which fronted us, and which represented *a huge human mouth in the act of biting a human hand*.

We closed up and stood looking at the picture. It was not badly drawn. In fact, considering the backward state of civilization among the inhabitants of these remote islands, it was really a remarkable work of art. The lips were cleverly depicted, and between the lips the teeth—two regular and white rows—were drawn with great accuracy. The hand which it was biting was held by the side, just above the fourth finger, and there was no arm or other part of a human being depicted.

When we had looked for some seconds at the picture we began to look at each other.

"What does it mean?" asked Jack Brace.

"It means that we are among man-eaters," said Bob.

"Noo, they'd fin sic a braw hand as this fine eating!" exclaimed the mate, holding up one of his enormous hairy paws.

It wanted just this touch of humour to pull us together, for I could see that one or two were not a little perturbed at the sight of the drawing.

"It is almost too well done to be the work of a native," I said. "You know these seas pretty well, Mr. Thudduck," I continued, "have you ever seen the like?"

"Never, sir-r."

"Do you think that is the work of a native?"

Thudduck looked at the rock steadily for a few moments.

"He wears breeks, or some ither claites," he replied.

By which we understood him to mean that the artist had advanced beyond the civilization of the unclothed natives usually to be found in these latitudes.

After this we proceeded very cautiously, keeping as near together as possible, carefully examining every dark spot among the bushes, and searching around other fallen boulders near our path; but no further evidence did we meet with of the presence of fellow-men, until all at once we struck a broad and well-trodden path, which seemed to ascend the side of the mountain in a series of zigzags, and therefore with an easier gradient than the rough track we had hitherto followed.

"Hurrah!" cried Bob, dashing forward. "Now we shall make some progress!"

"Steady! steady!" I said. "We must be very careful to keep well together. It would not do for our party to be surprised while we are straggling in this fashion!"

We waited for the others to come up, and then found it was possible to walk two abreast; and so in this way we continued our journey, at each turn of the winding road getting glimpses through the palms of lovely bits of scenery, with peeps of the distant sea sparkling and glinting in the mid-day sunshine. Fortunately we were fairly well protected from the sun's rays by the foliage above us, or the heat would have been unbearable.

"How much further?" inquired one of the men after we had climbed for about an hour and a half.

"Till we reach the summit," replied our leader. "Come on, my lads!" he cried, encouragingly; "we shall be at the top in less than an hour!"

I suggested that as soon as we reached a suitable place we should rest and have some refreshment.

"The men will go on with double the energy afterwards," I said; "and it will be wise of you to consider their feelings."

"True," said my nephew; "they are not accustomed to such long tramps ashore."

In about a quarter of an hour we came to what seemed to be a very suitable place for a halt; and as it was here that the first of our very remarkable adventures happened, it will be well for me to describe the spot as particularly as I can.

Right in our way stood an enormous boulder. It looked like one stone; but, on nearer approach, we found that there was on one side a very small slit, through which only one man could pass at a time, and which had not been visible to us as we ascended.

"I thought we had come to a full stop!" cried Jack Brace. "Are we to pass through that hole?"

"Look to your arms!" cried Bob, addressing the whole party; and when he saw that each of us was ready, he gave the order to follow him.

I could not help but admire his courage as I saw him enter the narrow opening, for had an enemy been lying in ambush on the further side of the rock, it would have been easy enough to cut us down one by one. But Bob passed through easily and safely, and in a few minutes we were all assembled on the other side. Behind

us rose the huge boulder, some twelve or fifteen feet of sheer rock. On either side of us was a wall of rock of equal height, above which grew dense bushes and high trees, forming a natural roof, so that only a dim twilight penetrated. Whether this place was the work of nature or of man it was impossible at the moment to say, but certainly it was very remarkable, and a great silence fell on the party as we stood within the boulders, looking ahead.

So deep was the gloom of this sheltered alley that we could not discern anything before us; and as we had here a level place on which to sit, some one suggested that we should now refresh the inner man.

"Ef ye'll be adveesed by me," said the mate, "ye'll place a guard ahint the doorway;" and he pointed to the narrow slit through which we had entered.

"Right you are, 'Tammaas,'" cried Bob. "It would never do to be caught here, like sheep in a pen. Who knows how many brown beggars have watched us as we climbed these slopes? Which of you men will stand guard on the other side?"

Half a dozen seamen held up their hands. "Let them all go, Bob," said I; "we shall be all the more secure for a strong guard."

Taking their share of the provisions, the men disappeared through the opening, and we soon heard faint sounds of talking and laughing, as they discussed their meal on the other side of the stone barrier. We proceeded to imitate their example, and soon felt considerably refreshed.

"I would suggest," said Jack Brace, addressing Bob Halliard, "that you put that map in a more secure place. If we meet with enemies, they will think that your bag contains something valuable;" and he pointed to the leather satchel, containing the much-prized Bible, which Bob wore slung over his shoulder.

Thudduck and I agreed with him that it was by no means a safe place for so important a document.

"But how would you have me carry it?" asked Bob. "It's too big to go into my pocket!"

"Tear oot the map," suggested the mate. "The Beeble wull do mair goot to the darkies wi'oot it!"

Bob thought for a moment.

"I have a little waterproof pocket—made on purpose to hold valuables, and sewn inside my shirt. That will be the very place for the map."

So saying, he opened the Bible, and very carefully tearing out the map, he placed it in the receptacle he had indicated.

"What do you say if we explore a little way down this alley?" suggested Jack Brace. "The sailors will guard the entrance, and we are well provided with arms."

"And suppose we should fall into an ambush?" I said. "Would it not be better to leave only two of the men outside, and to take the others with us?"

"Niver mind the men," cried Thudduck. "I ken four braw laddies that would be stark enew for twenty neegers." And he stretched out his huge fist, as if in defiance of prospective enemies.

I did not feel very comfortable at the idea of a fight in the dim and rock-bound glen, but yielded to the wishes of the others. So, after having told the seamen that we were going a little distance further, and bidding them to keep a good look out, and fire a gun in case of danger, we started.

For a short distance the path was tolerably level. Then, to our surprise, it began to descend to the right, and the gloom became more intense as we wound our way down a sloping path among the great rocks, the foliage over our heads now being so thick that we could hardly see our way.

"I don't half like this!" I exclaimed. "Besides, we shall never reach the summit by going down-hill."

But the others only laughed, and said that they hoped the pathway would turn upwards directly.

All at once Bob stopped and picked up something from the ground.

"What is it?" we cried.

He held up a large piece of bark. The inside of it was of a very light colour, and upon it was drawn the Mouth and Hand which we had previously seen depicted on the boulder near the foot of the mountain. The drawing had been exceedingly well done by means of a red pigment, which made the lines stand out with remarkable distinctness; while the background was shaded with charcoal.

"What do you think of this?" asked Bob, turning to me with a serious look.

We stood round him and looked at the thing.

"They seem to have a clever draughtsman among them," remarked Jack.

"But what does it mean?" I asked.

"Maybe it's a warnin'; but I hae my doots if it's freendly," said Thudduck, peering into the darkness ahead of us.

We marched on slowly, holding our weapons ready for immediate use. The path continued to slope downwards, but we hoped that it would soon lead to a rise, and double back zigzag fashion, so bringing us higher up the mountain. But as we went on, the passage became narrower, and we could only walk in single file, till at length Thudduck's broad shoulders touched either side of the rocks, and he declared that he would stick fast if he attempted to go much further.

It was just here, on looking up, that we perceived some of the rocks touched each other overhead.

"It looks lighter further on. We shall soon be through this!" cried Bob, pressing forward.

We followed as fast as we were able; but he must have forged a considerable way ahead, chiefly because of the difficulty which the mate found in squeezing his huge form between the rocky walls, and as he was next behind Bob in this part of our journey, he delayed the whole party. At all events, when we turned a corner round which my nephew had passed a few moments previously, we looked for him in vain. He had completely disappeared.

The place in which we now stood was much wider than the part we had just traversed; in fact, so wide that it resembled nothing so much as an oval bear-pit in some Zoological gardens. But so far as we could see, we were in an *impasse*, for there was no visible outlet, except by the way we had come.

We examined the rocky walls all around, and looked up at the trees above; but not the slightest trace was there of our leader. Then Thudduck gave a huge shout—such a shout as he would have produced if hailing a vessel at sea, and the walls about us rang again; but there was no answering response from Bob Halliard.

"Fire a gun!" I said to Jack, who immediately blazed away into the air. Presently there came the answering report of a rifle far away.

"Surely that cannot be produced by Bob's weapon?" I said.

"No," replied the mate; "the men have heard our gun—that's their reply."

"And they will be hurrying in this direction," cried Jack. "Let's meet them!"

But I did not feel comfortable at leaving the place, even for a few minutes, without further search.

"Can none of us climb these rocks?" I asked.

Thudduck shook his head as he scanned the walls. They rose up sheer for thirty feet, and overhung towards the summit. There was neither foothold nor handhold anywhere visible.

"Go back, and meet the men!" I said; "and I will remain here till you return. It may be that Bob will come back directly." For I wondered whether he were playing us a trick.

"We shall be back in ten minutes," said Jack Brace, as he squeezed himself through the narrow entrance to the oval.

I little dreamed what a terrible and momentous period of my life would elapse before I saw him again.

Chapter V

Within the Crater.

AS soon as they had departed I set to work to examine more minutely the rocky walls around me, but could discover no opening wide enough to admit the body of a man. Then I directed my eyes to the ground, and, walking round the enclosure, carefully scanned every inch. Presently a little to the right of the opening through which we had entered I saw something shining. It was a very small object, and I stooped to look at it. I perceived that it was a metal button, apparently recently wrenched from a man's trousers, and as I still stooped down, with my hands resting on my knees, I suddenly felt the back of my clothing gripped by something powerful—whether human or otherwise I could not tell; and before I could recover myself, I was swung off my feet and carried swiftly upwards through the air; and, in less time than it takes me to write the account, I found myself laid on my back among the trees on the mountain side.

Hardly had I touched the ground before half a dozen natives had secured my arms and legs, while a wooden gag was thrust into my mouth and tied securely about my neck.

The men were a lithe and active set of fellows; and, though not very tall, were perfect Apollos for beauty of physical structure. Except a cloth about the loins they were naked, and as they stood round me I noticed that on the breast of each of them was tattooed, in distinct outlines, the Mouth and Hand.

Resistance would, I saw, be as fatal as it would be foolish; my only hope was that the rest of my party would return and discover my whereabouts. I turned my

head about, but could see nothing of Bob, though it was now clear enough that he had been whipped up out of the rocky defile in the same manner. What this was, I was for a few minutes at a loss to discover, until the sight of a pair of gigantic iron clips like a pair of scissors, and tightened by a rope running through rings at the upper ends, satisfied me that I had been slung up like a bale of merchandise! I had often seen such clips on board ship, and it struck me that it was a little remarkable that these islanders should have known their use on finding them (as I supposed they had done) on some wrecked vessel.

Presently I heard sounds, and the voices of my companions became more and more distinct as they returned. The gag prevented me from uttering articulate sounds; but it would not hinder my giving vent to deep groans, and I determined at all risks to do so as soon as I heard them enter the oval among the rocks just under the place where I lay.

But my captors were quite prepared for any demonstration on my part, for one of them advanced and knelt by my side, holding a long knife in both his hands on a level with his face, while the glittering point quivered over my body. I saw an unmistakable gleam in his dark eye which warned me of my fate should any sound escape my lips.

Meanwhile the remainder of my captors had drawn to the edge of the cliffs, and were peering through the bushes as though they were on the look out for further captures.

"Weel, I'm jiggered!" I heard Thudduck exclaim; "I believe the black loons hae ta'en the auld chap as they took his neffy!"

Then came exclamations of surprise from Jack Brace and other members of the party.

"Can you climb up there?" said the voice of one of the seamen.

"Wherever a cat can go I can follow," replied another.

"But no cat could climb those overhanging rocks," said the voice of Jack Brace.

The native with the iron grips was holding the tough cocoa-nut-fibre rope in readiness while he watched the party below. So dark was it among the bushes that it was impossible for the party in the glen to see the ambush above them. But I could plainly hear every word spoken by my friends as they discussed our strange and unaccountable disappearance. One proposed that they should at once go back to the ship for assistance; another that they should remain where they were, in the hope that we should return. But the majority seemed to consider this too dangerous a course, as the day was advancing and there would be a risk that they would be belated among the woods and rocks if they waited for long.

"I will go back with two of you," said Jack Brace, "and we will signal the ship. The captain will then come off; and, as he knows the ways of these natives, he will perhaps be able to advise us."

"Sae lang as he brings some mair men and shootin' airns, I shall be satisfied," remarked the mate, in a dry tone, as though he doubted the captain's ability to render any other assistance.

In a few minutes I heard sounds which seemed to indicate that some of the party beneath were retiring down the narrow passage. Not a word was spoken by my captors; but a look of intelligence passed between them, as though they were quite prepared to act when the opportunity presented itself.

Presently the man with the iron grips bent forward, and I saw him swiftly lower them over the rocks, while the rest of the party let out the slack of the rope. Five seconds later there was a shout as from the lips of Stentor himself, and I knew that they had laid hold of no less a personage than the huge mate! Active though the natives were, they soon found that Thudduck's weight was more than the five of them could raise the whole distance; and after they had run the rope up about half its length they were forced to take a purchase about the stem of a tree; and I was certain, even had I not heard his voice, that 'Tammass' Thudduck was hanging betwixt heaven and earth.

"By the living Gabbers!" he roared, in a voice of thunder, "the wirricows hae got me! Shoot, some of ye! Shoot the ugsome deevils, afoor the seat o' me breeks is tored oot! Ah! wad ye noo?" he cried again, as they gave another pull from above, and raised him so much that I could just see his head bobbing about over the edge of the cliff.

The man who had been keeping guard over me now dropped his knife, and sprang to assist his comrades; at the same moment I heard several shots fired from below, and one of the natives staggered back and fell down near me, while the blood gushed from a bullet wound in his forehead. In a few seconds he had ceased to breathe. As for the mate, he was not to be easily captured. Twisting himself round, he grasped the rope by which he was suspended, and, with the agility possessed only by sailors, swung himself up on to the rocky platform in the face of the astonished islanders. As he did so the relaxed grips dropped from his garments, while he rushed forward, his huge and ape-like arms swinging like flails.

"Mind your ee, auld blackface!" he shouted, darting his fist squarely between the eyes of the first man in the line. It was a tremendous blow, and felled the man instantly. The others, as agile as monkeys, slipped out of his way, and before he could check his headlong career, or discern my form as I lay among the grass, he tripped over my legs and fell headlong into a bramble-like bush. He fell with such violence that only his legs were left visible, and upon these sprang the four dusky men who remained uninjured.

I will not repeat the forcible remarks which were uttered by Thudduck as they held up his legs, and thus forced him to remain in the prickly bush. It did not take them long to bind his feet securely together.

Meanwhile I heard shouts and exclamations from the seamen below.

"Shall we go back and find a way round to the top?" cried one of them.

"Ay, ye loons! and be vara quick about it!" ejaculated Thudduck, from the midst of the bush. He looked so exceedingly comical that, in spite of the gravity of the situation and the inconvenience of the wooden gag, I fairly shook with laughter.

The natives, too, heard the voices, and even, if they did not understand English, they were quick enough to perceive that the party below meant business, for they immediately proceeded to drag the mate from the bush and to bind his arms. This done, a gag similar to mine was forced between his teeth and fastened securely. I cannot say that they found it an easy matter to secure the huge and powerful fellow, for he hit out right and left and once succeeded in bowling over two of his assailants; but they were both plucky and active, and, as his legs were fastened, he was at a disadvantage. As soon as they had completed their task, they fastened

the cocoa-nut-fibre rope by a noose about Thudduck's neck and about my own also, leaving a piece about three yards long between us; then, untying our legs, they motioned us to rise.

The men whom the mate had knocked down had by this time recovered, and proceeded to assist the others. They divided into two companies, and, seizing either end of the rope, led us away from the spot and down the slope among the thickest part of the luxuriant and tropical vegetation. The bushes closed behind us as we passed, and I perceived that it would well-nigh be impossible for any one to track our passage.

For more than an hour the men hurried us downwards, till I began to feel quite exhausted; for it was very difficult to keep one's balance while stumbling along over tufts of grass and pieces of rock, and with one's arms tightly bound into the bargain. There was also the difficulty of the rope which joined me to my companion in misfortune. Whenever he gave a lurch, my neck received such a jerk that I feared more than once it would be dislocated.

At length we reached a clearing near the foot of the mountain, and here our captors made a halt. Right before us we could see our ship. Presently, and while we were looking, a puff of white smoke rose from her side, which was immediately followed by the report of a heavy gun. The natives, who were still carefully holding the ends of the rope, started on hearing the sound, and pointed to the ship with animated gestures, making remarks to each other in a strange and uncouth language.

In a few minutes we saw a black speck on the water making for the vessel. Was it one of our boats, or was it a native canoe? We were unable to tell at such a distance; but, on seeing it, the natives indulged in further gestures and remarks. We all watched the speck until it reached the side of the ship.

I now come to a part of our adventures on which I cannot look back without a thrill of horror. So startling were these adventures, that, unless I had myself passed through the experiences, and had myself witnessed the scenes, I should have put them down as among the most exaggerated of "travellers' tales."

After about twenty minutes' rest we were made to resume our journey. Our route no longer led through the untrodden forest, but along a well-beaten track at the foot of the mountain. Walking was now so much less difficult that I kept up easily with the long strides of Thudduck, who was in front of me, and with the quick paces of the natives. We must have travelled several miles when all at once the path turned *inwards* and downwards, towards the heart of the mountain, and for a little distance we passed into a tunnel, but whether a natural one or constructed by men, I am unable to say. Here our progress was slower, for as we advanced it became exceedingly dark, till at last we stopped altogether, and I heard one of the men in front give a shrill and peculiar cry, which echoed weirdly in the confined space.

The cry was answered by a similar sound, which seemed to come from within the mountain in front of us, and in a few seconds we perceived a dim and flickering light, which seemed to be shining through a doorway.

Towards this light the natives conducted us; and when we had passed the barrier, we heard the door close in our rear, though in the gloom it was impossible to see any one as we entered.

On the side of the tunnel was affixed a rude lamp, which gave a fitful glare and cast strange and fantastic shadows about us as we advanced. Presently we passed another lamp, and another—in all I counted nine lamps—as we penetrated deeper and deeper into the bowels of the mountain.

Had I been alone I verily believe I should have fainted from fright; but the sight of the mate's burly form, as he marched on in front of me, gave me a certain amount of courage. For it is not a little remarkable that, in whatsoever kind of danger we find ourselves, we always derive consolation from the fact that another is suffering along with us.

It must not be imagined that the passage through which we were being conducted proceeded in a straight line; on the contrary, it curved and twisted about in a most remarkable way, and seemed in two places to describe a complete corkscrew curve; for I ought to explain that the slope of the floor had throughout a decided downward tendency, till at length, as I calculated, we must have been far below the level of the sea.

I longed to be able to speak to my companion; but the gag, which by this time had brought on an intolerable aching in my jaws, effectually hindered me; and so we stumbled on, round the corners, and over the irregular floor, now with some slack rope between us, now with a jerk of the neck as the rope tightened—for it was impossible to see the mate, except as we passed one of the before-mentioned lamps, till, to my great thankfulness, the light of day appeared right ahead of us.

I almost forgot for a few moments my feeling of exhaustion, and my anxiety concerning our fate, in the wonder excited by the sight of this gleam of daylight. Had we then passed through the mountain, or did the passage merely lead to another opening on the side we had entered?

These doubts were soon to be solved; for presently, on emerging from the tunnel, we found ourselves blinking in the light and standing in a huge arena which would measure fully half a mile across. All around towered a vast precipice of rock rising sheer above us for some hundreds of feet, and then bending inwards like the top of an inverted basin from which the bottom had been removed. Above this, the rock sloped upwards again in a vast sweep, in the form of a basin set the right way upon the lower one. In this way a broad lip or rim was formed, which overhung the immense semi-cavern in which we found ourselves. Yet, in spite of this projection, so wide was the opening in the centre, that an ample supply of light was admitted.

The ground was covered with what appeared to be hard sand; but what interested me particularly was the fact that the place was crowded with inhabitants. A number of them, both men and women, came up to look at us. They were a handsome race, the men a light brown, and the women very much lighter in shade, and having well-formed limbs, and in many cases, very pretty faces. Their clothing consisted merely of a short petticoat, and both sexes had long black hair, which hung in profusion over their shoulders. What especially attracted my attention was the fact that on the upper part of the breast of each of them was tattooed the mouth and hand which I had already noticed on the bodies of our captors.

Around the wide circle were large numbers of dwellings, some of them of considerable size; and these houses, being under the shelter of the projecting rim of rock, looked exceedingly snug.

I had hardly time to grasp these details, when the leader of our party gave the word of command, and we advanced in the direction of the largest of the dwellings on the other side of the great space.

Chapter VI

The White Queen.

THE sun was westering, and had ceased to shine directly into the aperture, but plenty of light still entered the crater, and it was reflected by the white sand on the floor. The path they took us lay across the middle of the arena, and in the middle I saw the ashes of several large fires which had been made in hollows scooped out in the sand, and I shuddered when I remembered that these people were probably cannibals, and that these were apparently the places where they cooked and ate their victims.

Presently our escort halted before the large building which we had noticed from the other side. I now saw that it was an imposing and handsome structure, and seemed to be built of native rock and blocks of lava, and similar material. There was a flight of steps before the door; and indeed, I noticed that this was a peculiar feature in all the houses, which were thus raised considerably above the sandy ground. I remember that I wondered at this at the time; but I had no time for thought, for no sooner had we arrived, than a fierce-looking man habited in a scarlet petticoat, and having the mouth and hand tattooed on his breast in a more elaborate fashion than I had noticed in the case of the other natives, came forward to the top of the steps, and addressed some words to our guards. Directly I saw him there flashed into my mind the words written under the map—I remembered them well, for they were the concluding ones—"Beware of the Red Petticoat."

After he had spoken to the men who had captured us, he eyed us scowlingly, and gave an order to the guards, who immediately proceeded to disarm us, and to hand our weapons to this man, making a curious sign as they did so, for each man placed the side of his left hand between his own teeth—a salute which "Red Petticoat" immediately returned.

As soon as he had received them he disappeared within the building, and the guards unfastened our hands, and removed the gags.

"The ugly loons!" exclaimed Thudduck, as soon as he could speak. "I thought I should hae swallowed my tongue lang sin!"

My own tongue was so sore and swollen that I could hardly reply; besides, I felt sick at heart in anticipation of our approaching doom. We had seen nothing of my nephew, but I had no doubt that he had also been captured by the wily islanders, and was destined for a similar horrible fate.

"Cheer up, sir-r!" cried my companion in trouble. "Never say die while there's a shot in the locker. We're not eaten yet! We'll disagree with 'em now, and gie 'em mortal indigestion later on!"

I felt a little cheered by the good fellow's courage and good humour, but could neither see how escape could be made from such a place, nor how our friends could successfully attack such an impregnable retreat.

As soon as the man in the red skirt returned, he beckoned us to follow him. I looked at Thudduck, and he nodded as if he agreed that we had better do as we were bidden—indeed, I do not see that we could have done otherwise. So we ascended the steps, and followed him into the building.

Judge our surprise at finding an entrance hall richly furnished in semi-European style. A carpet of curiously woven and stained grasses covered the floor; there were chairs and tables of curious pattern and elaborately carved; weapons, both native and European or American, hung upon the walls; and there was a general air of comfort and civilization. One thing especially struck me; there were vases of fantastic pottery, in which were growing lovely tropical flowers and other plants, which seemed to suggest a woman's presence about the building.

"Bless me!" I exclaimed, as we entered, "this is very strange!"

"My stars!" ejaculated 'Tammás,' as he gazed around.

Our guide drew aside a curtain, woven of native grasses, but of finer texture than the carpet, and motioned us to enter. We did so, and found ourselves in an exceedingly strange apartment. Across the room at the further end from that at which we had entered, was a screen, or grille, which seemed to be made of a species of cane or bamboo. Looking through this, we could see that the space within was carpeted like the entrance hall; only the material was richer, and more variegated. But what especially took our attention was a kind of chair, or throne, of most elaborately carved wood, which stood on a pedestal near the wall, and facing the above-mentioned screen.

"I suppose the chief sits on it?" remarked the mate, as he peered through the screen.

"I cannot tell," I said; "everything here is so wonderful and mysterious, that I know not what to think."

There were no chairs in our portion of the apartment, but the floor was carpeted, and around the room ran a fixed bench. The windows were high up in the walls, and seemed to be protected on the outside by strong bars, but whether of wood or metal I could not tell.

We waited for some time; but, as no one came, I ventured to try the door. It was secured on the outside.

"This cannot be a prison," I said.

As I spoke, a voice came to us from within the screen; and we turned round, astonished, as we heard not merely the soft tones of a woman, but our own tongue, though spoken with evident difficulty, and with a foreign accent.

"Messieurs vill find it very difficult to open zat door," said the voice; "so vill you please give me your attention."

Drawing a few steps nearer to the screen, we beheld an amazing sight. Seated upon the throne was a tall elegant woman of some thirty years of age. Her features were evidently those of a European; her skin was not only white, it was very fair,

and of extraordinary beauty. Her hair, which was a rich brown, hung in glossy tresses over her bare shoulders. She was attired in what might have passed in England for evening dress. It was made of some native material, so far as I could see, and was of a rich cardinal colour, ornamented with blue, except for the strip over her shoulders. Her arms were bare, so were her feet. But the thing which I think arrested our attention, was the device tattooed on the upper part of her chest. The marks were made wonderfully distinct by reason of the exceeding whiteness of her skin, it was the sign with which we now were so familiar—*the mouth holding the human hand*.

"You have had a long walk to-day, messieurs!" she said, with a smile; "and, therefore, I will not detain you very long."

"We shall be vara glad to go, marm!" said Thudduck, saluting her in the most approved fashion.

She showed her white teeth as she smiled at his words, and I could not help thinking how regular they were, and how like the set depicted on the rock and on the breasts of the islanders.

"We should like to know who you may be, madam," I said, in my most polite tones, and with just a tinge of sarcasm in my voice, for I was annoyed that we should be now questioned by a woman.

She laughed again—it was a low silvery laugh.

"You are not zee first who has vondered, nor zee first who has felt anger at zee sight of me!" she cried; and then, she struck her small hands together twice. Instantly, a curtain behind the throne drew aside, and a body of armed men, headed by Red Petticoat, streamed into the enclosed space. Each was attired in a short, coloured petticoat, each bore the elaborate tattoo of the Mouth and Hand, each carried a weapon—some, clubs of fantastic shape; some, great double-edged knives; others, bows and arrows. But I saw no fire-arms.

They arranged themselves in a semi-circle on either side of the throne, fixing their eyes intently on its occupant. There must have been nearly a hundred of them, and a set of fine active fellows they looked.

Then the queen (for such I supposed her to be) arose, and twisting her left hand round in a way that could only have been acquired by long practice, she placed it between her teeth.

Instantly, every one of the warriors imitated her, at the same time raising his weapon on high with his right hand. This curious and impressive ceremony was repeated three times. After this, the whole body gave a great shout, which caused the walls to ring again.

Sitting down, the queen then addressed them in their strange-sounding tongue; and as she proceeded I noticed that they became more and more excited; till, when she concluded, they gave another shout, and once more went through the ceremony of placing the side of the left hand in the mouth.

"I don't care sae lang as they ainly ate thimsels!" remarked Thudduck.

I began to fear that this was a preliminary to an attack upon ourselves, but happily the commotion subsided; and at a signal from the queen the company retired as they had come.

"My council of varriors have left zee decision of your fate in my hands," said the queen, addressing us as soon as the last of the natives had quitted the room.

"As you speak our language," I replied, "your majesty will, I trust, not allow us to be treated cruelly. We are here on lawful business."

"Vat is your business on zis island?" demanded the queen.

"We are here," I replied, "in search of my brother, a naturalist, who came to these seas some nine years ago, and who has not been heard of since that time."

As I said this the queen gave a little exclamation of surprise, and looked at me, I thought, so very intently, that I wondered if she could give me any information.

"If your majesty and your subjects can aid our search," I said, trying to put a bold face on the matter, "we will bestow ample rewards."

"But if I do not choose to give you zis information?" she said, with a frown.

"Then," cried Thudduck, breaking in, "the Queen o' Great Britain will send her men-o'-war, and make it a wee bit hot for this island!"

"Zee whole of zee English fleet would be useless," replied the queen. "Man!" she continued, addressing Thudduck, while her beautiful eyes flashed fire, "you know nossing of my power. But you *shall* know! Yes, you *shall* know!" she reiterated in a shriller tone, and she raised her shapely hands as if she would clap them again, for it was plain that Thudduck had angered her; but seemingly she thought better of it, for checking herself she went on in a calmer tone, as if speaking to herself—"Not yet! Not yet! He has yet much to learn—and to suffer! Not yet!"

Though I was at a loss to understand what these words meant, I perceived that her gaze was fixed upon me in a dreamy, melancholy way, as though her thoughts were far away, and I ventured to say that we were very weary and should be glad of food and rest.

"Ah! zee fools! zat is zee way in vich so many are spoilt!" So saying, she arose and abruptly left the room by the door behind the throne. I was particularly struck by the gracefulness of her form and the dignity of her carriage as she passed out.

"What did she mean, Thudduck?" I asked.

"It's plain eneuch what she meant!" he said; "ef we're empty it's thin we shall dee, an ef we're kep foo we shall dee fat!"

"Then you think they will eat us?"

"Maybe they'll try; but I'm thinkin' they'll noan fin' sae mich that isna grissle o' these boanes;" and he bared his long sinewy arm, with a grim smile. "But, I say, sir-r," and he lowered his voice to a whisper, "wat do ye think o' her? She's not a neeger? An' this gran hoose noo; hoo cam she to hae beelt it amang these broon fiends?"

"I cannot tell," I replied; "perhaps if we are docile and obedient she may tell us more; but, be that as it may, we shall be all the more likely to be liberated."

Thudduck shook his head. "I dinna like the look o' them bluidy knives. Did ye na see the stains on 'em? They've cut up as much man-meat as wad victual the ship, I'll be boun!"

"Vat is zat he says?—zis sailor-man, I mean," said the voice of the queen at my elbow, as she tapped me lightly on the shoulder. We turned quickly, and saw that the door by which we had entered was open. She was looking angrily at Thudduck. "Vat did he say about *meat*?" she asked.

"He is hungry, like myself, queen," I said, "and we trust you will give us of your royal hospitality;" and I gave a gallant bow, at which she seemed to be conciliated, and, advancing towards the door, beckoned us to follow her. This we did, and

passing through the spacious entrance-hall, in which I noticed numerous retainers, all of them armed with enormous double-edged knives, and each bearing on his breast what I now took to be the national arms, namely, the Mouth and Hand, she advanced towards a large door, saying some words in the native tongue to several of the guards as she passed along. Immediately the men closed behind us, holding their keen blades in such a position that we must have run against them had we attempted to return. Near the door stood a sentinel, who saluted the queen by grasping his left hand with his teeth in the manner we had just witnessed in the audience-chamber.

At a signal from our fair guide, he sprang forward, and opening the door disclosed a rough and rocky passage, very similar to the one by which we had entered this strange and wonderful mountain.

"Follow me," said the queen, as she beckoned to us.

"In for a bawbee in for a pun," growled Thudduck, in an undertone.

The door closed in our rear; but we were not in the dark, for lamps, filled with palm oil, were burning at regular intervals. The passage sloped upwards, and in places was exceedingly steep. It turned and twisted about, always ascending, till at length we found ourselves at another door. This the queen opened with a small key, and, holding up her white finger, she signalled to the guards to halt; following her, we presently found ourselves in a most wonderful place.

"Ah, you are pleased!" exclaimed the queen, as we looked around. And certainly we each gave vent to a cry of surprise and admiration when we realized the splendours about us.

We were in a vast cavern, yet not so lofty but that we could see the roof, which sparkled in the light of the many lamps hung around the walls. The floor was covered with a grass carpet of exceeding richness and softness. Around the walls, for a height of about seven feet, hung a grass tapestry of cunningly woven work. Sumptuous couches and chairs furnished this subterranean hall; and in the centre was a table laid for a meal in European style. Seating herself at the head of this table, the queen motioned me to a seat on her right; but Thudduck, waiting for no invitation, coolly seated himself at the further end, and without further ceremony made an attack upon the food.

It was plentiful but peculiar. There were curious vegetables, whose names I did not know. There were meats, too, and of them I felt grave suspicion, and at first felt inclined to refuse them. What if they had already killed and cooked my nephew? I thought. Thudduck, however, seemed to have no such qualms, and so encouraged me by his vigorous appetite and example, that I was soon in a fair way of making a substantial meal. There were various drinks on the table, and I found the palm wine particularly refreshing.

As soon as I had finished, the queen clapped her hands, and the half-dozen guards who had followed us up the winding passage entered. They advanced towards the table, and she gave them an order in their own language, on which they immediately grasped Thudduck by the shoulders as if to lead him away.

"Noo, ye black loons, wat do ye want wi' me?" he cried; cramming, at the same time, a last morsel into his capacious mouth.

"I trust your majesty will not separate us?" I said earnestly, addressing the queen. "My friend is a good and trusty fellow, and I should not like to lose sight of him."

But she shook her head, and I saw a look of determination in her face.

"He must go," she said; "you may meet him again."

Then followed a wonderful scene. By a backward swing of his great arms, Thudduck knocked clean over four out of his five assailants, and leaping upon the table among the dishes, quickly was at my side.

"Let's up and at 'em!" he cried. "We'll fix 'em, in spite o' their greet soords! Come on!" he roared, in a voice which echoed round the cavern and up in the roof of the stony vault. "Come on, ye black deevils, an' Tammas Thudduck 'll gie ye a fling!" So saying, he gave a mighty heave, and lifting the table, turned it upside down on to the men who were rising half-dazed from the ground. It went down on to them with a crash. "Follow me, sir-r!" he cried; and before I could hinder him, he seized the queen in his ape-like grasp, and throwing her over his shoulder, made for the door.

Illustration:

He seized the queen... and made for the door.

"Don't be a fool, Thudduck," I shouted; but he paid no heed to me. I tried to stop him, but was too late; he had gained the door into the passage, and I could hear the screams of the queen as he stumbled over the rough stones.

"Is the man mad?" I exclaimed; for I could see nothing but trouble as the result of his act.

Chapter VII

The Tattooing.

MY first thought was to follow Thudduck at the top of my speed; my second, to raise the table from the guards; and in this I was assisted by the remaining native, who, deeming prudence the better part of valour, had carefully avoided the swing of my friend's arm.

Bruised and badly cut by the broken crockery, arose the four. They presented a sorry, not to say comical, sight, for they bore on their persons the remains of the various tasty dishes which had been piled in such profusion on the table. One of them was bleeding from a bad cut on the head, and another seemed to have sprained his leg, for he could hardly stand. The remaining two, however, did not appear to be altogether incapacitated; so, motioning to them, I followed Thudduck.

As we advanced down the passage, I heard the sound of a crash and a stentorian shout from the Scotchman, followed by a faint cry from the queen.

"Mad!" I said to myself, as we hurried on; "the man is a mad fool! This will finish us."

Presently we came to the lower door; it was open, and its guardian was lying in the hall, a stream of blood issuing from his nose. Rushing to the entrance, I espied Thudduck striding swiftly across the arena of sand in the direction of the passage through which we had come; over his shoulder lay the form of the queen, though whether she were dead or alive I could not tell. Her fair hair streamed down Thudduck's back as he grasped her with his left hand, while with his right he kept at bay the swarms of natives who were trying to impede his progress.

"Doon wi' ye! Doon wi' ye, ye black hoonds!" he yelled, dashing his fist into the faces of the crowd as he ran, and bowling men over like ninepins.

I wondered at first why they did not use their knives and clubs, but soon perceived that they were afraid of injuring the queen. Besides which, most of the people seemed to be completely paralyzed with amazement at the man's audacity.

"He will never do it!" I said to myself, as I stood on the steps and watched him wrenching himself and his burden from the hands of the wondering people, now taking a sharp run, in which, however, he was more than outpaced by the semi-nude and active natives, now dashing into a group of those who had hurried to intercept him, and scattering them like chaff as he hurled his huge form among them. On he pressed, ever gaining energy and leaving behind him a trail of baffled people; until, as by a miracle, he had gained the entrance to the passage. But he could do no more—the door was fastened.

In two seconds he had let down the queen from his shoulder and had placed her body as a shield before him, while he stood with his back against the door.

I could not see her features at the distance they were from me, but I noticed that her head fell to one side as if she were either dead or had fainted. In a few minutes the natives had assembled about him in such crowds that I could only distinguish his head above that of the queen. Weapons were raised and shaken, and shouts went up, but for some time nothing was done. All at once Thudduck disappeared.

At first I almost hoped that the door behind him had given way, and that he was making for the open country. But I was mistaken; some one had crept up to him, and, passing a rope round his ankles, had brought him violently to the ground. And now I beheld them dragging him by the legs across the sand towards the palace, the queen being borne by several of her subjects.

Was it an inspiration, or was it the instinct of my early medical training that brought the thought? But instantly it flashed upon me that, by being of service to the queen, I might save our lives, and Bob's also—if he were in their hands.

They bore the queen past me into one of the many apartments which opened out of the spacious hall, and, as no one seemed to notice me, I followed the bearers. They laid her on a couch, and I was about to approach her when Red Petticoat grasped my arm, as if to hinder me. At this moment the queen opened her eyes and looked round wonderingly.

"I understand medicine—I am a doctor," I said, addressing her.

She spoke a few words in a feeble tone, and I was allowed to administer a restorative from the pocket-case I always carried. In a few moments she again opened her eyes, and the colour began to return to her cheeks.

To my astonishment, she took my hand and pressed it to her lips, saying—

"So like him, and so good!"

I did not venture yet to put in a word for Thudduck; but I was terribly afraid that he would now be treated in a summary manner and with great severity. So I sat down by the queen, feeling her pulse from time to time, and in less than an hour she was herself again.

"You feel better now?" I said interrogatively, as she opened her eyes after a short sleep.

"Yes, I am better," she said ; "quite well, I think. But zat man—zat terrible, dreadful sailor—ah!" And she addressed a few words in her native tongue to the red-petticoated functionary, who immediately left the room. I trembled at this, for I remembered the warning written beneath the map.

I was about to intercede for Thudduck, but detected a look in the queen's eyes which warned me to bide my time.

"You wonder who I am," she began abruptly, "and why you have been brought here?"

I bowed.

"And I am about to tell you," she continued. "It is plain to you zat I am not a native of zis country?"

I gave another bow of assent.

"My story is not long, but it will be a strange von to your ears," she said.

And then she told me that she had been born in Paris, thirty years previously, and that her father had foolishly embarked all his fortune in a colonizing expedition to the Marquesas Islands. The ship on arriving had been driven from the first island on which they proposed to settle by the infuriated inhabitants, who captured and ate some of the crew. The ship then sailed for the less-known islands on the edge of the group, and at length the present island was reached. After a careful examination, and no signs of inhabitants having been discovered, the party of colonists was landed, along with all their goods, and a plentiful supply of firearms and food, and the ship sailed away for other parts, on the understanding that the captain would call there on the return voyage.

"I vas a leetle girl," said the fair narrator, "at the time, and do not remember all zat happened; but I can just recollect ze night ven my parents and friends vere all taken from zere beds and brought here. Oh, it vas a great feast for ze man-eaters. In ze middle of ze sand zere vas a big, big fire, and ze people had a big, big feast—lasting many days, till ze ground vas covered all over vis bones."

"And how did you manage to escape," I asked, shuddering at her story.

"Zee wife of zee chief loved me. Her child had recently died. So she tattooed me here;" and the queen pointed to her bosom.

"But how would that protect you?" I asked.

"Zee man-eaters vill not harm any von marked with zee sacred sign of zee Mouth and Hand, nor could they be persuaded to eat his flesh," replied the queen.

As she said this there flashed into my mind the mysterious words written by my brother under the map in the bible which he had given to Captain Clearstory, "*No safety but for those marked*," and a ray of hope dawned that, perhaps, in this way we might be preserved from a horrible fate.

The queen looked at me attentively, as if to read my thoughts, and then continued—

"Zee old chief had no living child, and adopted me as his heir. He died ten years ago; and to-day is zee anniversary of his death."

"So you have reigned ten years?"

She nodded.

"But surely *you* do not indulge in the dreadful custom of eating human flesh?" I cried, shrinking from her in horror.

She gave one of her silvery laughs, saying, "Ah! you vish to know too much!" And she tapped my hand with a dainty fan of feathers, which hung from her waist.

I thought I had better now seize the opportunity of asking her about Bob, for I was terribly anxious to learn whether my nephew had been captured; but I could only obtain from her an evasive reply. Then I questioned her once more about my brother—

"Do you remember an Englishman who visited this island about nine years ago?" I asked.

She turned away, and seemed lost in thought for a few moments; then, fixing on me her beautiful and expressive eyes, she said—

"You shall know more another time. Do not ask me now. You need rest, and may sleep visout fear;" for she perceived that I was in a nervous condition of mind.

"But what of my friend the sailor?" I asked.

"Ah! I can do *nossing* for zat dreadful man!" she exclaimed, as she clapped her hands twice.

Immediately, the man in the red petticoat entered the apartment, and the queen gave him some instructions in the tongue of the natives.

"Go vis him, he vill not harm you!" she said, with a wave of her hand; and I followed him, sorely perplexed and wondering what would be the sequel to this strange series of adventures.

"Had it not been for Thudduck's mad conduct," I said to myself, as I followed my guide, "we might have some hopes of being liberated; but, as it is—"

Here Mr. Red Petticoat ushered me into a room in which was a bed. While there was a strange semi-barbarous character about its furniture, the apartment was by no means devoid of comfort. I noticed a second door at the further end, and the windows were high up and barred.

I was terribly weary, and in ten minutes was fast asleep. Then I had a strange dream. I was lying on the sand in the centre of the arena; near me was burning a fierce fire, and I could see its smoke ascending up towards the ridge of the crater far above. I tried to move, but seemed to be bound hand and foot. Then Red Petticoat stooped over me, and held a sharp knife to my breast. The point of it pricked my skin, causing me to cry out. Immediately, the heat of the fire increased, greatly scorching my breast, though, strangely enough, it did not seem to affect the rest of my body. After this the fire seemed to die out, and I experienced a delicious coolness...

The light was stealing in through the narrow windows above me when I awoke. My limbs were stiff, and I had strange feelings of discomfort in my chest. Sitting up in bed I looked around. The room had apparently not been entered since I came to rest. At this I felt relieved. There was a mirror—probably, originally belonging to the ill-fated French colonists—hanging on the wall opposite. I got out of bed and looked at it. My shirt was open, and I could see some dark marks on my chest

Taking down the glass, I turned towards the light, *and on my breast saw the sign of the Mouth and Hand*. The stinging, painful sensation was evidence enough that it had been recently done. But when? And who had done it? Why did I not awake? For it must have taken some time to make all those minute punctures, and to fill them with the indelible dye. Often since that morning have I looked at the weird device which I shall carry to my grave, but never shall I forget the shock which the discovery gave me.

One thing, however, was plain enough; the tattooing was the work of no unfriendly hand. For if the queen's word was to be trusted, I might now consider myself to be safe from violence on the part of the natives. But what about Thudduck? I feared greatly for him; for it was evident that the queen had taken a great dislike to the man.

I was soon dressed and strolled out on to the platform which ran round the building. The natives seemed going about their ordinary avocation; children were playing on the sand, all unconscious that they were in the heart of a huge volcano. In the distance I could see a party of men marching towards the narrow passage, as if bound for the open country. Fires were lighted before many of the dwellings, at which the women were cooking—for there were no chimneys to any of the houses. A general air of peacefulness and comfort pervaded the whole of this strange town, and I could not help wondering why they had such a horrible taste for human flesh.

"I hope zat you did sleep vell?" said the voice of the queen at my elbow. I turned, and saw that the glow of health had returned to her face. She looked charming in a simple loose-fitting garb of some native material. I noticed, especially, that this dress, like the one she had worn on the previous day, was cut so as to show plainly the tattoo marks.

Thanking her, I replied that I was quite refreshed; but added that I would like to know how she had managed to have me tattooed.

"It vas very easy," she said; "you vere fast asleep, and I did just give you a leetle of our poison. On the arrows it kills, but when it is drunk very weak it sends to sleep. Then I did our Sacred Sign on your breast."

"What! Yourself!" I cried.

"Yes, vis my own hands!" she replied, with a bright smile, as though proud of her achievement.

She must have detected the slight frown on my face, for she added—

"You vill sank me von day for vat I have done. But come, ve must eat!" And she turned into the hall and led me to one of the numerous rooms. It was a small one—a sort of boudoir, and furnished in the same semi-barbaric fashion as the rest of the building, but withal with such taste and comfort, that I was again quite surprised. I could see that the queen had something to say to me; and I ate, for a while, of the unusual but by no means unpalatable viands on the table, without breaking the silence; my thoughts, meanwhile, intent on Bob Halliard and on trusty Thomas Thudduck.

For a long time, too, the queen was silent, and I perceived that she, too, was deep in thought. A shade passed occasionally over her handsome face, and it was plain enough that something troubled her. At length she spoke.

"I am queen," she said; "but I cannot break zee laws or infringe zee customs of my people. Zee great council will assemble to-day, ven it vill be decided vhat vill be done vis you."

"But did you not say that this tattoo,"—and I pointed to my breast—"is my security?"

She nodded.

"But I did not put zee mark on any von else," she said, with a significant nod.

I grasped her meaning. I had no need to fear for myself, but Thudduck and Bob would be sacrificed.

"Tell me, queen," I said hastily, and presuming on her friendliness to address her thus—"tell me! is my nephew in the hands of your people?"

"Yes."

"And is he in danger of his life?"

"He vill be eaten."

"When?"

"In two days."

"Can you do nothing to save him?" For I dared not mention Thudduck at present. She shook her head sadly.

"By our laws the queen may claim but one as her share, and may eat him at her leisure; I have chosen you!"

"I do not fear your teeth, O queen!" I said, with a bow and a smile, as I helped myself to more of the delicious but unknown dish before me, "nor do I believe that you would touch human flesh."

She smiled; and, as I thought—though I might have been mistaken—looked significantly at the dish. "It is not bad eating!" she said. Whereupon I laid down my fork and turned from the plate in loathing. Was I then eating a portion of a fellow-creature? The thought was truly revolting, and I looked at her in horror.

"If you had lived here all your life, you vould do as I have done," she said, half apologetically. But I inwardly felt that I could never again look on her with anything but loathing and disgust.

"Do you often claim your share of man's-meat?" I said, determined to find out whether she were a confirmed cannibal.

"I have only done so once before."

These words relieved my mind. The queen was not so bad, after all, I thought.

"Was that recently?" I asked, anxious for further information and yet half-dreading her reply.

"It was nine years ago," she said, rising from the table as if to put a stop to further questions.

As she quitted the room it flashed upon me that she referred to my poor brother. Had she eaten him?

I was left alone all that morning. Whether orders had been given that I was to be allowed my liberty I cannot tell. But, although Red Petticoat scowled fiercely at me and grasped his broad-bladed knife threateningly as I passed him, I was not molested. So I strolled around the town, and took stock of the place and its inhabitants. There were many more houses than I had imagined, and the population must have numbered several thousands. Each house was raised on piles some feet above the sand, which looked here and there as though it had

recently been flooded. I put this down to the action of the rains during the wet season.

Presently I came to a huge door in the rock. It was fully as wide as a barn door, and seemed to be constructed of ship's timbers. There were workmen near by, and I tried to ask them its use, but they knew no English and could not understand my signs.

Before noon the party of men who had gone out in the morning returned. They brought with them a prisoner. He was one of the sailors who had been left on the ship, and I knew by this either that a relief party had been sent by Captain Clearstory, or that an attack had been made on the vessel.

Chapter VIII

„Father, your Boy is here.“

THERE was much commotion in the royal palace when I returned. I met the queen as she passed into the great audience chamber where Thudduck and I had first seen her.

"Come vis me," she said, in her pretty accent; "zee great council is about to begin."

She was dressed in a splendid scarlet robe, decorated with the brilliant feathers of rare birds, and looked every inch a queen. Taking me by the hand, she led me through a curtained door at which stood semi-nude armed sentinels, and presently I found myself by the throne and within the screen through which Thudduck and I had looked. After us filed in the chiefs and princes (for such I took them to be). As soon as the curious ceremony of placing the side of the hand between the teeth had been performed by the queen and court respectively, a lengthy discussion was held, of which I was unable to understand a word; though I detected fierce glances directed against me, especially by him whom I have named Red Petticoat. This man presently placed himself before the throne and made some energetic gestures and remarks; and concluded by stepping up to me and holding his long knife to my throat. He held it so close that its sharp point pricked my skin and I started back in alarm. But the rest gave vent to a shout of approval and pointed their weapons threateningly towards me.

A flush of colour came into the face of the queen as she arose and calmed the uproar with a graceful wave of her shapely arm.

"Do not be afraid!" she said to me, in gentle tones; "you shall not be hurt."

So saying, with her own hands she unbuttoned my shirt and displayed before them the sacred sign of the Mouth and Hand on my breast.

A dead silence fell on the assembly as they looked first at the sign and then at each other.

"Salute them with the sign—do as I do," said the queen, placing the side of her left hand between her teeth.

I imitated her in a very awkward manner—for it requires long practice to do it as those islanders do it; but, looking as brave as I could, I turned towards them and made the sign. Instantly they returned it, with grunts of satisfaction. Red Petticoat alone looked angry.

"You are now one of us," said my fair and royal deliverer.

I bowed low and thanked her for her clemency; but I felt terribly anxious concerning the fate of my nephew and Thudduck.

Nor were my fears to be unrealized. Red Petticoat now left the chamber, returning shortly accompanied by a guard of six armed warriors. They did not come alone. With them were Thudduck, Bob Halliard, and the sailor.

"You here!" cried the latter, undaunted by his position, as he caught sight of me.

No one but the queen could understand our language (and how she had learnt English so fluently I could not conceive). So I asked her whether she would permit me to hold a short conversation with my friends before the council proceeded with its deliberations.

Turning to the assembled councillors she asked their assent, and, having obtained it, bowed permission to me.

"How did *you* get here?" I asked of Bob.

"By the kind invitation of these dark-skinned gentry," he said, waving his hand towards the assembled council. "But, tell me—have you heard anything of my father?"

"Nothing that I can rely on."

"Could you find out more?"

"Yes; if I follow up the information at my disposal."

I dared not say more on this topic, as the queen was listening intently and with an anxious expression on her expressive features.

"What are they going to do with us?" asked Bob.

I hesitated, for I did not like to tell him what I knew.

"Fire away, uncle!" he said. "After all I have seen, you will not frighten me." And he looked round defiantly.

"You see this," I said, opening my shirt and showing the tattoo marks. "This was done last night by the queen, unknown to me, strange as it may seem. She assures me that no native will henceforth harm me, because I have received their sacred sign of brotherhood."

"Why not ask her to tattoo *us*?" inquired Bob.

I shook my head.

"She would not be allowed to do it," I said; and then I explained what the queen had already told me concerning her privilege of claiming one prisoner.

Bob's countenance fell as he heard this.

"Then there is nothing for us but to die," he said doggedly, folding his arms.

I could see that the queen was becoming much agitated, as she listened to our conversation.

"Oh how I wish zat I could save him!" she cried, clasping her hands, while tears came into her eyes. "But unless he receives zee sacred sign zere is *no* chance for him."

"You hear that!" said Bob. "I didn't know the young woman spoke English so well," he added, in a tone of surprise.

The queen frowned, and I looked significantly at Bob, for I feared that his off-hand manner might give offence. But Red Petticoat speedily decided the matter. He seemed to have an idea that the queen had a desire to befriend the prisoners, and stepping forward, he now addressed the assembly; the result being that the queen was—most reluctantly, as I perceived—compelled to assent, and the guards immediately formed around the three and hurried them away.

I followed the queen from the audience chamber and implored her to save them.

"I vill do vat I can for your nephew," she said; "but for zee others I dare do nossing."

I then asked her if I could not see my nephew.

"Trust me," she said, "and you shall certainly see him."

That night I slept lightly, for I was not so weary as on the night of our arrival. Some time during the small hours I was awakened by a slight sound.

"Follow me," whispered the voice of the queen.

It was very dark during the night in this deep crater. I had slept in my clothes, and so followed her at once.

"Silence!" she whispered, "or we shall awake the chief executioner!"

"Is that Red Petticoat?"

"Yes; he is a very dangerous man, and very fond of man's- flesh. He is angry that I have claimed you as my portion."

It did not seem nice to be called a "portion," as though I were already divided into joints of meat; but I held my tongue, and followed the queen as quietly as possible.

She conducted me up the passage which led to the scene of Thudduck's exploit; but branched off before arriving at the dining-hall. Here she took a lamp from the wall, and we passed up a narrow steep passage, which seemed to me to be a natural fissure, or crack, within the mountain. At any rate I could see no roof. Presently we arrived at a series of doors on the right hand side of the passage. Before the first of these the queen stopped.

"Your nephew is inside," she said, as she removed a stout bar.

Sure enough there was Bob, sitting disconsolately on a jutting piece of rock. He sprang up in alarm as we entered, but grasped me warmly by the hand as soon as he recognized his visitors.

"Well done, uncle! Well done, queen!" he cried. "This looks encouraging, I must say."

"Come, Bob," I said; "there is no time to be lost. Your only chance is to do as the queen bids."

"I can save you," she said, looking towards the doorway fearfully; "but you must be marked with the Sacred Sign."

"I'm game for anything!" responded Bob, unbuttoning his shirt. "Will it take long?"

"It vill take an hour at zee least."

So saying she handed to me the lamp, and then I saw that she carried also a leathern case. From this she took long needles and a bone phial, and commenced operations. It was a painful process, and I wondered how I could have endured it without awakening; but Bob bore it bravely, and the device was widely and effectively tattooed on his breast in less than an hour by my watch.

She had hardly completed her task when I heard a distant sound. The queen hastily started up.

"The guards are on their rounds!" she said, looking at me in despair.

"Lie down behind this rock till they have passed," said Bob to me. It was my only chance; and the queen at once retired and barred the door. Where she went I knew not then, but I afterwards, learnt that she was well acquainted with the wonderful labyrinth of fissures within the heart of this remarkable mountain, and found no difficulty in escaping without observation.

"I can hear their footsteps; they are close at hand," whispered Bob; and immediately afterwards the door was flung open, and a light flashed into the dungeon. Bob remained motionless, his head leaning on his hand, apparently fast asleep.

I could hear the voices of the men as they spoke to each other in their own tongue; and then, to my intense relief, they closed and barred the door and departed.

"Is Thudduck near us?" I asked, as soon as they had gone.

"No; he and the other sailor were taken off in another direction. But we will find them if we can get out of this beastly hole."

"The queen will be back shortly," I said; "and then we will persuade her to allow us to tattoo Thudduck and the seaman."

"Yes; I think we could manage it," said Bob.

But though we waited for a long time the queen did not return, and at length our patience was quite exhausted.

"Let's try to get out," said Bob.

"Impossible!" said I. "The bar is too strong."

"But we have knives! Surely we can cut away some of the woodwork. At any rate, we can try!"

So we crouched by the door in the pitchy darkness, and hacked away at the stout boards; but could not feel, after much toil, that we had made any impression.

"This is terrible!" I said. "What can we do?"

"Let's hurl a piece of rock against the door," suggested Bob;—"that is, if we can loosen a big lump."

We felt our way to the projecting rock, and with much trouble dislodged a large piece. With this we staggered to the door and swung it as a battering ram with all our might, and presently the door fell outwards with a crash.

No answering sounds followed; and, indeed, so far removed was the dungeon from the centre of the crater that I had little fear any one would hear our movements. We crept down the passage in the direction of the dining-hall, till we arrived at the first lamp, which we took, for a light was essential to us; and then, returning, ascended the winding crevasse for a considerable distance. The ascent was pretty steep, and we wondered where it would lead us.

"Do you think there can be any outlet this way?" said Bob.

I feared not; but the inner road was blocked by the palace and by other dangers. Above all I feared Red Petticoat.

"Hark!" I said, "what is that sound?"

"Water, as I'm alive!" replied Bob.

We listened. Yes, it was the distant sound of splashing water.

"Where water runs we may get out," I remarked, and we pressed on till presently we found ourselves on a sort of stone embankment against which water was rippling. Near one end of this channel was a wooden sluice-gate, which could be raised by means of a great lever. And we noticed that beyond it was another crevasse or channel, leading down towards the centre of the crater, but nearly at right angles with the path by which we had come.

"Is it a subterranean lake?" I said inquiringly.

Bob's reply was to fall on to his knees. Bending over the bank, he took up some water in his hand.

"Ah!" he cried, "it is salt—this is the sea! This must be one arm of the channel marked on the map!"

"Where the sea comes in we could get out, old man!" I cried, with a new sensation of hope. "But what about the others? We cannot desert them."

"No; but if only we could liberate them, we might get them out this way!"

"We must first discover whether this is the channel leading to the sea. What is *that* place?" and he pointed to a door which had escaped our notice. It was barred, like the door of our late dungeon.

We took down the bar and opened the door. The light fell on the form of a man. He lay sleeping on a rough couch, for the place was not unfurnished. His beard and hair were long, and his clothing of native manufacture, but he was no islander.

"Do you know him?" asked Bob, as I stooped and held the light closer to the sleeper.

"Bob," I said, in an awe-struck whisper, "*it is your father!*"

In an instant he was on his knees by the side of the sleeper.

"Father!" he whispered, "father! your boy is here!"

Slowly opening his eyes, my brother gazed at him for a few moments, as though in a dream; but he did not seem to be afraid.

"I thought you would come one day," he at length said slowly; and then came a flood of tears, and father and son were locked in each other's arms.

Chapter IX

Our Plan, and How it Worked.

WE told my brother (the Professor, as Captain Clearstory invariably called him) as fully as our precious time would permit—for, indeed, we are anxious to be up and doing—our eventful story.

He, on his part, told us that he had spent the whole of the past nine years on the island, having been captured, like ourselves, by the natives.

"I should have been eaten at once," he continued, "had not Queen White-Dove—as her native name signifies—claimed me as her portion, and marked me with the

sacred sign;" and he touched his breast. "I think she likes me," he added, "for she has proved wonderfully intelligent at learning English."

He then told us that he had found on his arrival, that the natives were suffering from various disorders caused by the insanitary condition of the arena within the crater. By his advice the queen had ordered the erection of new dwellings, which, as I had noticed, were constructed on piles several feet above the sand. He had discovered that the underground arm of the sea (of which I shall have to speak anon) washed a narrow wall of rock deep within the mountain, and that it only needed properly constructed sluice-doors to admit water to any required depth to the arena.

"We have done this several times a year for the past eight years," said my brother, "and with great advantage to the health of the people. My great opponent, however, has been the chief-executioner, who has always tried to hinder my reforms, and cordially hates the queen, who has acted in every important matter under my advice."

"He is the man whom we call Red Petticoat!" I exclaimed.

"The same—the petticoat is a mark of rank—and he is a most dangerous fellow."

"And the man against whom we were warned in the directions written underneath the map," said Bob.

His father smiled.

"Then, you received the Bible?"

"Or we should not have been here," I added. But I did not then explain how it came into our hands.

"But what are you doing down in this dungeon?" I asked.

"The queen hid me here from Red Petticoat's malice two days ago. There was great excitement when the ship was sighted, and the news was signalled from point to point throughout the island—for there are other towns, and this is only the stronghold. She told me that Red Petticoat was plotting against my life, though I was under the protection of the laws of the country, by virtue of the sacred sign."

"Then the sacred sign is not a complete protection?" I exclaimed.

"Not from that villain. Since then, I have lain here awaiting the queen, who was to inform me when it was safe for me to reappear. The natives are afraid of this part of the great rift, and go by another road to their fleet."

"What fleet?" we exclaimed.

"They have a large fleet of enormous war canoes, as well as of small ones, in this underground channel. Its shore entrance is entirely concealed, and it would have been almost impossible for you to have seen it from the deck of the ship; but, once found, the successful storming of the stronghold would be certain, for a broad way leads from the water's edge, down to the centre of the crater, which is there entered by large doors, and the water is only kept back by the sluice-gates."

"I saw them this morning," I said. "They are like barn-doors."

"How can we save the mate and the seaman?" asked Bob.

"And ourselves?" I added.

The professor thought awhile. "There is but one way—we must get them up here. We can only escape by water."

We talked for some time, and finally decided that Bob and I should go down the dry channel below the sluice as far as the big doors.

"You can cut a small hole and watch the proceedings," said my brother. "If they bring out Thudduck and the sailor, run back and tell me, and I will open the sluice-gate. The water will rush down the steep passage, and burst open the doors. The natives will then fly to their dwellings, and will probably leave their victims. By this time you will be round through the royal dining hall—that is the cavern, you know—and within the palace. There we must trust to circumstances. You are both tattooed?"

"Yes."

"Well, that mark will be a protection against every one, except the chief executioner, who will, I am certain, take secret vengeance on any, or all of us—that is, if he has the opportunity."

I looked at my watch, and found that it would now be daylight above ground.

"Let us be off, Bob," I said. And leaving my brother at the sluice, we advanced down the broad dry channel towards the interior of the mountain, in which we saw indications of its frequent use; which was to be expected, seeing that this was the broad road from the town to the wharf, or landing-place.

On arriving at the bottom, which I perceived was far below the level of the sea, we came to the big doors. They were securely fastened, and we could hear through them the sounds of revelry, as if something unusual was taking place.

"I hope we are not too late," I remarked.

We found that the woodwork was rotten, and it did not take us long to cut two small spy-holes, which gave us an excellent view of the arena. A huge fire blazed in the centre, and a number of people were assembling around it. Each of them, even the women, was armed with a murderous-looking knife; and I shuddered as I realized what these preparations presaged.

"There they are," whispered Bob, as he nudged my elbow. We were kneeling side by side, with our eyes applied to the holes, when a guard of some twenty armed men came into view. In their midst marched Thudduck and the seaman. The former, from his vastly superior height, towered like a Gulliver among the Liliputians above the dusky-skinned natives. The seaman, on the contrary, was short and rather stout, and I could not help thinking that the wretched cannibals hoped to get a good picking off his bones.

They marched very near to our place of concealment, and as they passed the great doors we heard Thudduck say—

"Cheer up, Jock, an' we'll gie the loons a hielan' fling afoor mony minutes!"

I wondered what he meant, and watched them closely as they were led in the direction of the fire. I hoped sincerely that they would be able to break away from their guards.

"If only I had my good rifle, I'd pot a few through this hole!" exclaimed Bob, gnashing his teeth with rage as he watched them place the prisoners near the fire.

For my own part I was in an agony of apprehension, and every minute expected to see Red Petticoat—who was master of the ceremonies — raise his enormous double-edged knife, and plunge it into his victims.

"Can we do *nothing*, Bob?" I said. "It is horrible to feel we are powerless in this hole. Shall we go back to your father and tell him to raise the sluice?"

"And drown Thudduck with the natives!"

"Oh, we need not do that! It will take a long time to flood this great place to such a depth, and the inflow will at any rate divert the minds of these villains from their purpose."

"I don't half like the risk to those two poor fellows," returned Bob. "You see, we must leave this place before the water is turned on."

I thought a minute.

"There's a better way, Bob. I am known to be marked with the Mouth and Hand. I will find the queen and go down with her among the people. If she can be persuaded to come with me, perhaps we may be able to liberate the prisoners—at any rate I will see what the queen says. She has been long among the cannibals, but I cannot believe that she likes their ways."

"As she has so far shown herself our friend, I think you may trust her," said Bob. "But I cannot let you go alone. I will go back and tell the gov'nor to let in the water in ten minutes. Then I will return to you, and we will do as you have suggested. As soon as the black fellows see the water they will skedaddle, like rabbits to their burrows; then we will unfasten Thudduck and the seaman and make for the palace. Once there, it will not be a difficult matter to get into the passage which leads past the dining-hall cavern, and thence by way, of the dungeons to the subterranean sea. The gov'nor will be awaiting our arrival, and will have a canoe ready."

This scheme seemed to me to be the only feasible one, and I was glad to have Bob's company; so we cut away a portion of the rotten doors, and waited our opportunity to slip out unobserved.

The natives now began a dance. Round and round the fire they whirled, singing a weird song as they worked themselves up to a frenzy in preparation for their inhuman feast. Thudduck and the seaman stood just outside the ring; their arms were bound, and Red Petticoat kept watchful guard over them.

The wild dance was at its height, and no one was looking towards the great doors, when Bob, having hastened back to his father to tell him to open the sluice-gates, returned to me. Then we crept through the opening. In a few minutes we had reached the palace. The queen was nowhere to be found. I sought her everywhere, and called her by name, but with no success.

Fearing that Bob's father would raise the sluice before we could get near to Thudduck, we started off across the sand in the direction of the great fire. How it roared and crackled, to be sure, sending clouds of smoke up towards the edge of the crater far above.

As we advanced, I heard a cry. It came from Red Petticoat as he turned and caught sight of us. Instantly the dance ceased, and every one looked in our direction. Baring our breasts so as to show the tattoo, we advanced with as brave a face as we could command; though I must confess that I, for one, was inwardly quaking for fear of what might happen.

"Thudduck!" I cried, as we drew near, "do not look at us, and do not reply, but listen attentively. We have a scheme for your rescue. A flood of water will presently enter this place. Keep your eye on the great doors on your left, and beware of Red Petticoat."

I looked up towards the mouth of the crater as I was speaking, as if I addressed some one far up on the craggy sides, and not a few of them turned their eyes in

that direction, as though wondering to whom I spoke. The chief executioner, however, kept his gaze steadily on us, and I noticed that he was grasping firmly his long knife.

Then he turned towards the dancers, and cried aloud to them what was, I suppose, a command that we should be seized, and several of the men advanced towards us immediately with threatening gestures. They looked terrible fellows, and each was armed with the deadly knife.

"It is now or never," said I. "Do as I do."

So we halted, and I pointed to my breast, and at the same time placed the side of my left hand between my teeth. Bob imitated me exactly. The effect was magical. Our would-be assailants immediately halted *and returned the sign*. Seeing this, Red Petticoat yelled at them fiercely, as if to hound them on; and he was, I believe, himself on the point of dashing upon us, when I heard a wonderful and remarkable sound like that of distant thunder, which quickly increased in volume. I knew what it was. Bob's father had let in the water.

The next instant the great doors in the rocky side of the crater were burst violently open, and, with a roar, an enormous flood rolled out upon the plain.

"Look there! look there, my lads!" I shouted to Thudduck and his companion, and at the same time I ran towards them, Bob following, in the hope that I might be able to untie the cords which bound their arms. But Red Petticoat was too quick for me. Taking in the situation at a glance, he rushed upon Thudduck with his huge knife upraised, and grasped by both his hands, his eyes gleaming with intensest hate. I expected that Thudduck would attempt to flee, and be struck down in the attempt, or that he would die bravely confronting his assailant.

But "Tammass" Thudduck had no intention of being done to death so long as he could prevent it. His arms, it is true, were tightly bound, but his legs were free; and as Red Petticoat leaped upon him with a savage yell, Thudduck raised his right foot and struck him with all his might full in the pit of the stomach, so that the man went down as if shot. Not, however, before the blow of his keen knife had fallen. But so sudden had been the stoppage of his career that, instead of entering the mate's breast, the weapon had only severed his bonds. In a few seconds Thudduck was a free man.

"Which way oot o' this ugsome den? Tell me, sir-r, an' I'll follow," he cried. "Ah, but I've geen that pawky seevage one i' his wame!"

The water was now dashing in tremendous volume through the wide aperture, and was rapidly spreading over the sand. Seeing this, the natives were making in all directions towards their elevated dwellings, with cries of consternation.

Seizing the fallen executioner's knife, Thudduck speedily cut the cords which bound his companion.

"Come along!" I cried; "follow me before we are stopped!"

We made for the palace, and, as we entered, met the queen.

"Vat have you done?" she cried. "Who has turned on zee vater?"

"The Englishman whom we found by the sluice-gates."

"Zee Englishman?" she exclaimed; "and he is—"

"My brother, and this man's father," I replied, pointing to Bob. And then, fearing that I should never again see her, I grasped her hand. "Good-bye, queen," I said. "I wish that it were in my power to reward you for all your protection and kindness."

There were tears in her eyes as she replied, sadly—

"You will soon be far away; but do not forget me."

"Come with us," I said; "we will convey you to Europe."

She hesitated a moment.

"No," she said. "No; I have no relatives—no home. I must stay here."

We left her, and were making for the passage which led up through the mountain to the dining-hall cavern, when we heard her voice crying after us—

"Hasten! hasten!" she said. "Zee chief executioner and his men come zis way. Zey must not overtake you!"

We hurried on. I seized a lamp from the wall and guided Thudduck and the seaman safely past the cavern-hall and the dungeons, and on through the long dark rift till we arrived at the water. I saw at a glance that it was rushing with tremendous force down the other passage towards the crater. My brother was anxiously waiting our arrival.

"The sluice-gates were rotten, and have broken down!" he cried. "Nothing can now save the town. I shall go back to warn the people before it is too late," he added, "and to save the queen."

"Don't stir an inch that way, I implore you!" I said. "Red Petticoat and his assistant-butchers are on our track, and may be here directly. Our only chance is to get afloat. Where are the canoes?"

"Follow me, then," he said, moving away. But I could see that he did so regretfully.

We followed him along the embankment until by the dim light of the lantern we saw some dozens of huge canoes drawn up by the side of a kind of wharf.

"Let's get afloat," said Thudduck, leaping into one of the smaller craft.

We followed him, and were in the act of untying the rope which held the boat to the side, when I saw that something white was fluttering along the embankment towards us.

"What is that?" said Bob.

He had no sooner spoken than we caught the sound of men's voices echoing up the passage. Then I heard, through the pitchy darkness, the voice of the queen close at hand, and crying for help in imploring tones. Before I could stop him, Thudduck had leaped ashore, and had rushed off in the direction of the sound. In less than a minute he returned, bearing the form of the queen in his arms.

"Shove off, m' lads! " he cried, as he leaped on board. "The black deevils are coming, and no mistak!"

And in the distance I could hear the roar of many voices above the sound of the waters. I knew what it meant—the natives were making for the canoes.

Chapter X

We are Entrapped.

IN desperation we seized the paddles and urged the curious and ungainly craft down the dark channel in the direction of the sea. Although the canoe was by no means so large as the others which we had seen, it was far too big for four men to manage easily. I should have thought that twenty persons could have found ample room in it. Hence, though we worked hard, we did not make very rapid progress. The pitchy darkness of the cavernous inlet was also a great hindrance, and several times we grazed rocks with such violence that I feared we should stave in the sides of our frail bark, with results I could hardly dare contemplate.

After the first of these collisions, the queen, who had been helping with a paddle, abandoned it in favour of the lamp, which she held over our bows, and from this position directed our course. In paddling one has the advantage of looking forwards, so we were able to see her quite plainly as she stood in the fore part of the craft; her garments, and long hair which hung over her shapely shoulders, fluttering in the air, while she guided our progress by voice and hand.

Illustration:

She guided our progress by voice and hand.

The underground channel through which we were passing was a wonderful phenomenon of nature. Some convulsion within the volcano had, probably ages ago, rent open these great rifts. In places the sides towered above us so far that the dim and flickering light we carried was powerless to penetrate the immense space. In other parts the sides drew in so close that we could almost touch the rock with our paddles on either hand. Through these narrower passages the water was now swirling inwards at a great rate. In fact, in one place, it ran like a mill-race, and I feared at first that we should never be able to pass it.

"The water is rushing in to fill up the crater," remarked my brother. "In a few hours the first basin will be quite filled, for this subterranean channel is nearly on a level with its roof."

The queen overheard him.

"Oh, my home! Oh, my people!" she cried.

She turned towards us as she spoke, and, as the light fell on her pale features, I saw there a look of unutterable sorrow and pity, and I felt that though she had long lived among savages, she had the heart of a civilized woman.

At this moment we heard behind us a sound. It was the splash of paddles!

"The black demons are coming!" muttered Thudduck, digging his paddle more vigorously than ever into the inky flood. Then we heard a shout, and looking back could see in the distance five dancing lights, and we knew that Red Petticoat and the other natives were afloat and in pursuit of us.

"Will they overtake us?" whispered Bob over my shoulder, for he paddled just behind me.

"Not if I can help it," I replied. "But I must confess that knowing how skilful these islanders are with their canoes, I have great doubts whether we can maintain our distance."

We forthwith pressed our blades against the water with all our might, following the guiding finger of the queen, down long passages, across broader pools, round awkward and dangerous corners; but, as I had feared, the sound of the paddles

and the cry of voices in our rear sounded ever nearer down the long cavernous rift; and we knew that our pursuers were making a determined effort to overtake us.

Every few yards the queen glanced back anxiously, till at length she faced us altogether, just as we entered what seemed to be a broad oval-shaped pool.

"Ve cannot escape them by speed!" she exclaimed, in despairing tones.

"Can we gie 'em the slip i' some ither way?" asked Thudduck.

"Yes," she answered, pointing away to the left. "Zere is zee cave of zee Mountain Spirit! Zey vill not follow us zere!"

"Do you know the way?" I asked.

"Yes."

"But what about the light? They will follow that!"

As I spoke the first of the canoes swept round a point of rock astern of us, and not more than a hundred yards away.

"Oot wi' the licht," roared Thudduck. But the queen had anticipated him, for no sooner had the light affixed to the bows of the approaching canoe turned the corner, than she stripped off the mantle or cloak which she wore and wrapped it around the lamp, thus effectually obscuring every gleam of light.

"On to zee left—zee vay is straight," she cried, laying her hand on my shoulder—for I was next to her in the canoe.

Slowly and as quietly as possible we paddled in the direction she had indicated, and in a few seconds had passed from the inrushing stream into a tranquil side-channel.

The roof was much lower than that of the broader passage which we had just quitted, and our paddles touched either side of the rocky walls. No sooner had we entered than we beheld, on looking back, a huge war canoe, containing a large crew of half nude natives, passing the entrance to our retreat. We held our breath for fear they would discover us, but their gaze was directed forwards, and so they swept swiftly by; but we caught a glimpse of Red Petticoat's crimson garment fluttering in the light of his lantern as he stood at the bows piloting their course.

"What shall we do?" asked Bob.

"Remain where we are, most decidedly," said his father. "The other canoes are coming."

Thrusting our craft a little further into the passage, we sat silent in the darkness until the splash of paddles told us that another canoe was at hand. In a few seconds it passed like the first, to be succeeded by three others, all crowded with natives.

"Did you see any women and children?" whispered the queen, when the fifth canoe had disappeared into the darkness.

"None but warriors," replied my brother, and they were all armed."

"Then they are certainly after us," remarked Bob.

"Undoubtedly."

"What will they do?" I asked, for I was sure that after his long residence among these people my brother would be able to tell me what we might expect their tactics to be.

"They will be in the open sea presently," he said.

"And then?"

"Well, not finding us, they will probably return to search the sides of the channel, but they will hardly venture into the cave at the end of this side-passage."

"Why not?"

"Because the cave is the reputed abode of the Mountain Spirit, whom they dread and worship."

"But they may watch the entrance in the hope that we may attempt to escape."

"That is quite possible."

"And is there no way out through the cave of which you speak?"

"There is one way; but I fear it will be impassable now."

"It is our only chance," I said; "let us go on!"

"You do not know what you are attempting," replied my brother. "Let us wait until we see signs of the return of the natives. If they pass round to the shore, and there land, we may be able to escape by way of the sea."

"An' git back to the ship," put in Thudduck, in a tone of satisfaction.

After waiting a while in the narrow passage we cautiously ventured from our retreat; not daring, however, to show a light, for fear lest Red Petticoat and his company should be returning and should catch sight of us. But we had not proceeded very far when Bob whispered, "Look there!" And sure enough we saw a light advancing towards us through the darkness and from the direction of the sea.

"They are coming back, sir!" said the seaman.

So, without delay, we turned, and with some difficulty re-entered the narrow side-passage.

"They may come a little way—it will only be a short distance to-day," said my brother.

"Why to-day?"

"Because it is only on the day of the full moon that natives of high rank, led by the chief executioner, venture into the cave. Those of inferior rank never come at all. But let us push on. I will tell you all about it later."

In a few moments the queen showed us a little light, carefully shielding the lamp by holding it in front of herself, so that no gleam might penetrate to our rear; and thus, paddling slowly, we advanced for some distance towards the heart of the mountain. The roof above us was so low that we could easily touch it; indeed, it would have been impossible to have stood upright in the canoe. We could not guess the depth of the water beneath us, but I imagine it was immense. The air was as motionless as the water, and we paddled along in silence wondering what was before us, and not very sanguine as to our chances of escape.

In ten minutes—for we proceeded very slowly—the prow of the canoe grated on a sandy bank.

"Here we land," said the Professor.

"Well, as you know all about it," I said, "suppose you lead."

"I will follow the queen," he said.

"Zen I vill show you zee great mystery of zee volcano," she said, as she took my proffered hand and stepped lightly ashore.

We followed her up the bank and along a continuation of the rift. The pathway rose for some yards, after which it sloped down gradually towards the centre of the

mountain, and I wondered whether it would lead us back to the crater. The pathway was rough and stony, and we stumbled along in single file after our fair guide; Thudduck, who brought up the rear, giving vent to sundry exclamations in the broadest Scotch dialect as his shins struck against projecting pieces of rock.

In a few minutes we found ourselves in a spacious cavern, the entrance to which was guarded by two huge human figures, which had evidently been carved from the trunks of trees. So real did they seem that for a moment I started back appalled, for they were exactly like a pair of gigantic chief-executioners. Each grasped in his right hand the national long knife, which glittered in the light of our lamp; and each was clad in a short scarlet petticoat of native material, while on their breasts was the sacred symbol of the Mouth and Hand.

The light was insufficient to reveal to us the roof of the cavern. We could judge, however, by the sound of our voices, that it was exceedingly lofty; and weird echoes responded to our every whisper.

"What is that?" inquired Bob, pointing ahead.

We looked in the direction he indicated, and could see the dim outline as of an immense human mouth carved in the rocky side of the cavern.

"That is the object which these people worship," said the professor. "It is, I believe, a work of nature; one of those curious forms of rock one meets with occasionally. This one has probably been produced by volcanic action in ages long gone by."

"The mooth looks vara black!" remarked Thudduck, advancing towards it.

At this moment we heard shouts in our rear. The sounds came distinctly though faintly up the water-way which we had just traversed.

"Zay suspect zat ve are here," said the queen, looking anxiously back.

"But they dare not follow us—of that I am certain," said the professor.

"No; but zey vill vatch zee entrance."

"I fear so. Yes, I very much fear that we cannot escape by that way."

"And zee other—?"

The professor shook his head.

"If the water had not been too high it might have been possible; but I fear that all hope of escape by that road is now cut off."

We were, just then, at a loss to understand my brother's meaning, though its terrible import was afterwards made plain enough to us all.

After a time the sounds ceased, and when we had listened attentively, Bob suggested that two of us should go back to the canoe and paddle very quietly and cautiously down the narrow channel to ascertain the true state of affairs.

Thudduck and the seaman volunteered to go; and, after many injunctions from us that they should be extremely careful not to expose themselves, they departed.

"While they are away, let us get out the provisions," said the professor. "I, for one," he added, "am quite faint for want of food."

"Provisions!" we exclaimed. "Where will you find them?"

By way of reply my brother walked across towards the great mouth. The queen, who seemed to be well acquainted with the strange place, followed him with the lamp. Presently they returned with some cocoa-nuts and other fruits.

"Here we have both meat and drink," said my brother, throwing down the nuts.

"Where did you find them?" we asked, in astonishment.

He smiled.

"These are the offerings which the natives have recently made to the Spirit who lives in the mouth. It is only a week since the full moon, on which day Red Petticoat and others brought a fresh supply for the deity; so we are in luck's way."

We sat down around the lantern and enjoyed the refreshing fruit; for the morning was now far advanced, and none of us had tasted food since the previous evening. While we did this we discussed the situation. Bob was for making a dash in the dark for the sea and for liberty; but the queen reminded him that we had no weapons, while the natives were all armed with bows and poisoned arrows, and we agreed that the risk would be too great.

"But you say there is another way?" I said, turning to my brother.

"Say rather, *there was*," he replied, shaking his head. "Yes, there *was* a way—known only to myself and to the queen; but I fear escape by that way is now hopeless."

"But tell us more about it," said Bob.

"I will tell you when the sailors return with their report," said he.

In half an hour we heard the footsteps of Thudduck and the seaman, as they stumbled along in the dark over the loose stones, for there was no mistaking their heavy tread.

They brought bad news. The natives, suspecting that we had taken shelter in the inlet leading to the cave, were blockading the entrance. Thudduck said they had ventured as far down as was safe, and that Red Petticoat was there giving directions, and evidently preparing to starve us out.

"He knows that the cocoa-nuts will not last us long," said the professor, shaking his head.

Then while Thudduck and his companion were enjoying some food, we held a council. It was plain that the natives considered that they had caught us in a trap. My brother advised patience.

"We are all weary," he said; "I recommend that we watch and sleep in turns for some hours. Perhaps the islanders will tire of keeping guard, and will retire; if not, we must—" He hesitated.

"Well?" said I.

"We must take the desperate step of trying the other road."

"And which way does it lie?" asked Bob.

"*Through the mouth*," he replied.

Chapter XI

Through the Mouth.

I THINK we must have stared at my brother for fully thirty seconds, open-mouthed.

"Yes," he repeated, emphatically, "it will be a desperate, and I fear, hopeless venture; but unless we can break away through the cordon of canoes down the water-way, we must attempt the passage *through the mouth!*"

Then we turned our gaze towards the object indicated, It was a remarkable work of nature. The lips were as finely formed as if carved by human skill; the teeth, which seemed to consist of huge pieces of stone, were so white, that they gleamed in the light of our lantern. Each tooth must have been fully four feet in height, and of corresponding width, with a narrow space between each. The mouth was open, as though the owner thereof were laughing, and there was a width of about two feet between the upper and lower rows—just enough space, in fact, to admit a man's body. The opening was some eight feet from the ground.

"Yes, that is the alternative road," said the professor, pointing towards the mouth. "If we cannot pass the natives' canoes, we must go by that way. But *then*, our difficulties will only be beginning."

"Where does it lead?" asked Bob.

"Down into the crater. I will tell you how the queen and I found it out," said his father. "Four years ago, a rebellion broke out. It was headed by the chief executioner, who is wishful to be made king. His followers consisted of the fiercest and most blood-thirsty of the islanders, and I need hardly say that the remainder of the natives, who are a peaceable and industrious people, and who greatly dread and dislike the chief executioner, opposed his object.

"I was able to convey information to the queen that a plot had been formed, and that her life might be in danger; and we fled to this place, accompanied by two of her most trusty guards. The day of our flight was unfortunately that immediately before the date of the full moon; a fact which we only remembered after our arrival here. We were about to leave the place, having determined to seek a shelter nearer the shore, when one of the guards reported that the chief executioner and his company were already at the entrance. Our only chance was concealment. But where? *Can you climb up there?* I asked the queen, as I pointed to the mouth. She replied that she would do so, with my assistance. So we sent the two guards away with the canoe, giving them instructions to report that we had escaped, and telling them to return for us when the conspirators had retired.

"As soon as they had gone, I lifted the queen up to the edge of the stones which formed the teeth, and she was soon safely within the great mouth. With some difficulty I clambered up after her. To our surprise, we found that there was not only plenty of room, but also a long dark throat, which sloped downwards at an angle of nearly forty degrees, though not in all places quite so steep. Along this we crawled for a few yards, for it was not high enough for us to stand upright, being in some places only eighteen inches deep. We came to the first of these narrow places within a few yards; and not liking to venture further, we lay still and listened. 'They are coming,' whispered the queen; and sure enough I soon heard the voice of Red Petticoat and his followers. They were discussing our disappearance. Some of them maintained that we had escaped by water; but the chief executioner was convinced that we could not have got away, and maintained that we must be concealed in some of the rocky crevasses around the cavern.

"Before long bright gleams of strong light flashed up between the great teeth, and we perceived that they had lighted a fire which illuminated the cave in a

wonderful manner. I whispered to the queen that we had better venture deeper down the throat, and accordingly we crawled cautiously for a considerable distance, and at length saw in the distance a dim light—the light of day; and in a few minutes we were peering through a small hole which looked down into the crater. The aperture was a little way under the upper lip of the lower basin, and we could see our friends far below going about their duties. A shout brought two of them under us. Never before had human voice spoken from the tiny orifice high up in the sheer wall of rock, and they gazed at us amazed. I cried aloud to them in their own tongue, and asked whether they could aid us, but they shook their heads. The queen was in despair, and I could perceive no means by which we could safely descend from the dizzy height. Then an idea struck the queen. 'Shoot one of your arrows—not a poisoned one—into this hole?' she cried, 'but tie to it a thread!' The men ran off and returned with some thread, as well as with some stronger cord and a stout rope. Attaching the thread to an arrow one of them shot at the hole in which we knelt. It was an anxious moment, for if the arrow struck either of us it might inflict a severe wound, while there was the alternative risk that it might fall short. The arrow, as it happened, stuck into a crack just below our position; and with difficulty, and at risk of my neck, I succeeded in drawing up the thread to which the fine line and then the rope was attached.

It did not take long to lower the queen; after which, having jammed, the end of the rope among the splintered rocks, I descended myself.

"None but the two men, who were fortunately the queen's most faithful servants, had witnessed our descent; and as I was anxious for the preservation of our secret, we bound them over to silence and set fire to the cocoa-nut-fibre rope, which, being very dry, was entirely consumed right into the cave-passage in a few seconds. The chief executioner and his party did not return until the next day. They were amazed at finding us at home, and as we had armed all the queen's retainers, the rebellion was nipped in the bud and we heard no more of it. But one of Red Petticoat's followers reported that while they were in the sacred cavern of the mouth they were terrified at a sudden burst of dense smoke which was emitted from between the huge teeth. Taking this as a sign of the spirit's anger, they had prostrated themselves before it, and had then hastened back to their canoes, vowing that they would no more conspire against Queen White-Dove."

We had listened to the professor's story, and when he had finished we asked him what he proposed to do in case that Red Petticoat and his fleet of canoes continued to blockade the entrance.

"There is but one alternative," he replied, "and that is to attempt an escape through the Mouth."

"But the lower basin of the crater will now be a lake!" exclaimed Bob.

"Not only so," he replied, "but by this time the water will be above the level of the hole from which we descended on the eventful occasion of which I have just told you. In fact," he continued, "as the upper lip is just on a level with the sea, the water will by this time have completely filled the lower basin of the crater, and may possibly be overflowing into the upper and larger portion of the crater."

"Zen zee poor people vill be all drowned!" cried the queen, uplifting her hands in horror.

"They have had plenty of time to escape down the water-way to the sea, and doubtless are all quite safe," replied my brother. "But our own case is far more serious. In plain words it is simply this: either we must force our way, weaponless as we are, through the canoes, or we must crawl through the mouth."

"But the water!" we exclaimed.

"Yes; it will be a terrible risk! It means a plunge into the water, in the hope that we may be able to grasp the upper edge of the basin on rising."

I shuddered at the prospect.

"And if we fail?" I asked.

"None will ever know our fate."

We looked at each other for a while, anxiety and consternation visible in each face. At length Thudduck spoke—

"I'll gang doon wi' Micky here, an' the professor; that'll leave twa o' ye to 'fend the queen. The professor kens the loons' lingo; maybe he'll fin' oot their plans."

This seemed a good suggestion. It was decided that Bob and the queen should climb up into the cave—that is, if they were able to do so; while I kept guard on the sand-bank and awaited a signal from Thudduck, who was to shout to me if the natives seemed to be inclined to push their way up the passage.

I accompanied them to the water. We were by this time so accustomed to the pitchy darkness that we were able to find the canoe without difficulty, and, having helped them to push off, I sat down on the sand and awaited their return.

The excitement and anxieties of the previous day had fairly exhausted me. At any rate, I must have fallen asleep, for I was awakened by a sound. Starting up, I listened. Again it came, Thudduck's stentorian tones rolling down the long narrow rift, which conveyed the words as clearly as though he were close at hand.

"Hurry up, doctor! The black villains are comin'. Save the queen, i' ye can!" said the voice.

Hardly waiting till the words had all reached my ears, I started for the cave, knocking my legs pretty smartly against the rocky projections in my anxiety to warn Bob and the queen. They were lying on the sand on either side the lamp, fast asleep. I could not help looking on the beautiful features of the young queen with intense pity and gratitude when I remembered that it was for our sakes she was now in such jeopardy. For I could not but recollect that, but for us, she and her subjects would still be residing in the crater-town in peace.

"Up!" I cried. "They are coming!"

Bob raised his head in a sleepy fashion, and asked what was the matter.

"Red Petticoat and his men are coming up the passage; we must save the queen!" I said.

He and the queen were on their feet now.

"Vatever you say, I vill do," she said, looking up into my face trustfully. It was a look which brought out all the manliness of my soul.

"Come this way!" I replied, grasping her hand and hurrying towards the mouth. "There is no other place of safety, and you know the way well!"

"Yes, I know it," she said very quietly; but I felt her hand tremble.

Seizing the lamp, Bob made for the mouth; where he grasped the great teeth and swung himself up; and then, stooping, he seized the upstretched arms of the queen, and, with my aid, speedily landed her within the opening.

This was hardly accomplished, when, by the light of our lamp, we beheld my brother, Thudduck, and the seaman, re-entering the cavern.

"Oot wi' that licht!" roared Thudduck, as they made for the mouth.

The queen instantly slipped away from us, further down the *throat* (as I have already called the low passage); and, as I afterwards discovered, carefully concealing the light by the aid of some of her own garments. Then, grasping the hands of the professor and the sailors, we aided them to gain the mouth, and in a few seconds we were all safely concealed in the narrow throat.

Hardly had we accomplished this when we heard the sound of distant cries, and knew that our foes were now determined to attack us. As I happened to be the nearest to the front of the mouth, I was able, by lying flat, to peer between the teeth without risk of being seen. In a few minutes lights flashed into the cavern, and I then saw Red Petticoat himself. He was followed by upwards of a score of his followers, all heavily armed.

They held up their lanterns and looked around. On the floor were the remains of our cocoa-nut meal, and the sand was marked with our feet. The savages were not slow to perceive these signs of our recent occupation of the place, and they remarked on them with extravagant gestures and much discussion.

On a word of command from the chief executioner the men proceeded to search the cavern. Peering behind projecting rocks, and flashing lights into the deeper recesses, their amazement was great when they found no further traces of us, and I could see from my place of concealment that some of them were as much afraid as they were astonished; and in a few minutes all except Red Petticoat had retreated towards the entrance to the cavern, while they glanced up apprehensively at the Mouth.

At this moment I sneezed. I suppose that the dry dust of ages, lying just under my face, had got into my nostrils. At any rate, I gave a loud, sudden, and unexpected sneeze. It was so loud that I heard the echoes replying in innumerable faint sneezings far above in the roof. The men, with yells of terror, instantly disappeared in the direction of the water; but Red Petticoat stood his ground, gazing fixedly at the mouth. Then, drawing nearer, with his lantern upraised, he carefully inspected our hiding-place. I lay low, and held my breath as he approached. Apparently he was not satisfied, for he drew back, and, stretching his neck, endeavoured to obtain a view of the interior. All at once he placed the lantern on the ground; and, taking his long knife between his teeth, sprang forwards, and before I divined his intention, his head appeared above the teeth, which he had grasped firmly with both hands.

Without a moment's hesitation I seized him by his long black hair, and strove with all my strength to thrust him back. But he was too quick for me. Throwing one leg over the stone teeth, he grasped me in turn by my own hair, just as I cried out for assistance. The next instant I saw the keen point of the long knife as it glittered in his hand in the lamplight. One second later and it would have been buried in my neck; when, with a roar like an enraged lion, Thudduck sprang forward and grasped his arm. It was done so suddenly that the knife flew upwards, and glancing against the upper row of teeth, fell outwards on to the floor of the cavern.

"Ye black hoond, wad ye noo!" cried the mate, seizing the man's throat and shaking him as a terrier shakes a rat.

The others heard the noise and crawled towards us as quickly as they could.

"Ah!" cried the queen, raising her hands in surprise. "So you have caught him. Zen ve shall be able to escape."

"Yes; we will make him conduct us to the outlet," said Bob. "This is indeed a most fortunate capture."

We congratulated one another all round, for the end of our troubles now seemed to be in sight. Alas! how little did we know of the terrible ordeal through which we one and all had yet to pass.

While we were talking, "Tammass" Thudduck was busy "fixin the murderin seevage," as he expressed it. This he did with the aid of a piece of cord which he discovered in one of his capacious pockets. Then, as soon as Red Petticoat's hands were securely fastened, we descended from the mouth, and lowering the man carefully on to the sand, conducted him down the fissure to the water's edge.

Here a great and terrible disappointment awaited us—the canoe had gone!

Carefully we examined the place where it had been drawn up; anxiously did we search with our lamp the waters at our feet, to see if perchance it had been sunk. No trace of it remained.

The queen and my brother closely questioned the chief executioner, but he affirmed that the canoe was there when he and his men landed. Then Thudduck offered to swim down the water-way, to ascertain whether it somehow had got afloat. It was a risky proceeding, but he persisted in his offer; and so, throwing off his upper garments and discarding his boots, he plunged into the black flood. We anxiously awaited his return, and he was away so long that we feared lest the current had swept him into the crater. But at length he returned, somewhat exhausted with his swim. He reported that he had examined the sides of the narrow channel as far as its entrance, but without success.

With heavy hearts we turned to the cave. On our way the lamp which we had first brought burnt low, flickered, and presently went out. This made us turn our attention to that belonging to the chief executioner, for we felt it would be a terrible calamity if we should be left in that pitchy darkness.

"Zee oil vill last about two hours," said the queen.

My brother was of the same opinion, hence it was necessary that we should decide quickly on our course.

"Why not let Red Petticoat swim down the channel for help?" suggested Bob. "These natives swim like corks, and he may be able to work round to the shore. Besides, if he is drowned it will certainly be better than risking one of our own lives."

"And what kind of help do you think he would bring?" said his father. "You must recollect that the natives will now be infuriated at the destruction of their stronghold. The chief executioner would most certainly reappear with a large party of armed men, and our doom would be that we should play an important part in a great cannibal feast."

"The only alternative is through the mouth," I said.

"I can think of no other chance of escape," he replied; "even then we may have to deal with the natives."

And so it came to pass that we decided to make this desperate attempt to save our lives.

Chapter XII

A Terrible Plunge.

WITH anxious hearts, but with a feeling of grim determination to "do or die," we once more clambered up into the mouth. Thudduck had possessed himself of Red Petticoat's great knife, which he secured to his belt; and as it was manifest that the man would be unable to swim with his hands tied; and seeing he was now powerless to harm us, we set him at liberty, after the queen had made it plain to him that for the sake of his own life he must do what he could to assist us.

I went first, and was followed by Red Petticoat. Then came Bob, then the queen, and she was succeeded by my brother, while Thudduck and the seaman brought up the rear. And so we crawled slowly and painfully down the low and sloping "throat."

Bob carried the lamp in order that he might light the way for the queen, and I had to make my way in the dark.

Presently, far below in the remote distance, I saw a faint light. As we got nearer it assumed a greenish-blue hue, very unlike the ordinary effect of light admitted through a narrow aperture; and I wondered much why the light should assume such a colour. It grew clearer, until on turning I could see it reflected on the faces of those who followed me, imparting to them a truly ghastly appearance.

I had not gone much further, when suddenly I found myself up to my knees in water. It was then that the meaning of the strange light flashed upon me—the water which had been admitted to the crater had risen above the mouth of the passage in which we stood. How far above I could only guess by the height the water had risen inside the slanting tunnel, the end of which was clearly visible.

The others crowded behind me and inspected the view, and we all stood in silence for a few moments, gazing down into the blue-green flood. It was easy to account for the light; and we were glad of it, for the lamp we carried would very soon expire. None of us, however, were thinking of the beautiful effect, but rather of the terrible and dangerous plunge which each must take before there could be even a hope of liberty. And the plunge must be taken by all who did not wish their bones to lie for ever in the mountain-vault.

While we were looking at the water, a dark object floated across the entrance. Then came a cry of horror from the queen; and no wonder, for the object was the dead body of one of the islanders. The face was turned towards us, and we could quite plainly distinguish the features. The sight was certainly not calculated to strengthen our resolution as we contemplated the task before us.

"Let us draw back a little from the water," said my brother; "the passage is wider a few yards within, and we can sit down for a while to rest, and to arrange our plans."

"And to bid each other farewell," I added mournfully.

"Yes; we will sit down and talk a while, for this is back-aching work," remarked Bob.

As soon as we had settled ourselves, we proceeded to talk matters over. Our first business was to ascertain who were the swimmers. I confessed that I was unable to swim at all; all the rest had mastered that useful accomplishment; but Thudduck, who had already proved himself to be a particularly strong swimmer, promised to look after me. The queen and Red Petticoat, like all the natives, were as much at home in the water as on land.

"Who is to make the first journey?" asked Bob.

This was a momentous question, for if the water had not reached sufficiently near to the overhanging lip of the upper basin, it would be quite impossible for us to clamber out on rising to the surface.

"And how are we to know that the first person has reached the place of safety?" I asked.

To this there was no reply for some time, till Thudduck suggested that Red Petticoat should be sent first.

"These darkies swim like dooks," he said; "an' i' the loon canna find a landing-place, he'll jist dive an' come back."

"There is no danger, I imagine, that he will find any of his friends in the upper basin," remarked the professor, who immediately proceeded to inform the chief executioner of our plan.

The man protested against it with many words and much gesture at first, but at last consented to take the first plunge. This meant that he must first pass through some ten yards of tunnel, which slanted downwards at a considerable angle, and which was filled with water to the roof.

It needed a stout heart to face such a task; but our quondam enemy did not seem to be appalled. I suppose that when men live in constant danger, and when life is held very cheap in the society among whom they reside, they become less sensitive to their own safety. Be that as it may, Red Petticoat merely gave his limbs a good rub, to ensure active circulation, and then, without a word, entered the water.

From the shape of the opening and the slope of tunnel, it was impossible for him to dive headlong through the hole and out into the crater, and the first danger to be faced was the great difficulty of passing downwards and outwards with sufficient quickness as to be able to avoid drowning.

Suddenly he plunged under. For one instant we lost sight of him in the splash and swirl; the next we caught sight of him wriggling exactly like a great fish, and swimming fish-like down the narrow passage, until with an upward sweep he darted through the orifice and upwards out of sight.

As he disappeared from our view we each gave a gasp. So great was the tension of our anxiety, that I believe we each held our breath during the time the man was passing down the tunnel. I, for one, felt that it was an ordeal almost worse than death; for, as I have said, I was unable to swim, and I feared that my fate would be that I should be drowned before reaching the main body of water.

We waited for a while in the hope that Red Petticoat would be able to return to tell us the state of affairs; but, as he had not come back at the end of half an hour, we resolved that another should venture; and Bob volunteered to be the next.

Shaking us all heartily by the hand, and trying to look brave, Bob took off his shoes, and prepared to start by wading into the water up to the armpits as Red Petticoat had done.

"Pray that I may do it!" he cried, as he took the plunge.

As soon as we could see clearly what he was doing, we perceived that he was swimming under water as the native had done, though not with his ease and swiftness, down towards the opening. Shooting through it, he darted upwards out of our sight, and we each and all heaved a sigh of relief when the seconds of our suspense were over.

"I propose that we wait a while before another starts," said my brother. "If Bob meets with the native, he may be able to persuade him to return to us—that is, if a return be possible."

Accordingly we waited for fully half an hour more; but neither of our companions returned.

"It is something like death!" I remarked. "We each in turn take the plunge; but no one returns to relate his experiences."

"I hope that Bob succeeded in finding a landing-place," remarked his father, in an anxious tone.

"Helloa! What is this?" exclaimed Thudduck, suddenly. "Look ye here, noo!" And he pointed to a stone at the water's edge. "That stane was na covert a while sin!" he said.

"Zen zee vater is still rising!" cried the queen.

"In that case there is no time to be lost," I said. But as I spoke, my heart died within me; for, as I was unable to swim, I had little hope of being able to get through the passage. And then, even if successful, what was to hinder me from sinking down, down, into the vast crater, to find my grave among those strange dwellings where first I had met Queen White-Dove?

I think she must have read my thoughts—

"You vill not sink," she said, laying her hand gently and reassuringly on mine. "If some von vill fetch me two cocoa-nuts—unbroken vons—I vill make you safe!"

Although I did not understand her plan, I was sure that her long residence among these semi-amphibious islanders must have taught her how to deal with such persons as myself.

"I will go," said the seaman; and he started at once for the cavern, taking with him the lamp, which was still burning, though dimly, for the oil was very low now.

He soon returned with two huge cocoa-nuts. Into each of these the queen, with wonderful skill, bored a hole by the aid of Thudduck's knife. We drank the refreshing milk—for indeed we were parched with thirst—and the queen then stopped the holes with pieces of stick which had been deposited in the tunnel by birds. Having done this, she tore off a long broad strip from her skirt, and bound the nuts securely under my armpits.

"You vill not sink now," she said, viewing her handiwork approvingly.

I had my doubts, for the nuts felt very heavy; but I felt bound to trust her.

"Zis man vill go first," said the queen, pointing to Thudduck. I could not help smiling when I noted the tone of queenly command in her voice. "Zen you vill follow him," she said, turning to me, "and I vill follow you."

Her nobility and self-sacrifice flashed upon me instantly. She would help me to get through the narrow passage, or herself perish in the attempt. My heart was too full for words. I could only grasp her hands as a farewell—for, indeed, I feared it was this; and then we stood ready for the plunge.

"Lay yer hands on my shoulders and go wi' me," said Thudduck, when we had waded deep into the water.

I did as I was told, and the queen remained a short distance behind us, as though she would see how we progressed.

"Noo then, doon ye gae!" roared my guide.

In another instant we were under the water. My eyes were shut, for the simple reason that I could not open them, and I held on tight to Thudduck's shirt at the shoulders. I could feel his great arms working with regular strokes like twin pistons of some great engine. Then I became conscious that I could not hold my breath many seconds longer. I was bursting with the pressure on my lungs; a terrible throbbing at the heart told me that the vital forces in my body were being strained to the uttermost. Suddenly there came a shock, and I was torn away from my guide's shoulders with great force. Opening my mouth, I took in a little seawater; then the horrible thought that I was drowning flashed upon me, and I struck out for dear life, and in a few moments I bobbed up like a cork above the surface.

No words can express the relief I experienced in that gasp of fresh air. It was but one gasp, for the next instant I had sunk again, but not far; the cocoa-nuts brought me up, and there I remained, with my head bobbing about just above the level of the water.

To my astonishment, I was almost in the middle of the crater, and I could see Thudduck swimming towards an object which appeared to be floating. On it was a man. It was Bob! He was safe! I thanked God, and took courage, and shouted to him with all my might. He heard me, and looked eagerly around, but could not discern me for some time.

Then Bob shouted to me across the water.

"I am on the floating roof of a house; but I have no paddles."

It was just at this moment that I perceived the queen. She was swimming towards me with a wide, graceful stroke. Catching hold of me with one hand while she swam with the other, she towed me in the direction of the roof.

Feeling a little more confidence, and having now recovered both my wind and my senses, I aided her to the best of my ability, and before long we reached the raft, and, by the aid of its occupant, soon found a safe footing thereon.

"Thank God, you are safe!" cried Bob. "You were our chief anxiety, uncle. The risk is not so great for swimmers."

"How did you get here?" I asked.

"Exactly as you did. We came up a good deal further from the side of the crater than we expected, and I, for one, made for the nearest resting-place."

"And Red Petticoat, where is he?"

Bob pointed to the overhanging lip at the bottom of the upper basin. It was still some feet from the level of the water.

"Do you see that black speck?" he said, pointing under the huge shelf of rock.

I looked in the direction indicated, and saw the object he spoke of.

"That is Red Petticoat's head," he said. "He has been here, and I made him understand by signs that I wished him to dive down again, and, if possible, find the tunnel, in order that he might bring you information of our whereabouts, for I knew how anxious you would be. He dived several times, but has been so far unsuccessful."

"Is he to be trusted?" I asked, turning to Thudduck.

That worthy tapped significantly the huge knife which he had taken from the chief executioner.

"Sae lang as this carving-knife stays wi' me, thee's nain sae muckle to fear i' the black seevage," he said, with a meaning wink.

We now watched anxiously for the appearance of my brother and the seaman. We felt so entirely powerless to aid them, and could only wait with such patience as we possessed. Around us was the immense overhanging lip which divided the upper and lower basins of the crater. Above this the sides of the upper one sloped up steeper and steeper, till the rock rose up some thousands of feet of sheer precipice, on the summit of which we could see the edge of the thick forest and the waving of graceful palm branches against the clear sky. The sun no longer shone down into the crater, and I began to fear that we might have to remain the night in our wet clothes upon the frail raft.

"There they are!" exclaimed Bob, as two heads appeared above the surface some distance away from us.

We shouted till the rocky heights above us rang again, and in a few seconds we saw that they were making for us. Red Petticoat, too, heard the shout, and made for the raft, and before long we were all standing, wet but happily reunited, on the floating roof. We had to keep very still, however, for our united weight was almost too much for the stability of our bark, and on two occasions we narrowly escaped a capsize.

As soon as our first mutual congratulations were over, and we had wrung from our dripping garments as much water as we were able, we discussed the situation. None of us liked the idea of spending the night on the frail raft, and yet to reach the upper surface of the overhanging lip seemed to be impossible, unless the water rose some feet higher.

"The inflow is now doubtless considerably lessened," said the professor, "and as soon as it is at sea-level, there it will stay, only rising and falling with the slight Pacific tide."

"Then there is the danger that it may not reach to the lip?"

"I fear so," said he.

"And if we are successful in landing thereon—"

"We'll hae some thousands o' feet o' rock to climb," put in Thudduck.

The prospect was not encouraging. Here we were, in a deep pool, floating on the most unstable of rafts, wet to the skin, without food, the night approaching, and with no prospect of being able to land. Was ever the case of shipwrecked mariners

more hopeless? And yet we were on an inhabited island, with our own stout ship floating within sound of gun-shot.

As soon as Red Petticoat had recovered his breath, we consulted him, through the queen as interpreter, as to whether it would be possible for us to effect a landing; and, in case we did so, whether there were any point in which the rocks were accessible. To both these questions he replied in the negative. No one, he said, had ever been on the great ledge of rock, and no man could scale the cliffs.

While we talked despondingly of these matters the night fell.

Chapter XIII

The Fibre Rope.

WHO can describe the horrors of that night! A cold draught swept round the huge basin, causing us to shiver as we crouched on the floating roof. We dared not sleep; and hour after hour we gazed up at the dim outline of the rock which showed sharply against the star-lit sky. The weary hours dragged on, and at last came the light of day. I was glad enough of this, and so were the others, for we might now expect to be warmed by the sun's rays as soon as they had penetrated the crater. Luckily the sun was nearly directly overhead, for we were not far from the equator, and we might expect to have a liberal supply of his beams.

"There we can land!" cried Bob, pointing to the northern side of the great ring.

He was right. The water had risen a few feet during the night, and at the spot he had indicated there was a dip in the rock.

"How are we to get there?" I asked; for our raft was now in the centre of the lake and turning very slowly round with the motion of the water.

"If we hae na paddles we must mak some," said Thudduck, as he laid down on the edge of the roof and dashed his huge hand into the water. The effect of his exertions was to make us spin round quickly.

"Gang awa' to the ither side," he cried to Bob, who immediately crossed over and imitated Thudduck's performance, though with less success.

In a few seconds we were all, with the exception of Red Petticoat, lying flat on the edges of the roof and paddling with our hands. Red Petticoat slipped into the water over what I may term the stern of the craft, and aided us greatly by pushing and steering in the right direction. Our progress was slow, indeed so slow that for some time I doubted whether we had moved at all; but on looking up I perceived that we were really nearer to the proposed landing-place. After fully an hour's toil we were close to it, and Thudduck was able to stand up and grasp the overhanging ledge.

"Who gaes up first?" he asked.

"I will go first, and the queen shall follow," I said.

With some difficulty I clambered up over Thudduck's shoulders. But the raft nearly shot away from under our feet as we clung to the rock. Indeed, had it not been for Red Petticoat, who swam like a gigantic tadpole, holding the outer edge of

our frail craft, I verily believe we should never have been able to land. As it was, it was some time before our tired party, parched with thirst and suffering greatly from hunger, were safely lodged on the ledge.

Thudduck was about to give a hand to our quondam enemy Red Petticoat, when he espied the two cocoa-nuts which had been of service to myself and which I had left on the raft.

"Bring em wi' ye," he said.

Though the man did not understand his words he grasped the meaning of his gesture.

"Ve shall find some food vithin!" said the queen.

There was not much apiece, but the fruit being fresh and unspoilt by the salt water greatly revived us.

It was then decided that we should divide into two bands and proceed in opposite directions in the hope that at some point the cliff might be found to be less precipitous. But that we should ever be able to climb the vast heights of towering precipice seemed to us all to be absolutely hopeless, and with despondent hearts we started on our search. My brother conducted one party which consisted of Thudduck and Red Petticoat; while Bob, the queen, and Michael the seaman went with me.

The rocky ledge was of considerable width, but sloped up on the side near to the wall of rock until it rose quite perpendicularly. Nowhere could we perceive a spot where even a cat could have gained a foothold, nor did there anywhere appear an opening or rift through which we could reach the outer world.

We met the other party on the further side of the crater. It was evident from their downcast looks that they had met with no more success than ourselves.

"I can see no prospect of our salvation," said my brother. "To return through the mouth into the cavern is clearly impossible for any but Red Petticoat, and would be a great risk even for him."

We spent many weary hours in a close scrutiny of the enormous cliffs, but without avail. If they had been chiselled by the hands of masons they could hardly have been smoother. The day wore on, and the sun beat down upon us in the enclosed shadeless space with awful power, and added to the torments of our hunger and thirst—especially the latter. The queen bore it bravely; but I could see by the pallor of her face that her strength was well-nigh exhausted.

"We can only commend our souls into the hands of Almighty God," I said, addressing the whole party, "for I fear that this crater is to be our tomb."

We sat on the hot rocks for some time in silence. I think some of us were thinking of home, as people always do at such times; when all at once Bob exclaimed—

"I do not see why Red Petticoat should not make the attempt— it is our only chance!

"What do you mean?" we asked.

"I have been thinking," said he, "that as he is almost as much at home in the water as on land, he might be able to find his way back through the cavern and thence to the shore."

We shook our heads.

"He canna do it," said Thudduck, emphatically.

"At least we can ask him to try; I say it is our only chance," persisted Bob.

It was indeed, as Bob said, and as we all perceived, our only chance. As drowning men clutch at straws, so we caught at Bob's idea.

"Ask Red Petticoat if he will make the attempt," I said, turning to my brother. He put the question, and we all watched the man's face eagerly. At first he shook his head energetically. Then the queen broke in, and a long talk ensued in the native tongue between the three, during which Red Petticoat worked himself up into a state of great excitement.

"What does he say?" I asked at length impatiently, for we were unable to control our anxiety.

"He is willing to make the attempt if the queen will renounce her claim to the throne in case he succeeds."

We all turned towards her. How noble she looked! I could not help pitying her with all my heart, and I think we all felt the same.

Then ensued a curious scene. The queen stepped up to the chief executioner and touching the mark tattooed on his breast, placed her own fair white hand between his teeth. Then, turning to us, she said—

"I am no longer queen—call me White-dove! I could not have done it to save *my own* life!"

We understood her meaning. She would have died a queen but for our sakes; and never did she appear so queenly in our eyes as at that moment.

The sun had just passed over the western edge of the crater, throwing a long shadow across the deep waters when Red Petticoat prepared to start. Fortunately we were not far from the place under which the hole was situated, as the queen (as I must still call her) and my brother supposed.

We helped to rub his limbs. Then, after a few final words from the queen, he dived from the rocky platform. A few bubbles rose to the surface, and all was still. He might be drowned in the crater, or in the hole, or on his way down the long subterranean rift towards the sea, but we, in that case, would never learn his fate. Ours would speedily follow. If he succeeded we might hope to see natives on the brink of the dizzy crags above us some time during the next day.

"Do you think they will find a rope long enough for such a height as this?" I asked of Thudduck.

He looked up.

"It is between two and three thousand feet, sir."

"Yes—nearer three."

"The captain might find them rope enough."

"True," I said; "but will they go to the ship for aid?"

Thudduck shook his red head.

"I hae my doots!" he replied.

The sun set, and the night very swiftly followed, as is always the case in that latitude. With just a ray of hope in our hearts to lighten the gloom we tried to sleep. Not that we succeeded much better than on the previous night when on the raft. True our clothing was now dry; but our bed was a terribly hard one, and had it not been for our exhaustion, I believe that none of us would have slept at all.

It must have been about half an hour before sunrise when I awoke, and became conscious of a gnawing pain in the region of the belt. I lay still on my back, not

wishing to disturb the others by rising, and fixed my gaze on the line of trees far, far above, and which were, however, distinctly outlined against the sky. As I looked, the enormous depth of the wall of rock grew upon me. Never before our coming had the eyes of man rested on such a scene, for the whole of the interior of the mountain, from its summit to the sea level, was one sheer precipice.

As I looked I became conscious that *something was moving very slowly down the face of the cliff opposite to us*. For a moment I thought I must be mistaken, and fixed my gaze steadily on the place. No; it moved again!

"Bob!" I whispered to my nephew, who was lying close to me—"Bob, look there!"

Bob opened his eyes in a sleepy manner, and sat up, with a start.

"I thought I was on board ship," he said.

"Do you see that?" I said, pointing to the other side.

"It's a wooden bar or log!" he said, after looking at it for a few seconds. "And there's a rope attached to it. Why, look up, uncle. Don't you see the heads of the fellows against the sky there? they are letting down this log! Bravo, Red Petticoat!"

In one minute the whole party was aroused. In two more we were making our way along the ledge in the direction of the rope, with feelings of hope and of thankfulness such as I can hardly describe.

"Better be ate by the seevages than dee i' this hole," remarked Thudduck, as we hurried along.

"At any rate our death will in that case benefit some one!" said Bob, even attempting a joke.

Arrived at the spot, we looked up and saw, far above our heads—though it seemed to be so low when viewed from the other side—the rope and the attached log. Slowly, painfully slowly, it descended, and as it got nearer we saw that the rope was of cocoa-nut fibre, of the kind usually employed by the natives.

"Will it bear?" I said.

"I doubt it," said my brother. "The natives have, I suppose, gathered all the available ropes, and have joined them. But the weight of it must be enormous, and I question whether it will support much more than *its own* weight. Who is the lightest of our party?"

I think he regretted instantly that he had asked this question, for we all turned and looked at the queen. She certainly would not weigh more than nine stones; while Bob, who was the slightest of the men, would weigh nearly eleven.

"Yes, I vill go up first!" she said quietly.

"What a true heroine she is!" I thought.

But the professor would not have it so.

"It would not be right that we should allow you to risk your life, queen!" he said. "One of us men will go first!"

I think we each drew back for a moment, wondering which of us would volunteer to be drawn up this fearful cliff; but the queen stepped up to my brother, and laying her hand on his arm said a few words in the native tongue.

"I do not like to refuse her," he said, turning to us. "She claims the queen's right of going first till she is once more among her people."

"But we ought not to allow it!" I said.

"It is the wisest course," he replied.

With painful slowness the log descended until it was within our reach. It was a stout beam some five feet in length, and around the middle of it the cocoa-nut fibre rope was secured. Had not the height been so immense I should have felt certain that so strong a rope could easily have sustained the weight of any three of our party. But the case looked very different when the enormous length was considered. I wondered that it had not snapped asunder before the beam had reached us, and I could not conceive by what means the natives would draw it up with the additional weight of a man, or how they would contrive to keep it sufficiently clear of the rocks to avoid friction.

"I am ready!" said the queen, stepping forward. But Thudduck anticipated her—

"Yer Mejesty wull na gang up till Tammas Thudduck hae tried it," he said. "I'm three stean heevier nor the best o' ye! Heave- y-ho!" The last word was addressed in the shape of a shout to our invisible friends (for such we hoped they were) at the summit of the cliff, and Thudduck placed himself at the same time astride on the log.

"The black loons wull want a capstan to raise my big carcass, an' I hae my doots whether they'll manage it!" he remarked coolly.

Presently the rope began to stiffen, we could see that it stretched considerably as Thudduck's weight began to tell on it, and as yet he was not lifted from the rock.

"Dismount before it is too late," cried Bob. "I am the leader of this party and it is my duty to go first!"

"Tammas Thudduck's the mon to deal wi' the seevages," he replied, pointing to the chief executioner's long knife, which he still carried securely attached to his belt. And indeed if any one of us was capable of dealing with the dark-skinned gentry 'Tammas' was the man, though it struck me that either the queen or my brother would be able to treat with them after a more diplomatic manner.

Slowly, very slowly, Thudduck was raised into the air. At first the slope of the rock kept the rope away from the surface of the cliff; but Thudduck was soon obliged to keep himself removed from it by the free action of his feet, and it was wonderful to see with what strength and agility he contrived to hold himself back from the wall. An ordinary person would have found it difficult to do this, as well as to avoid being swung round against the rock. But to the sailor these were no difficulties, and in half an hour he was far above our heads and apparently walking like some huge fly up the side of the perpendicular cliff.

It was nearly an hour from the time he left us until he disappeared with a wave of his hand over the edge. We had, of course, no idea of the nature of his reception, but we trusted that, as Red Petticoat was there, it would now be a friendly one.

The rope was again lowered with considerable celerity, and it was decided that my brother should make the next ascent, on the ground that as he was familiar with the language of the islanders he would be able to interview Red Petticoat and either prepare the way for our reception, or, if need be, warn us by a note attached to the log what we might expect on reaching the summit.

The professor (as we all called him), being very light, was not nearly so long in reaching the top as his predecessor had been; but neither was he so skilful as Thudduck in keeping clear of the rock, and once or twice he swung round against

it with some violence. We held our breath when this occurred for fear that he would loose his hold; for in that case he would have been dashed to pieces before our eyes.

As soon as he had reached the top and the rope had again been lowered we turned to the queen.

"It is your turn now," I said.

But as I spoke I saw that the dangers, toils, and privations of the past forty-eight hours had told terribly on her nerves. She shook like a leaf as she replied, "You must leave me—I cannot go!" I saw at once that if she attempted the ascent she would either fall from the beam or be much injured against the face of the cliff.

"The rope must bear us both," I exclaimed; "surely together we are not much heavier than Thudduck."

I verily believe that Bob was about to volunteer to accompany the queen; but he said nothing, and I felt glad that I was to be her protector and guide in the awful ascent. But I did not realize then, as I have since done, the momentous nature of that journey.

Chapter XIV

My Queen.

PLACING myself astride of the beam, the queen resting on my knees, and my left arm encircling her slender waist, we commenced the ascent. At first it was easy enough; but very soon we reached the perpendicular part, and then the strain of keeping ourselves clear of the cliff became terrific. In her exhausted condition the queen could help me but little; but I managed to save her from contact with the rock, though I received several severe bruises myself in so doing.

When we were rather more than halfway up I looked down. It was only a momentary glance, though in my weak condition it almost caused me to loosen my hold; but as I recoiled with a gasp of horror from the sight of the deep abyss I caught sight of the queen's face. Her head was resting against my shoulder, and her beautiful eyes were looking up trustfully into my face.

"You are not afraid?" she murmured.

The sound of her voice gave me new heart, and a strange thrill of emotion vibrated in my bosom.

"Queen White-Dove," I whispered, "I *was* afraid; but your face gives me courage, for I love you devotedly."

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "I was sure you would love me at last!"

"Then I have your love?"

"It was yours since first I saw you," she said.

It was a strange place in which to plight our troth; but there, suspended in mid-air, against the side of the vast crater, we pledged our vows of eternal faithfulness and pressed our lips together in the first sweet kiss of newborn love. And I verily

believe that had the rope at that moment parted we should have died without terror, so complete was our bliss.

At length (and the latter part of our journey seemed to me to be even too short) we reached the summit. The strong hands of Thudduck as well as of Red Petticoat, and a dozen natives, seized us and lifted us into a place of safety. And not a moment too soon, for in another I had fainted.

On opening my eyes I could not realize where I was. Then, seeing the queen, who was kneeling by my side, and the whole party safe and sound, standing around me, I realized that our rescue was a reality, and earnestly I thanked God for it.

"Where are we?" I asked.

"Not many yards from the edge of the crater," answered Bob.

"Then we will take one look into it before we for ever leave that awful place," said I, rising to my feet with his assistance.

"I fear we shall not get away so easily as you imagine," he replied. "We are prisoners."

"Prisoners! To whom?"

"To the chief executioner and his people. They are demanding satisfaction for the destruction of their town and for the loss of their goods."

"Tell them we will make ample amends if they will place us on board our ship," I said, turning to my brother.

"To-morrow they will decide what is to be done with us," he said. "I have had a talk with Red Petticoat. He is now friendly disposed. At any rate, he does not wish us to be eaten."

"Eaten!" I exclaimed.

"That I fear will be our fate, unless he aids us to escape."

"What will be done with us to-night?"

"We are to be taken to a village on the north side of the mountain."

"What course do you advise?"

"I hardly know what to say. Perhaps the queen can suggest something. She is a wonderful woman."

"The most wonderful woman on earth!" I replied, in a tone of enthusiasm.

My brother looked into my face and smiled.

We went out from the grove of trees and approached the edge of the crater. Its depth was truly awful. Far down in the centre we could discern a black patch. I could hardly realize that it was the lake—our handiwork; and that on its bosom and by its side some of the most terrible hours of my life had been spent.

"Better far be here, and in danger of being eaten, than down yonder," remarked my brother.

With this sentiment we all agreed.

Red Petticoat and other natives now appeared with a plentiful supply of food. The nectar of the gods could not have been more delicious and acceptable. We sat down under the trees and thoroughly enjoyed it.

While we were thus employed, an animated discussion was going on between Red Petticoat and his brethren. It was evident, from the look of alarm which passed over the queen's face, that the natives wished to do something with us, to which the chief executioner was opposed.

"Tell me," I said, "what it is they are talking about."

"Red Petticoat claims us as his property."

"And I suppose that they consider they have earned us by their labours?"

She nodded,

"Well, I think they have a fair claim on the spoil," I remarked, with a laugh. "But how will this affect us?"

"If zey get us, zey vill eat zee two sailors."

"Why the sailors?"

"Zey have not zee sacred sign."

"Can they not be tattooed?"

She shook her head.

"I have ze needles and ze ink; but zey vill not allow me to do it."

"If you mean the natives," I said, "I am quite sure they would not allow it; but as soon as it is dark we may be able to manage it somehow. At any rate, we have already found it a great protection."

"It is zee *only* von," she replied.

Red Petticoat now approached, and intimated to the queen that it was time for us to descend the mountain; and accordingly, accompanied by the natives, who must have numbered fifty, we made our way by a winding path, which was only wide enough for us to travel in single file.

I marched just before Thudduck, and noticing that the chief executioner's knife, of which he had possessed himself in the cave, was no longer attached to his belt, I asked whether it had been taken from him.

Giving me a knowing wink, he replied by pointing to the leg of his wide sailor trousers, and I perceived indications that the said knife was concealed therein.

"When did you hide it?" I inquired.

"As I swung anent the cleef," said he.

In less than an hour we reached the village. It was of considerable size, and I perceived that many of the persons whom I had seen in the crater were there. These looked upon us with no very friendly eye, as we were marched up the main street towards a thatched hut, larger than the rest.

"What is this place?" I inquired of the queen, who now walked by my side.

"It is zee temple of zee Mouth and Hand," she replied.

"Why do they bring us here?"

Before she could reply, we had arrived at the door.

"Can you not get Red Petticoat inside, under some pretext?" I said. "I should like to know more of their plans."

She said that she would do her best.

At the entrance stood an armed native; and within the doorway were two huge carved figures, exactly similar to those we had seen at the entrance to the cavern. On the opposite wall was painted a representation of the Mouth and Hand, in front of which was a broad slab of wood supported on stones. It stood about three feet from the floor, and was some six feet in length. There were dark stains both on the slab and on its supports, as well as on the ground round about, while on the wall, over against the slab, and on either side of the huge Mouth hung a ghastly row of cruel-looking knives.

I looked at the queen's face, and saw that she was exceedingly pale.

"What does all this mean?" I said, taking her hand in mine.

Her lip trembled; but she did not reply.

"I think I can tell you," said my brother, who stood by. "I have never been into this place, but have often heard of it. In the old days—that is, before Queen White Dove came to the throne—wars with the inhabitants of the neighbouring islands were of pretty frequent occurrence. It was the custom to bring the prisoners here, and to slaughter and cut them upon that slab. The custom, owing to the queen's influence, has of late years fallen into abeyance."

We were left alone for a while, and we spent the time in an inspection of our horrible, shambles-like prison, and in discussing our position.

"I have never known the natives devour any who are marked with the Sacred Symbol," remarked my brother.

"Then I wish I was marked," said Thudduck.

"The queen can tattoo both you and Michael," said Bob.

"Can she, noo?" returned Thudduck, baring his manly bosom and turning towards us. On it were depicted a full-rigged ship under sail, sundry dolphins, and other marine wonders, till no portion of his chest remained unmarked.

"Zere is no room for zee mouth and hand," said the queen.

"But your arms or your back?" said I, inquiringly.

"Tammass" shook his head.

"Theer's not a square inch to let," he replied mournfully.

"And Michael?"

"I fear he's na better off!"

The seaman sorrowfully assured us that the condition of his skin was even worse than Thudduck's.

"The mark, you see, *must* be across the upper part of the chest—just below the collar bones," said my brother.

As there was plainly no way of inscribing the protective sign on our friends, we fell to talking over other chances for their safety.

"With but one weapon," I remarked, "we can do little."

"But what about those knives!" cried Bob, pointing to the wall. "Surely we can arm ourselves sufficiently to ward off an attack?"

"I advise you to conceal them, if you do that," said my brother. "Remember, the natives are armed with poisoned arrows, against which knives will be of no avail."

Taking his advice we each appropriated one of the weapons which the natives had so unaccountably left handy for our use, and concealed them under our clothing.

Scarcely had we done this when Red Petticoat entered. Carefully closing the door, he approached my brother, and said something to him in the tongue of the islanders.

"You don't say so!" cried my brother, in English, turning to us as he spoke.

"What's the matter?" we exclaimed.

"Red Petticoat informs me that the natives being unable to take our lives by reason of our tattooing—to kill any one bearing the sacred sign, is, you must understand, an unpardonable crime—have determined to send both us and their late queen in their war canoes to the nearest island, which happens to be inhabited by a hostile tribe, and where we shall be devoured with the greatest

despatch. They have, however, determined to keep Thudduck and the seaman for their own entertainment."

"Then we must contrive to defeat their object," said Bob.

"But how?"

"Will not Red Petticoat assist us?"

"I don't know—perhaps we can induce him, or force him to do so," said Bob.

Hereupon the queen and my brother held a long consultation with the chief executioner, the upshot of which was, that he undertook to aid us to escape to our ship, on condition that a handsome reward was paid to him for his services.

Having consulted us, this was agreed to, and ratified in the most approved form, Red Petticoat placing his hand, between the teeth of each member of our party in succession, while we at the same time placed ours in his mouth. It was a curious ceremony; but the queen and my brother assured us that it was a necessary conclusion to the bargain.

This done, Red Petticoat expounded to us, through our interpreters, the following scheme for our escape:—

Thudduck and the seaman, by Red Petticoat's arrangement, were that night to escape from our prison, and were by him to be concealed among the trees near the shore, with sufficient provisions to last them till the next evening.

He considered it best that we should quietly submit to be placed in the war canoes, which, he informed us, would be manned by a full complement of the strongest and most ferocious warriors on the island. These canoes would be two in number; the one to contain ourselves, the other (a very large canoe) to act as a convoy, and which would be filled with an additional party of armed men.

Red Petticoat further undertook to convey Thudduck and the seaman to the ship under cover of the darkness. They were at once to inform Captain Clearstory of our position, and he was to beat round the island and keep a sharp look-out for the two canoes.

As soon as they should appear to be well away into the offing he was to stand in between them and the island so as to intercept them in case they attempted to return, at the same time making all sail to come up with them without delay.

The plan seemed to be so admirable a one, that we accepted Red Petticoat's offer; at the same time resolving to use our knives if need be; for the queen feared that the natives would turn upon us if they considered it necessary for their own safety, and in case they were hard pressed by the ship.

The remainder of the day we rested and discussed chances of escape. Our position was at least more hopeful than when we were deep in the heart of the crater.

"An' far mair excitin'," remarked Thudduck.

Chapter XV

The Two Canoes.

AS soon as it was dark, Red Petticoat, who had left us when our arrangements were completed, returned for Thudduck and Michael the seaman.

"Hae ye got yer knife, Micky, man?" asked the mate, in a whisper.

The seaman nodded, but neither of them informed Red Petticoat that they were armed. I guessed, however, by the sharp glances which the astute native cast around, that he was aware we had appropriated some of the knives.

After their departure we tried to rest. It was a long time before I could sleep, for the floor was hard and the surroundings strange. My last waking consciousness was of the great Mouth gaping as though it would devour me, and I slept to dream once more that I was being eaten by a large party of hungry islanders.

Early the following morning we were aroused by the men who had guarded the building during the night. They brought us a plentiful supply of food, which we consumed with relish, and felt our spirits to be considerably revived thereby. But they did not seem to notice at the time that two of our number had gone.

The chief man among them, whom the queen told me was the second executioner, then entered and addressed the queen, requesting her, so she told us, to interpret his words to those of us who did not understand his tongue.

He informed us, as Red Petticoat had forewarned, that, except two of us whom the chief executioner had selected, we were to be sent away from the island. But he forgot to say that we were condemned to fall into the hands of savages far more terrible and bloodthirsty than those among whom we had lately dwelt.

At the conclusion of his speech the queen stepped from my side and addressed herself to the man. I judged from her animated manner and tone that she was pleading that we might be sent to the ship. In fact, my brother, who stood near me, whispered that such was the case.

Though I was filled with admiration for her courage, I felt sure that her request would not be granted, and, accordingly, was not surprised when, after the queen had concluded, and the man had said two or three words in reply, he summoned the natives from outside, when about a dozen of them entered.

They seemed much surprised when they found that Thudduck and the seaman had disappeared, until my brother informed them that the chief executioner had fetched them away, with which explanation they appeared to be satisfied.

They brought with them a quantity of cocoa-nut fibre rope, and we at once saw that they intended to bind our arms.

"This will never do," said Bob. "They can easily kill us or throw us overboard, and we shall sink like logs if our arms be bound."

The queen and the professor appealed to them to allow us to go unbound, but without avail. They would only consent that the queen should be free.

"Because I have been their queen," she said, translating their words to us. "But do not fear," she added; "I will do my utmost to liberate you."

My brother counselled obedience.

"These people are of very uncertain temper," said he, "and might suddenly change their minds and fall upon us where we stand. No; let us submit to be bound. Maybe the queen will be able to discover some way of releasing us when the ship comes in sight."

As for the queen, she gave me a look of intelligence and affection; and I perceived that she was well aware that our lives would probably depend on her caution and promptness.

While they were binding our arms, the natives discovered—as I feared would be the case—the knives which we had concealed. Immediately there was a great outcry, and for a few minutes I feared that our lives would be sacrificed. But their anger fortunately subsided, and they contented themselves with making our bonds very secure. The queen, however, was left quite free; and I knew that she, too, had a knife. On this knife, and on her prompt use of it when the proper moment should arrive, our lives depended.

"You will wait," I said to her, "until the ship comes up with us, or until the attention of the natives is in some way diverted from ourselves, and then you will sever the cords as quickly as you can."

"I will give her the signal," said my brother.

"If she should save *us*, we ought to rescue *her*," remarked Bob. "Why should she not come with us to England?"

"She will do so," I replied gravely.

As soon as the men had completed their work, and we were considered to be securely tied, they marched us down through the thick undergrowth to the beach. As we were on the further side of the island, we were of course unable to see the ship. On the beach were some eighteen canoes. Selecting the largest, they placed us in the bows where the paddlers would have full view of us, and then ten strong fellows manned the paddles and we started on what might prove to be our last voyage.

We were very silent as the canoe bounded over the dancing sunlit waters. The morning was a beautiful one, and the island, as its shores spread out on either hand, presented a lovely picture, while above towered the wonderful mountain of whose secrets we had learned so much.

For some time our crew paddled in silence also. It was plain that they were very anxious to get well away into the offing before the day had far advanced; though they had, of course, no idea that the ship was at all likely to appear from the southern side of the island.

In anxious expectation we kept our eyes fixed on the land astern of us. Presently I caught a gleam in Bob's eye, and looking in the same direction as he was doing, though very cautiously for fear of directing the attention of the crew, I saw the topsails of our ship above the trees as she slowly rounded the point on our left.

For a moment I held my breath, for I feared that if we all involuntarily turned in that direction the natives would look round and would see the ship; in which case they would certainly make for the shore with all speed.

"Let us look away to the right," I said, knowing that they would not understand me. "They will suspect nothing, unless we all look the same way."

At this moment my brother and the queen caught sight of the good ship as she rounded the point, and Bob and I at the same time turned our heads away and scanned the shore, while the quick-witted queen turned quite round and pointed over the bows in the direction in which we were going, remarking at the same time that the island for which we were bound lay straight ahead.

We all turned as she spoke and endeavoured, though with difficulty, to dissemble our intense interest in what was astern of us.

"What a blessing that these fellows use paddles and not oars!" exclaimed Bob. Fine strong men they were: and they used their paddles with such skill and strength that the foam was flying from the prow of our craft as they urged her along.

"Is your knife ready?" I said, addressing the queen.

"Quite."

"And do you think you could cut these cords quickly when the moment arrives?"

"Yes."

"Then you had better sing out and point astern when the ship draws near enough," said his father to Bob. "But be sure you delay until the ship is close upon us—that is, unless the men turn and see her before you do this. In that case the queen must cut these ropes immediately, and we shall have to strike at once for liberty."

"The ENTERPRISE is well round the point," said Bob, presently, taking a casual look behind. We dared not look round, for fear our captors would take alarm, and so we went on for nearly an hour until the queen, who now faced us and was reporting the progress of the ship, said very quietly—

"Zey are very near to us, and I can zee Red Petticoat!"

This was news indeed, and I thought it was now time to act.

"Are you all ready?" I asked, in a low voice. "Now, Bob, turn slowly and look astern," I said, "and give a loud shout as if of surprise, pointing to the ship as you do so. But wait until the latest possible moment, for it is plain that these fellows know nothing of the pursuit."

So Bob turned round and fixed his eyes on the advancing ship. Those were anxious moments, and our hearts beat fast. The dusky crew paddled on, all unconscious of their position; but by their side and handy for each man's grasp, was the deadly knife and the deadlier poisoned arrows.

It was just at this moment that one of the men, glancing over his shoulder, after he had noticed that I looked round astern, caught a glimpse of the ship quite close at hand.

Uttering a yell, he threw his paddle into the bottom of the canoe, and grasped his weapons. Instantly every man ceased paddling, and turned to ascertain the cause of their comrade's alarm.

As soon as they saw the ship they uttered a simultaneous cry, and remained for ten seconds gazing at it in astonishment.

In those ten seconds the queen had severed our cords, and we were free men.

With a shout, which was immediately answered from the ship, we threw ourselves on the islanders, in order to prevent them from securing their weapons. But they were too quick for us. Three of them grasped their knives, and the rest their bows. At the same time I saw that a couple of boats were leaving the side of the ship, and the sound of a cheer came across the waves.

The next instant the queen, stooping down by my side, had thrust her knife through the bottom of the canoe. The water streamed in immediately, while at the same time she cried aloud to the crew that we were sinking.

"Overboard every one of you!" cried my brother, at the same time giving me a shove which sent me clear of the side of the canoe and into the sea.

His friendly blow came not a moment too soon, for as I fell, and before my body touched the water in company with the others, the bows twanged and the deadly arrows whizzed over our heads.

Grasping me in a way known to all good swimmers, and bidding me not to struggle, Bob struck out for the ship, my brother and the queen swimming on either side of me. The natives had now enough to do to look after themselves; for, on looking back, the queen reported that they were swimming for their lives, and that the canoe was not to be seen.

"Well done! well done!" cried the voice of Jack Brace, as the first boat came up to us, and we were lifted from the water.

"Look after the black loons awa' yonder," cried Thudduck to the men in the second boat; and presently they came up with them, and took them on board.

The other canoe meanwhile had turned at sight of the ship, and was now far away and making for the shore. Captain Clearstory gave orders that our late guards should be landed on the island, after which we made sail, and in a few hours the scene of our wonderful and momentous experiences resembled a faint blue cloud in the far-distant horizon.

* * * * *

"Do you regret the old days, my queen?"

We were seated by the fire in my English home, and talking over the adventures on the island. My wife—the White Dove, as I often fondly call her—replied to my question by a pressure of her hand.

"I can never regret a time vich gave me the best of husbands," she said.

"Nor, for my part, can I regret that my brother should have taken it into his head to have investigated the mystery of the island and its wonderful crater," I returned.

"Yet I often feel sorry," she remarked, "vhen I remember zat my former beautiful palace in zee heart of zee mountain is now deep under vater."

"My brother tells me that no human power could have controlled the inrush of the sea when the sluice-gates gave way," I said.

"I am thankful zat all my poor people escaped," she said, with a sigh.

As I spoke, our old enemy entered the room, no longer attired, I need hardly say, in his red petticoat, but decently habited in the garb of civilization. A wonderful change had come over the man, and the chief executioner was now our faithful and attached servant. Having solemnly saluted us by placing his left hand in his mouth, he said—

"Zey have arrived, sir!"

I rushed at once into the hall, followed by my wife. Yes, there they were—Bob and Jack Brace—fine, manly fellows both of them, and Captain and Mrs. Clearstory, both brimming over with good humour, and last, but by no means least, faithful "Tammass Thudduck," as ugly and ungainly and as true to the very backbone as ever.

"An' we thocht we wad gie ye a proper hoose-warmin' on yer return fra the honeymoon, sae we've a' cam together," he cried.

What a talk we did have that evening! But I am sure that none of us—least of all my queen-bride—expressed the slightest desire to again reside in the extinct volcano.

"And the professor, where is he?" we all inquired, looking at Bob.

"Ah, you will be sorry to learn," he replied, "that yesterday my father again sailed for the Pacific."

