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Richard Jefferies **After London; or Wild England**

Edited and with an introduction by Mark Frost
Including additional writings by Richard Jefferies

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Part I

The Relapse into Barbarism

CHAPTER I

THE GREAT FOREST

THE old men say their fathers told them that soon after the fields were left to themselves a change began to be visible. It became green everywhere in the first spring, after London ended, so that all the country looked alike.

The meadows were green, and so was the rising wheat which had been sown, but which neither had nor would receive any further care. Such arable fields as had not been sown, but where the last stubble had been ploughed up, were overrun with couch-grass, and where the short stubble had not been ploughed, the weeds hid it. So that there was no place which was not more or less green; the footpaths were the greenest of all, for such is the nature of grass where it has once been trodden on, and by-and-by, as the summer came on, the former roads were thinly covered with the grass that had spread out from the margin.

In the autumn, as the meadows were not mown, the grass withered as it stood, falling this way and that, as the wind had blown it; the seeds dropped, and the bennets became a greyish-white, or, where the docks and sorrel were thick, a brownish-red. The wheat, after it had ripened, there being no one to reap it, also remained standing, and was eaten by clouds of sparrows, rooks, and pigeons, which flocked to it and were undisturbed, feasting at their pleasure. As the winter came on, the crops were beaten down by the storms, soaked with the rain, and trodden upon by herds of animals.

Next summer the prostrate straw of the preceding year was concealed by the young green wheat and barley that sprang up from the grain sown by dropping from the ears, and by quantities of docks, thistles, oxeye daisies, and similar plants. This matted mass grew up through the bleached straw. Charlock, too, hid the rotting roots in the fields under a blaze of yellow flower. The young spring meadow-grass could scarcely push its way up through the long dead grass and bennets of the year previous, but docks and thistles, sorrel, wild carrots, and nettles, found no such difficulty.

Footpaths were concealed by the second year, but roads could be traced, though as green as the sward, and were still the best for walking, because the tangled wheat and weeds, and, in the meadows, the long grass, caught the feet of those who tried to pass through. Year by year the original crops of wheat, barley, oats, and beans asserted their presence by shooting up, but in gradually diminished force, as nettles and coarser plants, such as the wild parsnips, spread out into the fields from the ditches and choked them.

Aquatic grasses from the furrows and water-carriers extended in the meadows, and, with the rushes, helped to destroy or take the place of the former sweet herbage. Meanwhile the brambles, which grew very fast, had pushed forward their prickly runners farther and farther from the hedges till they had now reached ten or fifteen yards. The briars had followed, and the hedges had widened to three or four times their first breadth, the fields being equally contracted. Starting from all sides at once, these brambles and briars in the course of about twenty years met in the centre of the largest fields.

Hawthorn bushes sprang up among them, and, protected by the briars and thorns from grazing animals, the suckers of elm-trees rose and flourished. Sapling ashes, oaks, sycamores, and horse-chestnuts, lifted their heads. Of old time the cattle would have eaten off the seed leaves with the grass so soon as they were out of the ground, but now most of the acorns that were dropped by birds, and the keys that were wafted by the wind, twirling as they floated, took root and grew into trees. By this time the brambles and briars had choked up and blocked the former roads, which were as impassable as the fields.

No fields, indeed, remained, for where the ground was dry, the thorns, briars, brambles, and saplings already mentioned filled the space, and these thickets and the young trees had converted most part of the country into an immense forest. Where the ground was naturally moist, and the drains had become choked with willow roots, which, when confined in tubes, grow into a mass like the brush of a fox, sedges and flags and rushes covered it. Thorn bushes were there too, but not so tall; they were hung with lichen. Besides the flags and reeds, vast quantities of the tallest cow-parsnips or 'gicks'* rose five or six feet

* Hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*), a native umbelliferous plant, not to be confused with its relative, Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*), the notoriously phototoxic plant introduced to Britain as a tall and spectacular garden novelty and now widely naturalised. 'Gicks' (sometimes 'Gix') is a dialect word, confined to Gloucestershire and Jefferies's native Wiltshire, often used to describe the dry stalks of tall umbelliferous plants. It is used regularly in Jefferies's works.

high, and the willow herb with its stout stem, almost as woody as a shrub, filled every approach.

By the thirtieth year there was not one single open place, the hills only excepted, where a man could walk, unless he followed the tracks of wild creatures or cut himself a path. The ditches, of course, had long since become full of leaves and dead branches, so that the water which should have run off down them stagnated, and presently spread out into the hollow places and by the corner of what had once been fields, forming marshes where the horsetails, flags, and sedges hid the water.

As no care was taken with the brooks, the hatches upon them gradually rotted, and the force of the winter rains carried away the weak timbers, flooding the lower grounds, which became swamps of larger size. The dams, too, were drilled by water-rats, and the streams percolating through, slowly increased the size of these tunnels till the structure burst, and the current swept on and added to the floods below. Mill-dams stood longer, but, as the ponds silted up, the current flowed round and even through the mill-houses, which, going by degrees to ruin, were in some cases undermined till they fell.

Everywhere the lower lands adjacent to the streams had become marshes, some of them extending for miles in a winding line, and occasionally spreading out to a mile in breadth. This was particularly the case where brooks and streams of some volume joined the rivers, which were also blocked and obstructed in their turn, and the two, overflowing, covered the country around; for the rivers brought down trees and branches, timbers floated from the shore, and all kinds of similar materials, which grounded in the shallows or caught against snags, and formed huge piles where there had been weirs.

Sometimes, after great rains, these piles swept away the timbers of the weir, driven by the irresistible power of the water, and then in its course the flood, carrying the balks before it like battering rams, cracked and split the bridges of solid stone which the ancients had built. These and the iron bridges likewise were overthrown, and presently quite disappeared, for the very foundations were covered with the sand and gravel silted up.

Thus, too, the sites of many villages and towns that anciently existed along the rivers, or on the lower lands adjoining, were concealed by the water and the mud it brought with it. The sedges and reeds that arose completed the work and left nothing visible, so that the mighty buildings of olden days were by these means utterly buried. And, as has been proved by those who have dug for treasures, in our time the very foundations are deep beneath the earth, and not to be got at for

the water that oozes into the shafts that they have tried to sink through the sand and mud banks.

From an elevation, therefore, there was nothing visible but endless forest and marsh. On the level ground and plains the view was limited to a short distance, because of the thickets and the saplings which had now become young trees. The downs only were still partially open, yet it was not convenient to walk upon them except in the tracks of animals, because of the long grass which, being no more regularly grazed upon by sheep, as was once the case, grew thick and tangled. Furze, too, and heath covered the slopes, and in places vast quantities of fern. There had always been copses of fir and beech and nut-tree covers, and these increased and spread, while bramble, briar, and hawthorn extended around them.

By degrees the trees of the vale seemed as it were to invade and march up the hills, and, as we see in our time, in many places the downs are hidden altogether with a stunted kind of forest. But all the above happened in the time of the first generation. Besides these things a great physical change took place; but, before I speak of that, it will be best to relate what effects were produced upon animals and men.

In the first years after the fields were left to themselves, the fallen and over-ripe corn crops became the resort of innumerable mice. They swarmed to an incredible degree, not only devouring the grain upon the straw that had never been cut, but clearing out every single ear in the wheat-ricks that were standing about the country. Nothing remained in these ricks but straw, pierced with tunnels and runs, the home and breeding-place of mice, which thence poured forth into the fields. Such grain as had been left in barns and granaries, in mills, and in warehouses of the deserted towns, disappeared in the same manner.

When men tried to raise crops in small gardens and enclosures for their sustenance, these legions of mice rushed in and destroyed the produce of their labour. Nothing could keep them out, and if a score were killed, a hundred more supplied their place. These mice were preyed upon by kestrel hawks, owls, and weasels; but at first they made little or no appreciable difference. In a few years, however, the weasels, having such a superabundance of food, trebled in numbers, and in the same way the hawks, owls, and foxes increased. There was then some relief, but even now at intervals districts are invaded, and the granaries and the standing corn suffer from these depredations.

This does not happen every year, but only at intervals, for it is noticed that mice abound very much more in some seasons than others. The extraordinary multiplication of these creatures was the means of providing food for the cats that had been abandoned in the towns,

and came forth into the country in droves. Feeding on the mice, they became, in a very short time, quite wild, and their descendants now roam the forests.

In our houses we still have several varieties of the domestic cat, such as the tortoiseshell, which is the most prized, but when the above-mentioned cats became wild, after a while the several varieties disappeared, and left but one wild kind. Those which are now so often seen in the forest, and which do so much mischief about houses and enclosures, are almost all greyish, some being striped, and they are also much longer in the body than the tame. A few are jet black; their skins are then preferred by hunters.

Though the forest cat retires from the sight of man as much as possible, yet it is extremely fierce in defence of its young, and instances have been known where travellers in the woods have been attacked upon unwittingly approaching their dens. Dropping from the boughs of a tree upon the shoulders, the creature flies at the face, inflicting deep scratches and bites, exceedingly painful, and sometimes dangerous, from the tendency to fester. But such cases are rare, and the reason the forest cat is so detested is because it preys upon fowls and poultry, mounting with ease the trees or places where they roost.

Almost worse than the mice were the rats, which came out of the old cities in such vast numbers that the people who survived and saw them are related to have fled in fear. This terror, however, did not last so long as the evil of the mice, for the rats, probably not finding sufficient food when together, scattered abroad, and were destroyed singly by the cats and dogs, who slew them by thousands, far more than they could afterwards eat, so that the carcasses were left to decay. It is said that, overcome with hunger, these armies of rats in some cases fell upon each other, and fed on their own kindred. They are still numerous, but do not appear to do the same amount of damage as is occasionally caused by the mice, when the latter invade the cultivated lands.

The dogs, of course, like the cats, were forced by starvation into the fields, where they perished in incredible numbers. Of many species of dogs which are stated to have been plentiful among the ancients, we have now nothing but the name. The poodle is extinct, the Maltese terrier, the Pomeranian, the Italian greyhound, and, it is believed, great numbers of crosses and mongrels have utterly disappeared. There was none to feed them, and they could not find food for themselves, nor could they stand the rigour of the winter when exposed to the frost in the open air.

Some kinds, more hardy and fitted by nature for the chase, became wild, and their descendants are now found in the woods. Of these,

there are three sorts which keep apart from each other, and are thought not to interbreed. The most numerous are the black. The black wood-dog is short and stoutly made, with shaggy hair, sometimes marked with white patches.

There can be no doubt that it is the descendant of the ancient sheep-dog, for it is known that the sheep-dog was of that character, and it is said that those who used to keep sheep soon found their dogs abandon the fold, and join the wild troops that fell upon the sheep. The black wood-dogs hunt in packs of ten or more (as many as forty have been counted), and are the pest of the farmer, for, unless his flocks are protected at night within stockades or enclosures, they are certain to be attacked. Not satisfied with killing enough to satisfy hunger, these dogs tear and mangle for sheer delight of blood, and will destroy twenty times as many as they can eat, leaving the miserably torn carcasses on the field. Nor are the sheep always safe by day if the wood-dogs happen to be hungry. The shepherd is, therefore, usually accompanied by two or three mastiffs, of whose great size and strength the others stand in awe. At night, and when in large packs, starving in the snow, not even the mastiffs can check them.

No wood-dog, of any kind, has ever been known to attack man, and the hunter in the forest hears their bark in every direction without fear. It is, nevertheless, best to retire out of their way when charging sheep in packs, for they then seem seized with a blind fury, and some who have endeavoured to fight them have been thrown down and seriously mauled. But this has been in the blindness of their rush; no instance has ever been known of their purposely attacking man.

These black wood-dogs will also chase and finally pull down cattle, if they can get within the enclosures, and even horses have fallen victims to their untiring thirst for blood. Not even the wild cattle can always escape, despite their strength, and they have been known to run down stags, though not their usual quarry.

The next kind of wild wood-dog is the yellow, a smaller animal, with smooth hair inclining to a yellow colour, which lives principally upon game, chasing all from the hare to the stag. It is as swift, or nearly as swift, as the greyhound, and possesses greater endurance. In coursing the hare, it not uncommonly happens that these dogs start from the brake and take the hare, when nearly exhausted, from the hunter's hounds. They will in the same way follow a stag, which has been almost run down by the hunters, and bring him to bay, though in this case they lose their booty, dispersing through fear of man, when the hunters come up in a body.

But such is their love of the chase, that they are known to assemble

from their lairs at the distant sound of the horn, and, as the hunters ride through the woods, they often see the yellow dogs flitting along side by side with them through bush and fern. These animals sometimes hunt singly, sometimes in couples, and as the season advances, and winter approaches, in packs of eight or twelve. They never attack sheep or cattle, and avoid man, except when they perceive he is engaged in the chase. There is little doubt that they are the descendants of the dogs which the ancients called lurchers, crossed, perhaps, with the greyhound, and possibly other breeds. When the various species of dogs were thrown on their own resources, those only withstood the exposure and hardships which were naturally hardy, and possessed natural aptitude for the chase.

The third species of wood-dog is the white. They are low on the legs, of a dingy white colour, and much smaller than the other two. They neither attack cattle nor game, though fond of hunting rabbits. This dog is, in fact, a scavenger, living upon the carcasses of dead sheep and animals, which are found picked clean in the night. For this purpose it haunts the neighbourhood of habitations, and prowls in the evening over heaps of refuse, scampering away at the least alarm, for it is extremely timid. It is perfectly harmless, for even the poultry do not dread it, and it will not face a tame cat, if by chance the two meet. It is rarely met with far from habitations, though it will accompany an army on the march. It may be said to remain in one district. The black and yellow dogs, on the contrary, roam about the forest without apparent home. One day the hunter sees signs of their presence, and perhaps may, for a month afterwards, not so much as hear a bark.

This uncertainty in the case of the black dog is the bane of the shepherds; for, not seeing or hearing anything of the enemy for months together, in spite of former experience their vigilance relaxes, and suddenly, while they sleep, their flocks are scattered. We still have, among tame dogs, the mastiff, terrier, spaniel, deer-hound, and greyhound, all of which are as faithful to man as ever.

CHAPTER II

WILD ANIMALS

WHEN the ancients departed, great numbers of their cattle perished. It was not so much the want of food as the inability to endure exposure that caused their death; a few winters are related to have so reduced them that they died by hundreds, many mangled by dogs. The hardest that remained became perfectly wild, and the wood cattle are now more difficult to approach than deer.

There are two kinds, the white and the black. The white (sometimes dun) are believed to be the survivors of the domestic roan-and-white, for the cattle in our enclosures at the present day are of that colour. The black are smaller, and are doubtless little changed from their state in the olden times, except that they are wild. These latter are timid, unless when accompanied by a calf, and are rarely known to turn upon their pursuers. But the white are fierce at all times; they will not, indeed, attack man, but will scarcely run from him, and it is not always safe to cross their haunts.

The bulls are savage beyond measure at certain seasons of the year. If they see men at a distance, they retire; if they come unexpectedly face to face, they attack. This characteristic enables those who travel through districts known to be haunted by white cattle to provide against an encounter, for, by occasionally blowing a horn, the herd that may be in the vicinity is dispersed. There are not often more than twenty in a herd. The hides of the dun are highly prized, both for their intrinsic value, and as proofs of skill and courage, so much so that you shall hardly buy a skin for all the money you may offer; and the horns are likewise trophies. The white or dun bull is the monarch of our forests.

Four kinds of wild pigs are found. The most numerous, or at least the most often seen, as it lies about our enclosures, is the common thorn-hog. It is the largest of the wild pigs, long-bodied and flat-sided, in colour much the hue of the mud in which it wallows. To the agriculturist it is the greatest pest, destroying or damaging all kinds of crops, and routing up the gardens. It is with difficulty kept out by palisading, for if there be a weak place in the wooden framework, the strong snout of the animal is sure to undermine and work a passage through.

As there are always so many of these pigs round about inhabited places and cultivated fields, constant care is required, for they instantly discover an opening. From their habit of haunting the thickets and bush which come up to the verge of the enclosures, they have obtained the name of thorn-hogs. Some reach an immense size, and they are very prolific, so that it is impossible to destroy them. The boars are fierce at a particular season, but never attack unless provoked to do so. But when driven to bay they are the most dangerous of the boars, on account of their vast size and weight. They are of a sluggish disposition, and will not rise from their lairs unless forced to do so.

The next kind is the white hog, which has much the same habits as the former, except that it is usually found in moist places, near lakes and rivers, and is often called the marsh-pig. The third kind is perfectly black, much smaller in size, and very active, affording by far the best sport, and also the best food when killed. As they are found on the hills where the ground is somewhat more open, horses can follow freely, and the chase becomes exciting. By some it is called the hill-hog, from the locality it frequents. The small tusks of the black boar are used for many ornamental purposes.

These three species are considered to be the descendants of the various domestic pigs of the ancients, but the fourth, or grey, is thought to be the true wild boar. It is seldom seen, but is most common in the south-western forests, where, from the quantity of fern, it is called the fern-pig. This kind is believed to represent the true wild boar, which was extinct, or merged in the domestic hog among the ancients, except in that neighbourhood where the strain remained.

With wild times, the wild habits have returned, and the grey boar is at once the most difficult of access, and the most ready to encounter either dogs or men. Although the first, or thorn-hog, does the most damage to the agriculturist because of its numbers, and its habit of haunting the neighbourhood of enclosures, the others are equally injurious if they chance to enter the cultivated fields.

The three principal kinds of wild sheep are the horned, the thyme, and the meadow. The thyme sheep are the smallest, and haunt the highest hills in the south, where, feeding on the sweet herbage of the ridges, their flesh is said to acquire a flavour of wild thyme. They move in small flocks of not more than thirty, and are the most difficult to approach, being far more wary than deer, so continuously are they hunted by the wood-dogs. The horned are larger, and move in greater numbers; as many as two hundred are sometimes seen together. They are found on the lower slopes and plains, and in the woods. The meadow sheep have long shaggy wool, which is made into various

articles of clothing, but they are not numerous. They haunt river sides, and the shores of lakes and ponds. None of these are easily got at, on account of the wood-dogs; but the rams of the horned kind are reputed to sometimes turn upon the pursuing pack, and butt them to death. In the extremity of their terror whole flocks of wild sheep have been driven over precipices and into quagmires and torrents.

Besides these, there are several other species whose haunt is local. On the islands, especially, different kinds are found. The wood-dogs will occasionally, in calm weather, swim out to an island and kill every sheep upon it.

From the horses that were in use among the ancients the two wild species now found are known to have descended, a fact confirmed by their evident resemblance to the horses we still retain. The largest wild horse is almost black, or inclined to a dark colour, somewhat less in size than our present waggon horses, but of the same heavy make. It is, however, much swifter, on account of having enjoyed liberty for so long. It is called the bush-horse, being generally distributed among thickets and meadow-like lands adjoining water.

The other species is called the hill-pony, from its habitat, the hills, and is rather less in size than our riding-horse. This latter is short and thickset, so much so as not to be easily ridden by short persons without high stirrups. Neither of these wild horses are numerous, but neither are they uncommon. They keep entirely separate from each other. As many as thirty mares are sometimes seen together, but there are districts where the traveller will not observe one for weeks.

Tradition says that in the olden times there were horses of a slender build whose speed outstripped the wind, but of the breed of these famous racers not one is left. Whether they were too delicate to withstand exposure, or whether the wild dogs hunted them down is uncertain, but they are quite gone. Did but one exist, how eagerly it would be sought out, for in these days it would be worth its weight in gold, unless, indeed, as some affirm, such speed only endured for a mile or two.

It is not necessary, having written thus far of the animals, that anything should be said of the birds of the woods, which every one knows were not always wild, and which can, indeed, be compared with such poultry as are kept in our enclosures. Such are the bush hens, the wood turkeys, the galenas, the peacocks, the white duck and white goose, all of which, though now wild as the hawk, are well known to have been once tame.

There were deer, red and fallow, in numerous parks and chases of very old time, and these, having got loose, and having such immense

tracts to roam over unmolested, went on increasing till now they are beyond computation, and I have myself seen a thousand head together. Within these forty years, as I learn, the roe deer, too, have come down from the extreme north, so that there are now three sorts in the woods. Before them the pine marten came from the same direction, and, though they are not yet common, it is believed they are increasing. For the first few years after the change took place there seemed a danger lest the foreign wild beasts that had been confined as curiosities in menageries should multiply and remain in the woods. But this did not happen.

Some few lions and tigers, bears, and other animals did indeed escape, together with many less furious creatures, and it is related that they roamed about the fields for a long time. They were seldom met with, having such an extent of country to wander over, and after a while entirely disappeared. If any progeny were born, the winter frosts must have destroyed it, and the same fate awaited the monstrous serpents which had been collected for exhibition. Only one animal now exists which is known to owe its origin to those which escaped from the dens of the ancients. It is the beaver, whose dams are now occasionally found upon the streams by those who traverse the woods. Some of the aquatic birds, too, which frequent the lakes, are thought to have been originally derived from those which were formerly kept as curiosities.

In the castle yard at Longtover may still be seen the bones of an elephant which was found dying in the woods near that spot.

CHAPTER III

MEN OF THE WOODS

So far as this, all that I have stated has been clear, and there can be no doubt that what has been thus handed down from mouth to mouth is for the most part correct. When I pass from trees and animals to men, however, the thing is different, for nothing is certain and everything confused. None of the accounts agree, nor can they be altogether reconciled with present facts or with reasonable supposition; yet it is not so long since but a few memories, added one to the other, can bridge the time, and, though not many, there are some written notes still to be found. I must attribute the discrepancy to the wars and hatreds which sprang up and divided the people, so that one would not listen to what the others wished to say, and the truth was lost.

Besides which, in the conflagrations which consumed the towns, most of the records were destroyed, and are no longer to be referred to. And it may be that even when they were proceeding, the causes of the changes were not understood. Therefore, what I am now about to describe is not to be regarded as the ultimate truth, but as the nearest to which I could attain after comparing the various traditions. Some say, then, that the first beginning of the change was because the sea silted up the entrances to the ancient ports, and stopped the vast commerce which was once carried on. It is certainly true that many of the ports are silted up, and are now useless as such, but whether the silting up preceded the disappearance of the population, or whether the disappearance of the population and the consequent neglect caused the silting, I cannot venture to positively assert.

For there are signs that the level of the sea has sunk in some places, and signs that it has become higher in others, so that the judicious historian will simply state the facts, and refrain from colouring them with his own theory as Silvester has done. Others again maintain that the supply of food from over the ocean suddenly stopping caused great disorders, and that the people crowded on board all the ships to escape starvation, and sailed away, and were no more heard of.

It has, too, been said that the earth, from some attractive power exercised by the passage of an enormous dark body through space, became tilted or inclined to its orbit more than before, and that this,

while it lasted, altered the flow of the magnetic currents, which, in an imperceptible manner, influence the minds of men. Hitherto the stream of human life had directed itself to the westward, but when this reversal of magnetism occurred, a general desire arose to return to the east. And those whose business is theology have pointed out that the wickedness of those times surpassed understanding, and that a change and sweeping away of the human evil that had accumulated was necessary, and was effected by supernatural means. The relation of this must be left to them, since it is not the province of the philosopher to meddle with such matters.

All that seems certain is, that when the event took place, the immense crowds collected in cities were most affected, and that the richer and upper classes made use of their money to escape. Those left behind were mainly the lower and most ignorant, so far as the arts were concerned; those that dwelt in distant and outlying places; and those who lived by agriculture. These last at that date had fallen to such distress that they could not hire vessels to transport themselves. The exact number of those left behind cannot, of course, be told, but it is on record that when the fields were first left neglected (as I have already described), a man might ride a hundred miles and not meet another. They were not only few, but scattered, and had not drawn together and formed towns as at present.

Of what became of the vast multitudes that left the country, nothing has ever been heard, and no communication has been received from them. For this reason I cannot conceal my opinion that they must have sailed either to the westward or to the southward where the greatest extent of ocean is understood to exist, and not to the eastward as Silvester would have it in his work upon the 'Unknown Orb', the dark body travelling in space to which I have alluded. None of our vessels in the present day dare venture into those immense tracts of sea, nor, indeed, out of sight of land, unless they know they shall see it again so soon as they have reached and surmounted the ridge of the horizon. Had they only crossed to the mainland or continent again, we should most likely have heard of their passage across the countries there.

It is true that ships rarely come over, and only to two ports, and that the men on them say (so far as can be understood) that their country is equally deserted now, and has likewise lost its population. But still, as men talk unto men, and we pass intelligence across great breadths of land, it is almost certain that, had they travelled that way, some echo of their footsteps would yet sound back to us. Regarding this theory, therefore, as untenable, I put forward as a suggestion that the ancients really sailed to the west or to the south.

As, for the most part, those who were left behind were ignorant, rude, and unlettered, it consequently happened that many of the marvellous things which the ancients did, and the secrets of their science, are known to us by name only, and, indeed, hardly by name. It has happened to us in our turn as it happened to the ancients. For they were aware that in times before their own the art of making glass malleable had been discovered, so that it could be beaten into shape like copper. But the manner in which it was accomplished was entirely unknown to them; the fact was on record, but the cause lost. So now we know that those who to us are the ancients had a way of making diamonds and precious stones out of black and lustreless charcoal, a fact which approaches the incredible. Still, we do not doubt it, though we cannot imagine by what means it was carried out.

They also sent intelligence to the utmost parts of the earth along wires which were not tubular, but solid, and therefore could not transmit sound, and yet the person who received the message could hear and recognise the voice of the sender a thousand miles away. With certain machines worked by fire, they traversed the land swift as the swallow glides through the sky, but of these things not a relic remains to us. What metalwork or wheels or bars of iron were left, and might have given us a clue, were all broken up and melted down for use in other ways when metal became scarce.

Mounds of earth are said to still exist in the woods, which originally formed the roads for these machines, but they are now so low, and so covered with thickets, that nothing can be learnt from them; and, indeed, though I have heard of their existence, I have never seen one. Great holes were made through the very hills for the passage of the iron chariot, but they are now blocked by the falling roofs, nor dare any one explore such parts as may yet be open. Where are the wonderful structures with which the men of those days were lifted to the skies, rising above the clouds? These marvellous things are to us little more than the fables of the giants and of the old gods that walked upon the earth, which were fables even to those whom we call the ancients.

Indeed, we have fuller knowledge of those extremely ancient times than of the people who immediately preceded us, and the Romans and the Greeks are more familiar to us than the men who rode in the iron chariots and mounted to the skies. The reason why so many arts and sciences were lost was because, as I have previously said, the most of those who were left in the country were ignorant, rude, and unlettered. They had seen the iron chariots, but did not understand the method of their construction, and could not hand down the knowledge they did not themselves possess. The magic wires of

intelligence passed through their villages, but they did not know how to work them.

The cunning artificers of the cities all departed, and everything fell quickly into barbarism; nor could it be wondered at, for the few and scattered people of those days had enough to do to preserve their lives. Communication between one place and another was absolutely cut off, and if one perchance did recollect something that might have been of use, he could not confer with another who knew the other part, and thus between them reconstruct the machine. In the second generation even these disjointed memories died out.

At first it is supposed that those who remained behind existed upon the grain in the warehouses, and what they could thresh by the flail from the crops left neglected in the fields. But as the provisions in the warehouses were consumed or spoiled, they hunted the animals, lately tame and as yet but half wild. As these grew less in number and difficult to overtake, they set to work again to till the ground, and cleared away small portions of the earth, encumbered already with brambles and thistles. Some grew corn, and some took charge of sheep. Thus, in time, places far apart from each other were settled, and towns were built; towns, indeed, we call them to distinguish them from the champaign, but they are not worthy of the name in comparison with the mighty cities of old time.

There are many that have not more than fifty houses in the enclosure, and perhaps no other station within a day's journey, and the largest are but villages, reckoning by antiquity. For the most part they have their own government, or had till recently, and thus there grew up many provinces and kingdoms in the compass of what was originally but one. Thus separated and divided, there came also to be many races where in the first place was one people. Now, in briefly recounting the principal divisions of men, I will commence with those who are everywhere considered the lowest. These are the Bushmen, who live wholly in the woods.

Even among the ancients, when every man, woman, and child, could exercise those arts which are now the special mark of nobility, i.e. reading and writing, there was a degraded class of persons who refused to avail themselves of the benefits of civilization. They obtained their food by begging, wandering along the highways, crouching around fires which they lit in the open, clad in rags, and exhibiting countenances from which every trace of self-respect had disappeared. These were the ancestors of the present men of the bushes.

They took naturally to the neglected fields, and forming 'camps' as they call their tribes, or rather families, wandered to and fro, easily

subsisting upon roots and trapped game. So they live to this day, having become extremely dexterous in snaring every species of bird and animal, and the fishes of the streams. These latter they sometimes poison with a drug or plant (it is not known which), the knowledge of which has been preserved among them since the days of the ancients. The poison kills the fishes, and brings them to the surface, when they can be collected by hundreds, but does not injure them for eating.

Like the black wood-dogs, the Bushmen often in fits of savage frenzy destroy thrice as much as they can devour, trapping deer in wicker-work hedges, or pitfalls, and cutting the miserable animals in pieces, for mere thirst of blood. The oxen and cattle in the enclosures are occasionally in the same manner fearfully mutilated by these wretches, sometimes for amusement, and sometimes in vengeance for injuries done to them. Bushmen have no settled home, cultivate no kind of corn or vegetable, keep no animals, not even dogs, have no houses or huts, no boats or canoes, nothing that requires the least intelligence or energy to construct.

Roaming to and fro without any apparent aim or object, or any particular route, they fix their camp for a few days wherever it suits their fancy, and again move on, no man knows why or whither. It is this uncertainty of movement which makes them so dangerous. To-day there may not be the least sign of any within miles of an enclosure. In the night a 'camp' may pass, slaughtering such cattle as may have remained without the palisade, or killing the unfortunate shepherd who has not got within the walls, and in the morning they may be nowhere to be seen, having disappeared like vermin. Face to face the Bushman is never to be feared; a whole 'camp' or tribal family will scatter if a traveller stumbles into their midst. It is from behind a tree or under cover of night that he deals his murderous blow.

A 'camp' may consist of ten or twenty individuals, sometimes, perhaps, of forty, or even fifty, of various ages, and is ruled by the eldest, who is also the parent. He is absolute master of his 'camp' but has no power or recognition beyond it, so that how many leaders there may be among them it is not possible even to guess. Nor is the master known to them as king, or duke, nor has he any title, but is simply the oldest or founder of the family. The 'camp' has no law, no established custom; events happen, and even the master cannot be said to reign. When he becomes feeble, they simply leave him to die.

They are depraved, and without shame, clad in sheepskins chiefly, if clad at all, or in such clothes as they have stolen. They have no ceremonies whatever. The number of these 'camps' must be considerable, and yet the Bushman is seldom seen, nor do we very often hear of their

depredations, which is accounted for by the extent of country they wander over. It is in severe winters that the chief danger occurs; they then suffer from hunger and cold, and are driven to the neighbourhood of the enclosures to steal. So dexterous are they in slipping through the bushes, and slinking among the reeds and osiers, that they will pass within a few yards without discovering their presence, and the signs of their passage can be detected only by the experienced hunter, and not always by him.

It is observed that whatever mischief the Bushman commits, he never sets fire to any ricks or buildings; the reason is because his nature is to slink from the scene of his depredations, and flame at once attracts people to the spot. Twice the occurrence of a remarkably severe winter has caused the Bushmen to flock together and act in an approach to concert in attacking the enclosures. The Bushmen of the north, who were even more savage and brutal, then came down, and were with difficulty repulsed from the walled cities. In ordinary times we see very little of them. They are the thieves, the human vermin of the woods.

Under the name of gipsies, those who are now often called Romany and Zingari were well known to the ancients. Indeed, they boast that their ancestry goes back so much farther than the oldest we can claim, that the ancients themselves were but modern to them. Even in that age of highest civilization, which immediately preceded the present, they say (and there is no doubt of it) that they preserved the blood of their race pure and untainted, that they never dwelt under permanent roofs, nor bowed their knees to the prevalent religion. They remained apart, and still continue after civilization has disappeared, exactly the same as they were before it commenced.

Since the change their numbers have greatly increased, and were they not always at war with each other, it is possible that they might go far to sweep the house people from the land. But there are so many tribes, each with its king, queen, or duke, that their power is divided, and their force melts away. The ruler of the Bushman families is always a man, but among the gipsies a woman, and even a young girl often exercises supreme authority, but must be of the sacred blood. These kings and dukes are absolute autocrats within their tribe, and can order by a nod the destruction of those who offend them. Habits of simplest obedience being enjoined on the tribe from the earliest childhood, such executions are rare, but the right to command them is not for a moment questioned.

Of the sorcerers, and particularly the sorceresses, among them, all have heard, and, indeed, the places where they dwell seem full of mystery and magic. They live in tents, and though they constantly remove

from district to district, one tribe never clashes with or crosses another, because all have their especial routes, upon which no intrusion is ever made. Some agriculture is practised, and flocks and herds are kept, but the work is entirely done by the women. The men are always on horse-back, or sleeping in their tents.

Each tribe has its central camping-place, to which they return at intervals after perhaps wandering for months, a certain number of persons being left at home to defend it. These camps are often situated in inaccessible positions, and well protected by stockades. The territory which is acknowledged to belong to such a camp is extremely limited; its mere environs only are considered the actual property of the tribe, and a second can pitch its tents within a few hundred yards. These stockades, in fact, are more like store-houses than residences; each is a mere rendezvous.

The gipsies are everywhere, but their stockades are most numerous in the south, along the sides of the green hills and plains, and especially round Stonehenge, where, on the great open plains, among the huge boulders, placed ages since in circles, they perform strange ceremonies and incantations. They attack every traveller, and every caravan or train of waggons which they feel strong enough to master, but they do not murder the solitary sleeping hunter or shepherd like the Bushmen. They will, indeed, steal from him, but do not kill, except in fight. Once, now and then, they have found their way into towns, when terrible massacres have followed, for, when excited, the savage knows not how to restrain himself.

Vengeance is their idol. If any community has injured or affronted them, they never cease endeavouring to retaliate, and will wipe it out in fire and blood generations afterwards. There are towns which have thus been suddenly harried when the citizens had forgotten that any cause of enmity existed. Vengeance is their religion and their social law, which guides all their actions among themselves. It is for this reason that they are continually at war, duke with duke, and king with king. A deadly feud, too, has set Bushman and gipsy at each other's throat, far beyond the memory of man. The Romany looks on the Bushman as a dog, and slaughters him as such. In turn, the despised human dog slinks in the darkness of the night into the Romany's tent, and stabs his daughter or his wife, for such is the meanness and cowardice of the Bushman that he would always rather kill a woman than a man.

There is also a third class of men who are not true gipsies, but have something of their character, though the gipsies will not allow that they were originally half-breeds. Their habits are much the same, except that they are foot men and rarely use horses, and are therefore

called the foot gipsies. The gipsy horse is really a pony. Once only have the Romany combined to attack the house people, driven, like the Bushmen, by an exceedingly severe winter, against which they had no provision.

But then, instead of massing their forces and throwing their irresistible numbers upon one city or territory, all they would agree to do was that, upon a certain day, each tribe should invade the land nearest to it. The result was that they were, though with trouble, repulsed. Until lately, no leader ventured to follow the gipsies to their strongholds, for they were reputed invincible behind their stockades. By infesting the woods and lying in ambush they rendered communication between city and city difficult and dangerous, except to bodies of armed men, and every waggon had to be defended by troops.

The gipsies, as they roam, make little secret of their presence (unless, of course, intent upon mischief), but light their fires by day and night fearlessly. The Bushmen never light a fire by day, lest the ascending smoke, which cannot be concealed, should betray their whereabouts. Their fires are lit at night in hollows or places well surrounded with thickets, and, that the flame may not be seen, they will build screens of fir boughs or fern. When they have obtained a good supply of hot wood coals, no more sticks are thrown on, but these are covered with turf, and thus kept in long enough for their purposes. Much of their meat they devour raw, and thus do not need a fire so frequently as others.

CHAPTER IV

THE INVADERS

THOSE who live by agriculture or in towns, and are descended from the remnant of the ancients, are divided, as I have previously said, into numerous provinces, kingdoms, and republics. In the middle part of the country the cities are almost all upon the shores of the Lake, or within a short distance of the water, and there is therefore more traffic and communication between them by means of vessels than is the case with inland towns, whose trade must be carried on by caravans and waggons. These not only move slowly, but are subject to be interrupted by the Romany and by the banditti, or persons who, for moral or political crimes, have been banished from their homes.

It is in the cities that cluster around the great central lake that all the life and civilization of our day are found; but there also begin those wars and social convulsions which cause so much suffering. When was the Peninsula at peace? and when was there not some mischief and change brewing in the republics? When was there not a danger from the northern mainland?

Until recent years there was little knowledge of, and scarcely any direct commerce or intercourse between, the central part and the districts either of the extreme west or the north, and it is only now that the north and east are becoming open to us; for at the back of the narrow circle of cultivated land, the belt about the Lake, there extend immense forests in every direction, through which, till very lately, no practicable way had been cut. Even in the more civilised central part it is not to this day easy to travel, for at the barriers, as you approach the territories of every prince, they demand your business and your papers; nor even if you establish the fact that you are innocent of designs against the State, shall you hardly enter without satisfying the greed of the officials.

A fine is thus exacted at the gate of every province and kingdom, and again at the gateways of the towns. The difference of the coinage, such as it is, causes also great loss and trouble, for the money of one kingdom (though passing current by command in that territory) is not received at its nominal value in the next on account of the alloy it contains. It is, indeed, in many kingdoms impossible to obtain sterling money. Gold there is little or none anywhere, but silver is the stand-

ard of exchange, and copper, bronze, and brass, sometimes tin, are the metals with which the greater number of the people transact their business.

Justice is corrupt, for where there is a king or a prince it depends on the caprice of a tyrant, and where there is a republic upon the shout of the crowd, so that many, if they think they may be put on trial, rather than face the risk at once escape into the woods. The League, though based ostensibly on principles the most exalted and beneficial to humanity, is known to be perverted. The members sworn to honour and the highest virtue are swayed by vile motives, political hatreds, and private passions, and even by money.

Men for ever trample upon men, each pushing to the front; nor is there safety in remaining in retirement, since such are accused of biding their time and of occult designs. Though the population of these cities all counted together is not equal to the population that once dwelt in a single second-rate city of the ancients, yet how much greater are the bitterness and the struggle!

Yet not content with the bloodshed they themselves cause, the tyrants have called in the aid of mercenary soldiers to assist them. And, to complete the disgrace, those republics which proclaim themselves the very home of patriotic virtues, have resorted to the same means. Thus we see English cities kept in awe by troops of Welshmen, Irish, and even the western Scots, who swarm in the palaces, in the council-chambers of the republics, and, opening the doors of the houses, help themselves to what they will. This, too, in the face of the notorious fact that these nations have sworn to be avenged upon us, that their vessels sail about the Lake committing direful acts of piracy, and that twice already vast armies have swept along threatening to entirely overwhelm the whole commonwealth.

What infatuation to admit bands of these same men into the very strongholds and the heart of the land! As if upon the approach of their countrymen they would remain true to the oaths they have sworn for pay, and not rather admit them with open arms. No blame can, upon a just consideration, be attributed to either of these nations that endeavour to oppress us. For, as they point out, the ancients from whom we are descended held them in subjection many hundred years, and took from them all their liberties.

Thus the Welsh, or, as they call themselves, the Cymry, say that the whole island was once theirs, and is theirs still by right of inheritance. They were the original people who possessed it ages before the arrival of those whom we call the ancients. Though they were driven into the mountains of the far distant west, they never forgot their language,

ceased their customs, or gave up their aspirations to recover their own. This is now their aim, and until recently it seemed as if they were about to accomplish it. For they held all that country anciently called Cornwall, having crossed over the Severn, and marched down the southern shore. The rich land of Devon, part of Dorset (all, indeed, that is inhabited), and the most part of Somerset, acknowledged their rule. Worcester and Hereford and Gloucester were theirs; I mean, of course, those parts that are not forest.

Their outposts were pushed forward to the centre of Leicestershire, and came down towards Oxford. But thereabouts they met with the forces of which I will shortly speak. Then their vessels every summer sailing from the Severn, came into the Lake, and, landing wherever there was an opportunity, they destroyed all things and carried off the spoil. Is it necessary to say more to demonstrate the madness which possesses those princes and republics which, in order to support their own tyranny, have invited bands of these men into their very palaces and forts?

As they approached near what was once Oxford and is now Sypolis, the armies of Cymry came into collision with another of our invaders, and thus their forward course to the south was checked. The Irish, who had hitherto abetted them, turned round to defend their own usurpations. They, too, say that in conquering and despoiling my countrymen they are fulfilling a divine vengeance. Their land of Ireland had been for centuries ground down with an iron tyranny by our ancestors, who closed their lips with a muzzle, and led them about with a bridle, as their poets say. But now the hateful Saxons (for thus both they and the Welsh designate us) are broken, and delivered over to them for their spoil.

It is not possible to deny many of the statements that they make, but that should not prevent us from battling with might and main against the threatened subjection. What crime can be greater than the admission of such foreigners as the guards of our cities? Now the Irish have their principal rendezvous and capital near to the ancient city of Chester, which is upon the ocean, and at the very top and angle of Wales. This is their great settlement, their magazine and rallying-place, and thence their expeditions have proceeded. It is a convenient port, and well opposite their native land, from which reinforcements continually arrive, but the Welsh have ever looked upon their possession of it with jealousy.

At the period when the Cymry had nearly penetrated to Sypolis or Oxford, the Irish, on their part, had overrun all the cultivated and inhabited country in a south and south-easterly line from Chester,

through Rutland to Norfolk and Suffolk, and even as far as Luton. They would have spread to the north, but in that direction they were met by the Scots, who had all Northumbria. When the Welsh came near Sypolis, the Irish awoke to the position of affairs.

Sypolis is the largest and most important city upon the northern shore of the Lake, and it is situated at the entrance to the neck of land that stretches out to the straits. If the Welsh were once well posted there, the Irish could never hope to find their way to the rich and cultivated south, for it is just below Sypolis that the Lake contracts, and forms a strait in one place but a furlong wide. The two forces thus came into collision, and while they fought and destroyed each other, Sypolis was saved. After which, finding they were evenly matched, the Irish withdrew two days' march northwards, and the Cymry as far westwards.

But now the Irish, sailing round the outside of Wales, came likewise up through the Red Rocks, and so into the Lake, and in their turn landing, harassed the cities. Often Welsh and Irish vessels, intending to attack the same place, have discerned each other approaching, and, turning from their proposed action, have flown at each other's throats. The Scots have not harassed us in the south much, being too far distant, and those that wander hither come for pay, taking service as guards. They are, indeed, the finest of men, and the hardiest to battle with. I had forgotten to mention that it is possible the Irish might have pushed back the Welsh, had not the kingdom of York suddenly reviving, by means which shall be related, valiantly thrust out its masters, and fell upon their rear.

But still these nations are always upon the verge and margin of our world, and wait but an opportunity to rush in upon it. Our countrymen groan under their yoke, and I say again that infamy should be the portion of those rulers among us who have filled their fortified places with mercenaries derived from such sources.

The land, too, is weak, because of the multitude of bondsmen. In the provinces and kingdoms round about the Lake there is hardly a town where the slaves do not outnumber the free as ten to one. The laws are framed for the object of reducing the greater part of the people to servitude. For every offence the punishment is slavery, and the offences are daily artificially increased, that the wealth of the few in human beings may grow with them. If a man in his hunger steal a loaf, he becomes a slave; that is, it is proclaimed he must make good to the State the injury he has done it, and must work out his trespass. This is not assessed as the value of the loaf, nor supposed to be confined to the individual from whom it was taken.

The theft is said to damage the State at large, because it corrupts the morality of the commonwealth; it is as if the thief had stolen a loaf, not from one, but from every member of the State. Restitution must, therefore, be made to all, and the value of the loaf returned in labour a thousandfold. The thief is the bondsman of the State. But as the State cannot employ him, he is leased out to those who will pay into the treasury of the prince the money equivalent to the labour he is capable of performing. Thus, under cover of the highest morality, the greatest iniquity is perpetrated. For the theft of a loaf, the man is reduced to a slave; then his wife and children, unable to support themselves, become a charge to the State, that is, they beg in the public ways.

This, too, forsooth, corrupts morality, and they likewise are seized and leased out to any who like to take them. Nor can he or they ever become free again, for they must repay to their proprietor the sum he gave for them, and how can that be done, since they receive no wages? For striking another, a man may be in the same way, as they term it, forfeited to the State, and be sold to the highest bidder. A stout brass wire is then twisted around his left wrist loosely, and the ends soldered together. Then a bar of iron being put through, a half turn is given to it, which forces the wire sharply against the arm, causing it to fit tightly, often painfully, and forms a smaller ring at the outside. By this smaller ring a score of bondsmen may be seen strung together with a rope.

To speak disrespectfully of the prince or his council, or of the nobles, or of religion, to go out of the precincts without permission, to trade without license, to omit to salute the great, all these and a thousand others are crimes deserving of the brazen bracelet. Were a man to study all day what he must do, and what he must not do, to escape servitude, it would not be possible for him to stir one step without becoming forfeit! And yet they hypocritically say that these things are done for the sake of public morality, and that there are no slaves (not permitting the word to be used), and no man was ever sold.

It is, indeed, true that no man is sold in open market, he is leased instead; and, by a refined hypocrisy, the owner of slaves cannot sell them to another owner, but he can place them in the hands of the notary, presenting them with their freedom, so far as he is concerned. The notary, upon payment of a fine from the purchaser transfers them to him, and the larger part of the fine goes to the prince. Debt alone under their laws must crowd the land with slaves, for, as wages are scarcely known, a child from its birth is often declared to be in debt. For its nourishment is drawn from its mother, and the wretched mother is the wife of a retainer who is fed by his lord. To such a degree is this tyranny carried! If any owe a penny, his doom is sealed; he becomes a

bondsman, and thus the estates of the nobles are full of men who work during their whole lives for the profit of others. Thus, too, the woods are filled with banditti, for those who find an opportunity, never fail to escape, notwithstanding the hunt that is invariably made for them, and the cruel punishment that awaits recapture. And numbers, foreseeing that they must become bondsmen, before they are proclaimed forfeit, steal away by night, and live as they may in the forests.

How, then, does any man remain free? Only by the favour of the nobles, and only that he may amass wealth for them. The merchants, and those who have license to trade by land or water, are all protected by some noble house, to whom they pay heavily for permission to live in their own houses. The principal tyrant is supported by the nobles, that they in their turn may tyrannise over the merchants, and they again over all the workmen of their shops and bazaars.

Over their own servants (for thus they call the slaves, that the word itself may not be used), who work upon their estates, the nobles are absolute masters, and may even hang them upon the nearest tree. And here I cannot but remark how strange it is, first, that any man can remain a slave rather than die; and secondly, how much stranger it is that any other man, himself a slave, can be found to hunt down or to hang his fellow; yet the tyrants never lack executioners. Their castles are crowded with retainers who wreak their wills upon the defenceless. These retainers do not wear the brazen bracelet; they are free. Are there, then, no beggars? Yes, they sit at every corner, and about the gates of the cities, asking for alms.

Though begging makes a man forfeit to the State, it is only when he has thews and sinews, and can work. The diseased and aged, the helpless and feeble, may break the law, and starve by the roadside, because it profits no one to make them his slaves. And all these things are done in the name of morality, and for the good of the human race, as they constantly announce in their councils and parliaments.

There are two reasons why the mercenaries have been called in; first, because the princes found the great nobles so powerful, and can keep them in check only by the aid of these foreigners; and secondly, because the number of the outlaws in the woods has become so great that the nobles themselves are afraid lest their slaves should revolt, and, with the aid of the outlaws, overcome them.

Now the mark of a noble is that he can read and write. When the ancients were scattered, the remnant that was left behind was, for the most part, the ignorant and the poor. But among them there was here and there a man who possessed some little education and force of mind. At first there was no order; but after thirty years or so, after

a generation, some order grew up, and these men, then become aged, were naturally chosen as leaders. They had, indeed, no actual power then, no guards or armies; but the common folk, who had no knowledge, came to them to decide their disputes, to advise them what to do, to pronounce some form of marriage, to keep some note of property, and to unite them against a mutual danger.

These men in turn taught their children to read and write, wishing that some part of the wisdom of the ancients might be preserved. They themselves wrote down what they knew, and these manuscripts, transmitted to their children, were saved with care. Some of them remain to this day. These children, growing to manhood, took more upon them, and assumed higher authority as the past was forgotten, and the original equality of all men lost in antiquity. The small enclosed farms of their fathers became enlarged to estates, the estates became towns, and thus, by degrees, the order of the nobility was formed. As they intermarried only among themselves, they preserved a certain individuality. At this day a noble is at once known, no matter how coarsely he may be dressed, or how brutal his habits, by his delicacy of feature, his air of command, even by his softness of skin and fineness of hair.

Still the art of reading and writing is scrupulously imparted to all their legitimate offspring, and scrupulously confined to them alone. It is true that they do not use it except on rare occasions when necessity demands, being wholly given over to the chase, to war, and politics, but they retain the knowledge. Indeed, were a noble to be known not to be able to read and write, the prince would at once degrade him, and the sentence would be upheld by the entire caste. No other but the nobles are permitted to acquire these arts; if any attempt to do so, they are enslaved and punished. But none do attempt; of what avail would it be to them?

All knowledge is thus retained in the possession of the nobles; they do not use it, but the physicians, for instance, who are famous, are so, because, by favour of some baron, they have learned receipts in the ancient manuscripts which have been mentioned. One virtue, and one only, adorns this exclusive caste: they are courageous to the verge of madness. I had almost omitted to state that the merchants know how to read and write, having special license and permits to do so, without which they may not correspond. There are few books, and still fewer to read them; and these all in manuscript, for though the way to print is not lost, it is not employed since no one wants books.

CHAPTER V

THE LAKE

THERE now only remains the geography of our country to be treated of before the history is commenced. Now the most striking difference between the country as we know it and as it was known to the ancients is the existence of the great Lake in the centre of the island. From the Red Rocks (by the Severn) hither, the most direct route a galley can follow is considered to be about 200 miles in length, and it is a journey which often takes a week even for a vessel well manned, because the course, as it turns round the islands, faces so many points of the compass, and therefore the oarsmen are sure to have to labour in the teeth of the wind, no matter which way it blows.

Many parts are still unexplored, and scarce anything known of their extent, even by repute. Until Felix Aquila's time, the greater portion, indeed, had not even a name. Each community was well acquainted with the bay before its own city, and with the route to the next, but beyond that they were ignorant, and had no desire to learn. Yet the Lake cannot really be so long and broad as it seems, for the country could not contain it. The length is increased, almost trebled, by the islands and shoals, which will not permit of navigation in a straight line. For the most part, too, they follow the southern shore of the mainland, which is protected by a fringe of islets and banks from the storms which sweep over the open waters.

Thus rowing along round the gulfs and promontories, their voyage is thrice prolonged, but rendered nearly safe from the waves, which rise with incredible celerity before the gales. The slow ships of commerce, indeed, are often days in traversing the distance between one port and another, for they wait for the wind to blow abaft,* and being heavy, deeply laden, built broad and flat-bottomed for shallows, and bluff at the bows, they drift like logs of timber. In canoes the hunters, indeed, sometimes pass swiftly from one place to another, venturing farther out to sea than the ships. They could pass yet more quickly were it not for the inquisition of the authorities at every city and port, who not only levy dues and fees for the treasury of the prince, and for their own

* Near to the stern.

rapacious desires, but demand whence the vessel comes, to whom she belongs, and whither she is bound, so that no ship can travel rapidly unless so armed as to shake off these inquisitors.

The canoes, therefore, travel at night and in calm weather many miles away from the shore, and thus escape, or slip by daylight among the reedy shallows, sheltered by the flags and willows from view. The ships of commerce haul up to the shore towards evening, and the crews, disembarking, light their fires and cook their food. There are, however, one or two gaps, as it were, in their usual course which they cannot pass in this leisurely manner; where the shore is exposed and rocky, or too shallow, and where they must reluctantly put forth, and sail from one horn of the land to the other.

The Lake is also divided into two unequal portions by the straits of White Horse, where vessels are often weather-bound, and cannot make way against the wind, which sets a current through the narrow channel. There is no tide; the sweet waters do not ebb and flow; but while I thus discourse, I have forgotten to state how they came to fill the middle of the country. Now, the philosopher Silvester, and those who seek after marvels, say that the passage of the dark body through space caused an immense volume of fresh water to fall in the shape of rain, and also that the growth of the forests distilled rain from the clouds. Let us leave these speculations to dreamers, and recount what is known to be.

For there is no tradition among the common people, who are extremely tenacious of such things, of any great rainfall, nor is there any mention of floods in the ancient manuscripts, nor is there any larger fall of rain now than was formerly the case. But the Lake itself tells us how it was formed, or as nearly as we shall ever know, and these facts were established by the expeditions lately sent out.

At the eastern extremity the Lake narrows, and finally is lost in the vast marshes which cover the site of the ancient London. Through these, no doubt, in the days of the old world there flowed the river Thames. By the changes of the sea level and the sand that was brought up there must have grown great banks, which obstructed the stream. I have formerly mentioned the vast quantities of timber, the wreckage of towns and bridges which was carried down by the various rivers, and by none more so than by the Thames. These added to the accumulation, which increased the faster because the foundations of the ancient bridges held it like piles driven in for the purpose. And before this the river had become partially choked from the cloacæ of the ancient city which poured into it through enormous subterranean aqueducts and drains.

After a time all these shallows and banks became well matted

together by the growth of weeds, of willows, and flags, while the tide, ebbing lower at each drawing back, left still more mud and sand. Now it is believed that when this had gone on for a time, the waters of the river, unable to find a channel, began to overflow up into the deserted streets, and especially to fill the underground passages and drains, of which the number and extent was beyond all the power of words to describe. These, by the force of the water, were burst up, and the houses fell in.

For this marvellous city, of which such legends are related, was after all only of brick, and when the ivy grew over and trees and shrubs sprang up, and, lastly, the waters underneath burst in, this huge metropolis was soon overthrown. At this day all those parts which were built upon low ground are marshes and swamps. Those houses that were upon high ground were, of course, like the other towns, ransacked of all they contained by the remnant that was left; the iron, too, was extracted. Trees growing up by them in time cracked the walls, and they fell in. Trees and bushes covered them; ivy and nettles concealed the crumbling masses of brick.

The same was the case with the lesser cities and towns whose sites are known in the woods. For though many of our present towns bear the ancient names, they do not stand upon the ancient sites, but are two or three, and sometimes ten miles distant. The founders carried with them the name of their original residence.

Thus the low-lying parts of the mighty city of London became swamps, and the higher grounds were clad with bushes. The very largest of the buildings fell in, and there was nothing visible but trees and hawthorns on the upper lands, and willows, flags, reeds, and rushes on the lower. These crumbling ruins still more choked the stream, and almost, if not quite, turned it back. If any water ooze past, it is not perceptible, and there is no channel through to the salt ocean. It is a vast stagnant swamp, which no man dare enter, since death would be his inevitable fate.

There exhales from this oozy mass so fatal a vapour that no animal can endure it. The black water bears a greenish-brown floating scum, which for ever bubbles up from the putrid mud of the bottom. When the wind collects the miasma, and, as it were, presses it together, it becomes visible as a low cloud which hangs over the place. The cloud does not advance beyond the limit of the marsh, seeming to stay there by some constant attraction; and well it is for us that it does not, since at such times when the vapour is thickest, the very wildfowl leave the reeds, and fly from the poison. There are no fishes, neither can eels exist in the mud, nor even newts. It is dead.

The flags and reeds are coated with slime and noisome to the touch; there is one place where even these do not grow, and where there is nothing but an oily liquid, green and rank. It is plain there are no fishes in the water, for herons do not go thither, nor the kingfishers, not one of which approaches the spot. They say the sun is sometimes hidden by the vapour when it is thickest, but I do not see how any can tell this, since they could not enter the cloud, as to breathe it when collected by the wind is immediately fatal. For all the rottenness of a thousand years and of many hundred millions of human beings is there festering under the stagnant water, which has sunk down into and penetrated the earth, and floated up to the surface the contents of the buried cloacæ.

Many scores of men have, I fear, perished in the attempt to enter this fearful place, carried on by their desire of gain. For it can scarcely be disputed that untold treasure lies hidden therein, but guarded by terrors greater than fiery serpents. These have usually made their endeavours to enter in severe and continued frost, or in the height of a drought. Frost diminishes the power of the vapour, and the marshes can then, too, be partially traversed, for there is no channel for a boat. But the moment anything be moved, whether it be a bush, or a willow, even a flag, if the ice be broken, the pestilence rises yet stronger. Besides which, there are portions which never freeze, and which may be approached unawares, or a turn of the wind may drift the gas towards the explorer.

In the midst of the summer, after long heat, the vapour rises, and is in a degree dissipated into the sky, and then by following devious ways an entrance may be effected, but always at the cost of illness. If the explorer be unable to quit the spot before night, whether in summer or winter, his death is certain. In the earlier times some bold and adventurous men did indeed succeed in getting a few jewels, but since then the marsh has become more dangerous, and its pestilent character, indeed, increases year by year, as the stagnant water penetrates deeper. So that now for very many years no such attempts have been made.

The extent of these foul swamps is not known with certainty, but it is generally believed that they are, at the widest, twenty miles across, and that they reach in a winding line for nearly forty. But the outside parts are much less fatal; it is only the interior which is avoided.

Towards the Lake the sand thrown up by the waves has long since formed a partial barrier between the sweet water and the stagnant, rising up to within a few feet of the surface. This barrier is overgrown with flags and reeds, where it is shallow. Here it is possible to sail along the sweet water within an arrow-shot of the swamp. Nor, indeed, would the stagnant mingle with the sweet, as is evident at other parts

of the swamp, where streams flow side by side with the dark or reddish water; and there are pools, upon one side of which the deer drink, while the other is not frequented even by rats.

The common people aver that demons reside in these swamps; and, indeed, at night fiery shapes are seen, which, to the ignorant, are sufficient confirmation of such tales. The vapour, where it is most dense, takes fire, like the blue flame of spirits, and these flaming clouds float to and fro, and yet do not burn the reeds. The superstitious trace in them the forms of demons and winged fiery serpents, and say that white spectres haunt the margin of the marsh after dusk. In a lesser degree, the same thing has taken place with other ancient cities. It is true that there are not always swamps, but the sites are uninhabitable because of the emanations from the ruins. Therefore they are avoided. Even the spot where a single house has been known to have existed, is avoided by the hunters in the woods.

They say when they are stricken with ague or fever, that they must have unwittingly slept on the site of an ancient habitation. Nor can the ground be cultivated near the ancient towns, because it causes fever; and thus it is that, as I have already stated, the present places of the same name are often miles distant from the former locality. No sooner does the plough or the spade turn up an ancient site than those who work there are attacked with illness. And thus the cities of the old world, and their houses and habitations, are deserted and lost in the forest. If the hunters, about to pitch their camp for the night, should stumble on so much as a crumbling brick or a fragment of hewn stone, they at once remove at least a bowshot away.

The eastward flow of the Thames being at first checked, and finally almost or quite stopped by the formation of these banks, the water turned backwards as it were, and began to cover the hitherto dry land. And this, with the other lesser rivers and brooks that no longer had any ultimate outlet, accounts for the Lake, so far as this side of the country is concerned.

At the western extremity the waters also contract between the steep cliffs called the Red Rocks, near to which once existed the city of Bristol. Now the Welsh say, and the tradition of those who dwell in that part of the country bears them out, that in the time of the old world the river Severn flowed past the same spot, but not between these cliffs. The great river Severn coming down from the north, with England on one bank and Wales upon the other, entered the sea, widening out as it did so. Just before it reached the sea, another lesser river, called the Avon, the upper part of which is still there, joined it passing through this cleft in the rocks.

But when the days of the old world ended in the twilight of the ancients, as the salt ocean fell back and its level became lower, vast sandbanks were disclosed, which presently extended across the most part of the river Severn. Others, indeed, think that the salt ocean did not sink, but that the land was lifted higher. Then they say that the waves threw up an immense quantity of shingle and sand, and that thus these banks were formed. All that we know with certainty, however, is, that across the estuary of the Severn there rose a broad barrier of beach, which grew wider with the years, and still increases westwards. It is as if the ocean churned up its floor and cast it forth upon the strand.

Now when the Severn was thus stayed yet more effectually than the Thames, in the first place it also flowed backwards as it were, till its overflow and that of the lesser rivers which ran into it met and mingled with the reflux of the Thames. Thus the inland sea of fresh water was formed; though Silvester hints (what is most improbable) that the level of the land sank and formed a basin. After a time, when the waters had risen high enough, since all water must have an outlet somewhere, the Lake, passing over the green country behind the Red Rocks, came pouring through the channel of the Avon.

Then, farther down, it rose over the banks which were lowest there, and thus found its way over a dam into the sea. Now when the tide of the ocean is at its ebb, the waters of the Lake rush over these banks with so furious a current that no vessel can either go down or come up. If they attempted to go down, they would be swamped by the meeting of the waves; if they attempted to come up, the strongest gale that blows could not force them against the stream. As the tide gradually returns, however, the level of the ocean rises to the level of the Lake, the outward flow of the water ceases, and there is even a partial inward flow of the tide which, at its highest, reaches to the Red Rocks. At this state of the tide, which happens twice in a day and night, vessels can enter or go forth.

The Irish ships, of which I have spoken, thus come into the Lake, waiting outside the bar till the tide lifts them over. The Irish ships, being built to traverse the ocean from their country, are large and stout and well manned, carrying from thirty to fifty men. The Welsh ships, which come down from that inlet of the Lake which follows the ancient course of the Severn, are much smaller and lighter, as not being required to withstand the heavy seas. They carry but fifteen or twenty men each, but then they are more numerous. The Irish ships, on account of their size and draught, in sailing about the sweet waters, cannot always haul on shore at night, nor follow the course of the ships of burden between the fringe of islands and the strand.

They have often to stay in the outer and deeper waters; but the Welsh boats come in easily at all parts of the coast, so that no place is safe against them. The Welsh have ever been most jealous as to that part of the Lake which we suppose to follow the course of the Severn, and will on no account permit so much as a canoe to enter it. So that whether it be a narrow creek, or whether there be wide reaches, or what the shores may be like, we are ignorant. And this is all that is with certainty known concerning the origin of the inland sea of sweet water, excluding all that superstition and speculation have advanced, and setting down nothing but ascertained facts.

A beautiful sea it is, clear as crystal, exquisite to drink, abounding with fishes of every kind, and adorned with green islands. There is nothing more lovely in the world than when, upon a calm evening, the sun goes down across the level and gleaming water, where it is so wide that the eye can but just distinguish a low and dark cloud, as it were, resting upon the horizon, or perhaps, looking lengthways, cannot distinguish any ending to the expanse. Sometimes it is blue, reflecting the noonday sky; sometimes white from the clouds; again green and dark as the wind rises and the waves roll.

Storms, indeed, come up with extraordinary swiftness, for which reason the ships, whenever possible, follow the trade route, as it is called, behind the islands, which shelter them like a protecting reef. They drop equally quickly, and thus it is not uncommon for the morning to be calm, the midday raging in waves dashing resistlessly upon the beach, and the evening still again. The Irish, who are accustomed to the salt ocean, say, in the suddenness of its storms and the shifting winds, it is more dangerous than the sea itself. But then there are almost always islands, behind which a vessel can be sheltered.

Beneath the surface of the Lake there must be concealed very many ancient towns and cities, of which the names are lost. Sometimes the anchors bring up even now fragments of rusty iron and old metal, or black beams of timber. It is said, and with probability, that when the remnant of the ancients found the water gradually encroaching (for it rose very slowly), as they were driven back year by year, they considered that in time they would be all swept away and drowned. But after extending to its present limits the Lake rose no farther, not even in the wettest seasons, but always remains the same. From the position of certain quays we know that it has thus remained for the last hundred years at least.

Never, as I observed before, was there so beautiful an expanse of water. How much must we sorrow that it has so often proved only the easiest mode of bringing the miseries of war to the doors of the

unoffending. Yet men are never weary of sailing to and fro upon it, and most of the cities of the present time are upon its shore. And in the evening we walk by the beach, and from the rising grounds look over the waters, as if to gaze upon their loveliness were reward to us for the labour of the day.

Part II

Wild England

CHAPTER I

SIR FELIX

ON a bright May morning, the sunlight, at five o'clock, was pouring into a room which faced the east at the ancestral home of the Aquilas. In this room Felix, the eldest of the three sons of the Baron, was sleeping. The beams passed over his head, and lit up a square space on the opposite whitewashed wall, where, in the midst of the brilliant light, hung an ivory cross. There were only two panes of glass in the window, each no more than two or three inches square, the rest of the window being closed by strong oaken shutters, thick enough to withstand the stroke of an arrow.

In the daytime one of these at least would have been thrown open to admit air and light. They did not quite meet, and a streak of sunshine, in addition to that which came through the tiny panes, entered at the chink. Only one window in the house contained more than two such panes (it was in the Baroness's sitting-room), and most of them had none at all. The glass left by the ancients in their dwellings had long since been used up or broken, and the fragments that remained were too precious to be put in ordinary rooms. When larger pieces were discovered, they were taken for the palaces of the princes, and even these were but sparingly supplied, so that the saying 'he has glass in his window' was equivalent to 'he belongs to the upper ranks'.

On the recess of the window was an inkstand, which had been recently in use, for a quill lay beside it, and a sheet of parchment partly covered with writing. The ink was thick and very dark, made of powdered charcoal, leaving a slightly raised writing, which could be perceived by the finger on rubbing it lightly over. Beneath the window on the bare floor was an open chest, in which were several similar parchments and books, and from which the sheet on the recess had evidently been taken. This chest, though small, was extremely heavy and strong, being dug out with the chisel and gouge from a solid block of oak. Except a few parallel grooves, there was no attempt at ornamentation upon it. The lid, which had no hinges, but lifted completely off, was

CHAPTER XXI

A VOYAGE

THE sun was up when Felix awoke, and as he raised himself the beauty of the Lake before him filled him with pleasure. By the shore it was so calm that the trees were perfectly reflected, and the few willow leaves that had fallen floated without drifting one way or the other. Farther out the islands were lit up with the sunlight, and the swallows skimmed the water, following the outline of their shores. In the Lake beyond them, glimpses of which he could see through the channel or passage between, there was a ripple where the faint south-western breeze touched the surface. His mind went out to the beauty of it. He did not question or analyse his feelings; he launched his vessel, and left that hard and tyrannical land for the loveliness of the water.

Paddling out to the islands he passed through between them, and reached the open Lake. There he hoisted the sail, the gentle breeze filled it, the sharp cutwater* began to divide the ripples, a bubbling sound arose, and steering due north, straight out to the open and boundless expanse, he was carried swiftly away.

The mallards, who saw the canoe coming, at first scarcely moved, never thinking that a boat would venture outside the islands, within whose line they were accustomed to see vessels, but when the canoe continued to bear down upon them, they flew up and descended far away to one side. When he had sailed past the spot where these birds had floated, the Lake was his own. By the shores of the islands the crows came down for mussels. Moorhens swam in and out among the rushes, water-rats nibbled at the flags, pikes basked at the edge of the weeds, summer-snipes ran along the sand, and doubtless an otter here and there was in concealment. Without the line of the shoals and islets, now that the mallards had flown, there was a solitude of water. It was far too deep for the longest weeds, nothing seemed to exist here. The very water-snails seek the shore, or are drifted by the currents into shallow corners. Neither great nor little care for the broad expanse.

The canoe moved more rapidly as the wind came now with its full force over the distant woods and hills, and though it was but a

light southerly breeze, the broad sail impelled the taper vessel swiftly. Reclining in the stern, Felix lost all consciousness of aught but that he was pleasantly borne along. His eyes were not closed, and he was aware of the canoe, the Lake, the sunshine, and the sky, and yet he was asleep. Physically awake, he mentally slumbered. It was rest. After the misery, exertion, and excitement of the last fortnight it was rest, intense rest for body and mind. The pressure of the water against the handle of the rudder-paddle, the slight vibration of the wood, as the bubbles rushed by beneath, alone perhaps kept him from really falling asleep. This was something which could not be left to itself; it must be firmly grasped, and that effort restrained his drowsiness.

Three hours passed. The shore was twelve or fifteen miles behind, and looked like a blue cloud, for the summer haze hid the hills, more than would have been the case in clearer weather.

Another hour, and at last Felix, awakening from his slumberous condition, looked round and saw nothing but the waves. The shore he had left had entirely disappeared, gone down; if there were land more lofty on either hand, the haze concealed it. He looked again; he could scarcely comprehend it. He knew the Lake was very wide, but it had never occurred to him that he might possibly sail out of sight of land. This, then, was why the mariners would not quit the islands; they feared the open water. He stood up and swept the horizon carefully, shading his eyes with his hand; there was nothing but a mist at the horizon. He was alone with the sun, the sky, and the Lake. He could not surely have sailed into the ocean without knowing it? He sat down, dipped his hand overboard and tasted the drops that adhered; the water was pure and sweet, warm from the summer sunshine.

There was not so much as a swift in the upper sky; nothing but slender filaments of white cloud. No swallows glided over the surface of the water. If there were fishes he could not see them through the waves, which were here much larger; sufficiently large, though the wind was light, to make his canoe rise and fall with their regular rolling. To see fishes a calm surface is necessary, and, like other creatures, they haunt the shallows and the shore. Never had he felt alone like this in the depths of the farthest forest he had penetrated. Had he contemplated beforehand the possibility of passing out of sight of land, when he found that the time had arrived he would probably have been alarmed and anxious for his safety. But thus stumbling drowsily into the solitude of the vast Lake, he was so astounded with his own discovery, so absorbed in thinking of the immense expanse, that the idea of danger did not occur to him.

Another hour passed, and he now began to gaze about him more

* The forward edge of a ship's or boat's prow.

eagerly for some sign of land, for he had very little provision with him, and he did not wish to spend the night upon the Lake. Presently, however, the mist on the horizon ahead appeared to thicken, and then became blue, and in a shorter time than he expected land came in sight. This arose from the fact of its being low, so that he had approached nearer than he knew before recognising it. At the time when he was really out of sight of the coast, he was much farther from the hilly land left behind than from the low country in front, and not in the mathematical centre, as he had supposed, of the Lake. As it rose and came more into sight, he already began to wonder what reception he should meet with from the inhabitants, and whether he should find them as hard of heart as the people he had just escaped from. Should he, indeed, venture among them at all? Or should he remain in the woods till he had observed more of their ways and manners? These questions were being debated in his mind, when he perceived that the wind was falling.

As the sun went past the meridian the breeze fell, till, in the hottest part of the afternoon, and when he judged that he was not more than eight miles from shore, it sank to the merest zephyr, and the waves by degrees diminished. So faint became the breeze in half-an-hour's time, and so intermittent, that he found it patience wasted even to hold the rudder-paddle. The sail hung and was no longer bellied out; as the idle waves rolled under, it flapped against the mast. The heat was now so intolerable, the light reflected from the water increasing the sensation, that he was obliged to make himself some shelter by partly lowering the sail, and hauling the yard athwart the vessel, so that the canvas acted as an awning. Gradually the waves declined in volume, and the gentle breathing of the wind ebbed away, till at last the surface was almost still, and he could feel no perceptible air stirring.

Weary of sitting in the narrow boat, he stood up, but he could not stretch himself sufficiently for the change to be of much use. The long summer day, previously so pleasant, now appeared scarcely endurable. Upon the silent water the time lingered, for there was nothing to mark its advance, not so much as a shadow beyond that of his own boat. The waves having now no crest, went under the canoe without chafing against it, or rebounding, so that they were noiseless. No fishes rose to the surface. There was nothing living near, except a blue butterfly, which settled on the mast, having ventured thus far from land. The vastness of the sky, over-arching the broad water, the sun, and the motionless filaments of cloud, gave no repose for his gaze, for they were seemingly still. To the weary glance motion is repose; the waving boughs, the foam-tipped waves, afford positive rest to look at. Such intense stillness as this of the summer sky was oppressive; it was like

living in space itself, in the ether above. He welcomed at last the gradual downward direction of the sun, for, as the heat decreased, he could work with the paddle.

Presently he furled the sail, took his paddle, and set his face for the land. He laboured steadily, but made no apparent progress. The canoe was heavy, and the outrigger or beam which was of material use in sailing, was a drawback to paddling. He worked till his arms grew weary, and still the blue land seemed as far off as ever.

But by the time the sun began to approach the horizon, his efforts had produced some effect, the shore was visible, and the woods beyond. They were still five miles distant, and he was tired; there was little chance of his reaching it before night. He put his paddle down for refreshment and rest, and while he was thus engaged, a change took place. A faint puff of air came; a second, and a third; a tiny ripple ran along the surface. Now he recollected he had heard that the mariners depended a great deal on the morning and the evening, the land and the Lake, breeze as they worked along the shore. This was the first breath of the land breeze. It freshened after awhile, and he re-set his sail.

An hour or so afterwards he came near the shore; he heard the thrushes singing, and the cuckoo calling, long before he landed. He did not stay to search about for a creek, but ran the canoe on the strand, which was free of reeds or flags, a sign that the waves often beat furiously there, rolling as they must for so many miles. He hauled the canoe up as high as he could, but presently when he looked about him he found that he was on a small and narrow island, with a channel in the rear. Tired as he was, yet anxious for the safety of his canoe, he pushed off again, and paddled round and again beached her with the island between her and the open Lake. Else he feared if a south wind should blow she might be broken to pieces on the strand before his eyes. It was prudent to take the precaution, but, as it happened, the next day the Lake was still.

He could see no traces of human occupation upon the island, which was of small extent and nearly bare, and therefore, in the morning, paddled across the channel to the mainland, as he thought. But upon exploring the opposite shore, it proved not to be the mainland, but merely another island. Paddling round it, he tried again, but with the same result; he found nothing but island after island, all narrow, and bearing nothing except bushes. Observing a channel which seemed to go straight in among these islets, he resolved to follow it, and did so (resting at noon-time) the whole morning. As he paddled slowly in, he found the water shallower, and weeds, bulrushes, and reeds became thick, except quite in the centre.

After the heat of midday had gone over, he resumed his voyage, and still found the same; islets and banks, more or less covered with hawthorn bushes, willow, elder, and alder, succeeded to islets, fringed round their edges with reeds and reed canary-grass. When he grew weary of paddling, he landed and stayed the night; the next day he went on again, and still for hour after hour rowed in and out among these banks and islets, till he began to think he should never find his way out.

The farther he penetrated the more numerous became the waterfowl. Ducks swam among the flags, or rose with a rush and splashing. Coots and moorhens dived and hid in the reeds. The lesser grebe sank at the sound of the paddle like a stone. A strong northern diver raised a wave as he hurried away under the water, his course marked by the undulation above him. Sedge-birds chirped in the willows; black-headed buntings sat on the trees, and watched him without fear. Bearded titmice were there, clinging to the stalks of the sedges, and long-necked herons rose from the reedy places where they love to wade. Blue dragonflies darted to and fro, or sat on water-plants as if they were flowers. Snakes swam across the channels, vibrating their heads from side to side. Swallows swept over his head. Pike 'stuck' from the verge of the thick weeds as he came near. Perch rose for insects as they fell helpless into the water.

He noticed that the water, though so thick with reeds, was as clear as that in the open Lake; there was no scum such as accumulates in stagnant places. From this he concluded that there must be a current, however slight, perhaps from rivers flowing into this part of the Lake. He felt the strongest desire to explore farther till he reached the mainland, but he reflected that mere exploration was not his object; it would never obtain Aurora for him. There were no signs whatever of human habitation, and from reeds and bulrushes, however interesting, nothing could be gained. Reluctantly, therefore, on the third morning, having passed the night on one of the islets, he turned his canoe, and paddled southwards towards the Lake.

He did not for a moment attempt to retrace the channel by which he had entered; it would have been an impossibility; he took advantage of any clear space to push through. It took him as long to get out as it had to get in; it was the afternoon of the fourth day when he at last regained the coast. He rested the remainder of the afternoon, wishing to start fresh in the morning, having determined to follow the line of the shore eastwards, and so gradually to circumnavigate the Lake. If he succeeded in nothing else, that at least would be something to relate to Aurora.

The morning rose fair and bright, with a southwesterly air rather than a breeze. He sailed before it; it was so light that his progress could not have exceeded more than three miles an hour. Hour after hour passed away, and still he followed the line of the shore, now going a short way out to skirt an island, and now nearer in to pass between sandbanks. By noon he was so weary of sitting in the canoe that he ran her ashore, and rested awhile.

It was the very height of the heat of the day when he set forth again, and the wind lighter than in the morning. It had, however, changed a little, and blew now from the west, almost too exactly abaft to suit his craft. He could not make a map while sailing, or observe his position accurately, but it appeared to him that the shore trended towards the south-east, so that he was gradually turning an arc. He supposed from this that he must be approaching the eastern end of the Lake. The water seemed shallower, to judge from the quantity of weeds. Now and then he caught glimpses between the numerous islands of the open Lake, and there, too, the weeds covered the surface in many places.

In an hour or two the breeze increased considerably, and travelling so much quicker, he found it required all his dexterity to steer past the islands and clear the banks upon which he was drifting. Once or twice he grazed the willows that overhung the water, and heard the keel of the canoe drag on the bottom. As much as possible he bore away from the mainland, steering south-east, thinking to find deeper water, and to be free of the islets. He succeeded in the first, but the islets were now so numerous that he could not tell where the open Lake was. The farther the afternoon advanced, the more the breeze freshened, till occasionally, as it blew between the islands, it struck his mast almost with the force of a gale. Felix welcomed the wind, which would enable him to make great progress before evening. If such favouring breezes would continue, he could circumnavigate the waters in a comparatively short time, and might return to Aurora, so far, at least, successful. Hope filled his heart, and he sang to the wind.

The waves could not rise among these islands, which intercepted them before they could roll far enough to gather force, so that he had all the advantage of the gale without its risks. Except a light haze all round the horizon, the sky was perfectly clear, and it was pleasant now the strong current of air cooled the sun's heat. As he came round the islands he constantly met and disturbed parties of waterfowl, mallards, and coots. Sometimes they merely hid in the weeds, sometimes they rose, and when they did so passed to his rear.

CHAPTER XXII

DISCOVERIES

THIS little circumstance of the mallards always flying over him and away behind, when flushed, presently made Felix speculate on the cause, and he kept a closer watch. He now saw (what had, indeed, been going on for some time) that there was a ceaseless stream of waterfowl, mallards, ducks, coots, moorhens, and lesser grebes coming towards him, swimming to the westward. As they met him they parted and let him through, or rose and went over. Next he noticed that the small birds on the islands were also travelling in the same direction, that is against the wind. They did not seem in any haste, but flitted from islet to islet, bush to tree, feeding and gossiping as they went; still the movement was distinct.

Finches, linnets, blackbirds, thrushes, wrens, and whitethroats, and many others, all passed him, and he could see the same thing going on to his right and left. Felix became much interested in this migration, all the more singular as it was the nesting-time, and hundreds of these birds must have left their nests with eggs or young behind them. Nothing that he could think of offered an adequate explanation. He imagined he saw shoals of fishes going the same way, but the surface of the water being ruffled, and the canoe sailing rapidly, he could not be certain. About an hour after he first observed the migration the stream of birds ceased suddenly.

There were no waterfowls in the water, and no finches in the bushes. They had evidently all passed. Those in the van of the migratory army were no doubt scattered and thinly distributed, so that he had been meeting the flocks a long while before he suspected it. The nearer he approached their centre the thicker they became, and on getting through that he found a solitude. The weeds were thicker than ever, so that he had constantly to edge away from where he supposed the mainland to lie. But there were no waterfowls and no birds on the islets. Suddenly as he rounded a large island he saw what for the moment he imagined to be a line of white surf, but the next instant he recognised a solid mass, as it were, of swallows and martins flying just over the surface of the water straight towards him. He had no time to notice how far they extended before they had gone by him with a rushing sound.

Turning to look back, he saw them continue directly west in the teeth of the wind.

Like the water and the islands, the sky was now cleared of birds, and not a swallow remained. Felix asked himself if he were running into some unknown danger, but he could not conceive any. The only thing that occurred to him was the possibility of the wind rising to a hurricane; that gave him no alarm, because the numerous islands would afford shelter. So complete was the shelter in some places, that as he passed along his sail drew above, while the surface of the water, almost surrounded with bushes and willows, was smooth. No matter to how many quarters of the compass the wind might veer, he should still be able to get under the lee of one or other of the banks.

The sky remained without clouds; there was nothing but a slight haze, which he sometimes fancied looked thicker in front or to the eastward. There was nothing whatever to cause the least uneasiness; on the contrary, his curiosity was aroused, and he was desirous of discovering what it was that had startled the birds. After a while the water became rather more open, with sandbanks instead of islands, so that he could see around him for a considerable distance. By a large bank, behind which the ripple was stilled, he saw a low wave advancing towards him, and moving against the wind. It was followed by two others at short intervals, and though he could not see them, he had no doubt shoals of fishes were passing and had raised the undulations.

The sedges on the sandbanks appeared brown and withered, as if it had been autumn instead of early summer. The flags were brown at the tip, and the aquatic grasses had dwindled. They looked as if they could not grow, and had reached but half their natural height. From the low willows the leaves were dropping, faded and yellow, and the thorn-bushes were shrivelled and covered with the white cocoons of caterpillars. The farther he sailed the more desolate the banks seemed, and trees ceased altogether. Even the willows were fewer and stunted, and the highest thorn-bush was not above his chest. His vessel was now more exposed to the wind, so that he drove past the banks and scattered islands rapidly, and he noticed that there was not so much as a crow on them. Upturned mussel-shells, glittering in the sunshine, showed where crows had been at work, but there was not one now visible.

Felix thought the water had lost its clearness and had become thick, which he put down to the action of the wavelets disturbing the sand in the shallows. Ahead the haze, or mist, was now much thicker, and was apparently not over a mile distant. It hid the islands and concealed everything. He expected to enter it immediately, but it receded

as he approached. Along the strand of an island he passed there was a dark line like a stain, and in still water under the lee the surface was covered with a floating scum. Felix, on seeing this, at once concluded that he had unknowingly entered a gulf, and had left the main Lake, for the only place he had ever seen scum before was at the extremity of a creek near home, where the water was partly stagnant on a marshy level. The water of the Lake was proverbial for its purity and clearness.

He kept, therefore, a sharp look-out, expecting every moment to sight the end of the gulf or creek in which he supposed himself sailing, so that he might be ready to lower his sail. By degrees the wind had risen till it now blew with fury, but the numerous sandflats so broke up the waves that he found no inconvenience from them. One solitary gull passed over at a great height, flying steadily westwards against the wind. The canoe now began to overtake fragments of scum drifting before the wind, and rising up and down on the ripples. Once he saw a broad piece rise to the surface together with a quantity of bubbles. None of the sandbanks now rose more than a foot or so above the surface, and were entirely bare, mere sand and gravel.

The mist ahead was sensibly nearer, and yet it eluded him; it was of a faint yellow, and though so thin, obscured everything where it hovered. From out of the mist there presently appeared a vast stretch of weeds. They floated on the surface and undulated to the wavelets, a pale yellowish green expanse. Felix was hesitating whether to lower his sail or attempt to drive over them, when, as he advanced and the mist retreated, he saw open water beyond. The weeds extended on either hand as far as he could see, but they were only a narrow band, and he hesitated no longer. He felt the canoe graze the bottom once as he sailed over the weeds. The water was free of sandbanks beyond them, but he could see large islands looming in several directions.

Glancing behind him he perceived that the faint yellow mist had closed in and now encircled him. It came within two or three hundred yards, and was not affected by the wind, rough as it was. Quite suddenly he noticed that the water on which the canoe floated was black. The wavelets which rolled alongside were black, and the slight spray that occasionally flew on board was black, and stained the side of the vessel. This greatly astonished and almost shocked him; it was so opposite and contrary to all his ideas about the Lake, the very mirror of purity. He leant over, and dipped up a little in the palm of his hand; it did not appear black in such a small quantity, it seemed a rusty brown, but he became aware of an offensive odour. The odour clung to his hand, and he could not remove it, to his great disgust. It was like

nothing he had ever smelt before, and not in the least like the vapour of marshes.

By now being some distance from any island, the wavelets increased in size, and spray flew on board, wetting everything with this black liquid. Instead of level marshes and the end of the gulf, it appeared as if the water were deep, and also as if it widened. Exposed to the full press of the gale, Felix began to fear that he should not be able to return very easily against it. He did not know what to do. The horrid blackness of the water disposed him to turn about and tack out; on the other hand, having set out on a voyage of discovery, and having now found something different to the other parts of the Lake, he did not like to retreat. He sailed on, thinking to presently pass these loathsome waters.

He was now hungry, and indeed thirsty, but was unable to drink because he had no water-barrel. No vessel sailing on the Lake ever carried a water-barrel, since such pure water was always under their bows. He was cramped, too, with long sitting in the canoe, and the sun was perceptibly sloping in the west. He determined to land and rest, and with this purpose steered to the right under the lee of a large island, so large, indeed, that he was not certain it was not part of the mainland or one side of the gulf. The water was deep close up to the shore, but, to his annoyance, the strand appeared black, as if soaked with the dark water. He skirted along somewhat farther, and found a ledge of low rocks stretching out into the Lake, so that he was obliged to run ashore before coming to these.

On landing, the black strand, to his relief, was fairly firm, for he had dreaded sinking to the knees in it; but its appearance was so unpleasant that he could not bring himself to sit down. He walked on towards the ledge of rocks, thinking to find a pleasanter place there. They were stratified, and he stepped on them to climb up, when his foot went deep into the apparently hard rock. He kicked it, and his shoe penetrated it as if it had been soft sand. It was impossible to climb up the reef. The ground rose inland, and curious to see around him as far as possible, he ascended the slope.

From the summit, however, he could not see farther than on the shore, for the pale yellow mist rose up round him, and hid the canoe on the strand. The extreme desolation of the dark and barren ground repelled him; there was not a tree, bush, or living creature, not so much as a buzzing fly. He turned to go down, and then for the first time noticed that the disk of the sun was surrounded with a faint blue rim, apparently caused by the yellow vapour. So much were the rays shorn of their glare, that he could look at the sun without any distress, but its heat seemed to have increased, though it was now late in the afternoon.

Descending towards the canoe, he fancied the wind had veered considerably. He sat down in the boat, and took some food; it was without relish, as he had nothing to drink, and the great heat had tired him. Wearily, and without thinking, he pushed off the canoe; she slowly floated out, when, as he was about to hoist up the sail, a tremendous gust of wind struck him down on the thwarts,* and nearly carried him overboard. He caught the mast as he fell, or over he must have gone into the black waves. Before he could recover himself, she drifted against the ledge of rocks, which broke down and sank before the blow, so that she passed over uninjured.

Felix got out a paddle, and directed the canoe as well as he could; the fury of the wind was irresistible, and he could only drive before it. In a few minutes, as he was swept along the shore, he was carried between it and another immense reef. Here, the waves being broken and less powerful, he contrived to get the heavy canoe ashore again, and, jumping out, dragged her up as far as he could on the land. When he had done this, he found to his surprise that the gale had ceased. The tremendous burst of wind had been succeeded by a perfect calm, and the waves had already lost their violent impetus.

This was a relief, for he had feared that the canoe would be utterly broken to pieces; but soon he began to doubt if it were an unmixed benefit, as without a wind he could not move from this dismal place that evening. He was too weary to paddle far. He sat on the canoe to rest himself, and, whether from fatigue or other causes, fell asleep. His head heavily drooping on his chest partly woke him several times, but his lassitude overcame the discomfort, and he slept on. When he got up he felt dazed and unrefreshed, as if sleeping had been hard work. He was extremely thirsty, and oppressed with the increasing heat. The sun had sunk, or rather was so low that the high ground hid it from sight.

* A structural cross-piece in a boat or canoe used as a seat for the rower(s).

CHAPTER XXIII

STRANGE THINGS

THE thought struck Felix that perhaps he might find a spring somewhere in the island, and he started at once up over the hill. At the top he paused. The sun had not sunk, but had disappeared as a disk. In its place was a billow of blood, for so it looked, a vast up-heaved billow of glowing blood surging on the horizon. Over it flickered a tint of palest blue, like that seen in fire. The black waters reflected the glow, and the yellow vapour around was suffused with it. Though momentarily startled, Felix did not much heed these appearances; he was still dazed and heavy from his sleep.

He went on, looking for a spring, sometimes walking on firm ground, sometimes sinking to the ankle in a friable soil like black sand. The ground looked, indeed, as if it had been burnt, but there were no charred stumps of timber such as he had seen on the sites of forest fires. The extreme dreariness seemed to oppress his spirits, and he went on and on in a heavy waking dream. Descending into a plain, he lost sight of the flaming sunset and the black waters. In the level plain the desolation was yet more marked; there was not a grass blade or plant; the surface was hard, black, and burned, resembling iron, and indeed in places it resounded to his feet, though he supposed that was the echo from hollow passages beneath.

Several times he shook himself, straightened himself up, and endeavoured to throw off the sense of drowsy weight which increased upon him. He could not do so; he walked with bent back, and crept, as it were, over the iron land which radiated heat. A shimmer like that of water appeared in front; he quickened his pace, but could not get to it, and he realised presently that it was a mirage which receded as he advanced. There was no pleasant summer twilight; the sunset was succeeded by an indefinite gloom, and while this shadow hung overhead the yellow vapour around was faintly radiant. Felix suddenly stopped, having stepped, as he thought, on a skeleton.

Another glance, however, showed that it was merely the impression of one, the actual bones had long since disappeared. The ribs, the skull, and limbs were drawn on the black ground in white lines as if it had been done with a broad piece of chalk. Close by he found three

or four more, intertangled and superimposed as if the unhappy beings had fallen partly across each other, and in that position had mouldered away leaving nothing but their outline. From among a variety of objects that were scattered about Felix picked up something that shone; it was a diamond bracelet of one large stone, and a small square of blue china-tile with a curious heraldic animal drawn on it. Evidently these had belonged to one or other of the party who had perished.

Though startled at the first sight, it was curious that Felix felt so little horror; the idea did not occur to him that he was in danger as these had been. Inhaling the gaseous emanations from the soil and contained in the yellow vapour, he had become narcotised, and moved as if under the influence of opium, while wide awake, and capable of rational conduct. His senses were deadened, and did not carry the usual vivid impression to the mind; he saw things as if they were afar off. Accidentally looking back, he found that his footmarks, as far as he could see, shone with a phosphoric light like that of 'touchwood' in the dark. Near at hand they did not shine; the appearance did not come till some few minutes had elapsed. His track was visible behind till the vapour hid it. As the evening drew on the vapour became more luminous, and somewhat resembled an aurora.

Still anxious for water he proceeded as straight ahead as he could, and shortly became conscious of an indefinite cloud which kept pace with him on either side. When he turned to look at either of the clouds, the one looked at disappeared. It was not condensed enough to be visible to direct vision, yet he was aware of it from the corner of his eye. Shapeless and threatening, the gloomy thickness of the air floated beside him like the vague monster of a dream. Sometimes he fancied that he saw an arm or a limb among the folds of the cloud, or an approach to a face; the instant he looked it vanished. Marching at each hand these vapours bore him horrible company.

His brain became unsteady, and flickering things moved about him; yet, though alarmed, he was not afraid; his senses were not acute enough for fear. The heat increased, his hands were intolerably hot as if he had been in a fever, he panted, but did not perspire. A dry heat like an oven burned his blood in his veins. His head felt enlarged, and his eyes seemed alight; he could see these two globes of phosphoric light under his brows. They seemed to stand out so that he could see them. He thought his path straight, it was really curved; nor did he know that he staggered as he walked.

Presently a white object appeared ahead; and on coming to it, he found it was a wall, white as snow, with some kind of crystal. He touched it, when the wall fell immediately with a crushing sound as if

pulverised, and disappeared in a vast cavern at his feet. Beyond this chasm he came to more walls like those of houses, such as would be left if the roofs fell in. He carefully avoided touching them, for they seemed as brittle as glass, and merely a white powder having no consistency at all. As he advanced these remnants of buildings increased in number, so that he had to wind in and out and round them. In some places the crystallised wall had fallen of itself, and he could see down into the cavern; for the house had either been built partly underground, or, which was more probable, the ground had risen. Whether the walls had been of bricks or stone or other material he could not tell; they were now like salt.

Soon wearying of winding round these walls, Felix returned and retraced his steps till he was outside the place, and then went on towards the left. Not long after, as he still walked in a dream and without feeling his feet, he descended a slight slope and found the ground change in colour from black to a dull red. In his dazed state he had taken several steps out into this red before he noticed that it was liquid, unctuous and slimy, like a thick oil. It deepened rapidly and was already over his shoes; he returned to the black shore and stood looking out over the water, if such it could be called.

The luminous yellow vapour had now risen a height of ten or fifteen feet, and formed a roof both over the land and over the red water, under which it was possible to see for a great distance. The surface of the red oil or viscid liquid was perfectly smooth, and, indeed, it did not seem as if any wind could rouse a wave on it, much less that a swell should be left after the gale had gone down. Disappointed in his search for water to drink, Felix mechanically turned to go back.

He followed his luminous footmarks, which he could see a long way before him. His trail curved so much that he made many short cuts across the winding line he had left. His weariness was now so intense that all feeling had departed. His feet, his limbs, his arms, and hands were numbed. The subtle poison of the emanations from the earth had begun to deaden his nerves. It seemed a full hour or more to him till he reached the spot where the skeletons were drawn in white upon the ground.

He passed a few yards to one side of them, and stumbled over a heap of something which he did not observe, as it was black like the level ground. It emitted a metallic sound, and looking he saw that he had kicked his foot against a great heap of money. The coins were black as ink; he picked up a handful and went on. Hitherto Felix had accepted all that he saw as something so strange as to be unaccountable. During his advance into this region in the canoe he had in fact

become slowly stupefied by the poisonous vapour he had inhaled. His mind was partly in abeyance; it acted, but only after some time had elapsed. He now at last began to realise his position; the finding of the heap of blackened money touched a chord of memory. These skeletons were the miserable relics of men who had ventured, in search of ancient treasures, into the deadly marshes over the site of the mightiest city of former days. The deserted and utterly extinct city of London was under his feet.

He had penetrated into the midst of that dreadful place, of which he had heard many a tradition: how the earth was poison, the water poison, the air poison, the very light of heaven, falling through such an atmosphere, poison. There were said to be places where the earth was on fire and belched forth sulphurous fumes, supposed to be from the combustion of the enormous stores of strange and unknown chemicals collected by the wonderful people of those times. Upon the surface of the water there was a greenish-yellow oil, to touch which was death to any creature; it was the very essence of corruption. Sometimes it floated before the wind, and fragments became attached to reeds or flags far from the place itself. If a moorhen or duck chanced to rub the reed, and but one drop stuck to its feathers, it forthwith died. Of the red waters he had not heard, nor of the black, into which he had unwittingly sailed.

Ghastly beings haunted the site of so many crimes, shapeless monsters, hovering by night, and weaving a fearful dance. Frequently they caught fire, as it seemed, and burned as they flew or floated in the air. Remembering these stories, which in part, at least, seemed now to be true, Felix glanced aside, where the cloud still kept pace with him, and involuntarily put his hands to his ears lest the darkness of the air should whisper some horror of old times. The earth on which he walked, the black earth, leaving phosphoric footmarks behind him, was composed of the mouldered bodies of millions of men who had passed away in the centuries during which the city existed. He shuddered as he moved; he hastened, yet could not go fast, his numbed limbs would not permit him.

He dreaded lest he should fall and sleep and wake no more, like the searchers after treasure; treasure which they had found only to lose for ever. He looked around, supposing that he might see the gleaming head and shoulders of the half-buried giant, of which he recollected he had been told. The giant was punished for some crime by being buried to the chest in the earth; fire incessantly consumed his head and played about it, yet it was not destroyed. The learned thought, if such a thing really existed, that it must be the upper part

of an ancient brazen statue, kept bright by the action of acid in the atmosphere, and shining with reflected light. Felix did not see it, and shortly afterwards surmounted the hill, and looked down upon his canoe. It was on fire.

CHAPTER XXIV

FIERY VAPOURS

FELIX tried to run, but his feet would not rise from the ground; his limbs were numb as in a nightmare; he could not get there. His body would not obey his will. In reality he did move, but more slowly than when he walked. By degrees approaching the canoe his alarm subsided, for although it burned it was not injured; the canvas of the sail was not even scorched. When he got to it the flames had disappeared, like Jack-o'-the-lantern, the phosphoric fire receded from him. With all his strength he strove to launch her, yet paused, for over the surface of the black water, now smooth and waveless, played immense curling flames, stretching out like endless serpents, weaving, winding, rolling over each other. Suddenly they contracted into a ball, which shone with a steady light, and was as large as the full moon. The ball swept along, rose a little, and from it flew out long streamers till it was unwound in fiery threads.

But remembering that the flames had not even scorched the canvas, he pushed the canoe afloat, determined at any risk to leave this dreadful place. To his joy he felt a faint air rising, it cooled his forehead, but was not enough to fill the sail. He paddled with all the strength he had left. The air seemed to come from exactly the opposite direction to what it had previously blown, some point of east he supposed. Labour as hard as he would, the canoe moved slowly, being so heavy. It seemed as if the black water was thick and clung to her, retarding motion. Still, he did move, and in time (it seemed, indeed, a time) he left the island, which disappeared in the luminous vapours. Uncertain as to the direction, he got his compass, but it would not act; the needle had no life, it swung and came to rest, pointing any way as it chanced. It was demagnetised. Felix resolved to trust to the wind, which he was certain blew from the opposite quarter, and would therefore carry him out. The stars he could not see for the vapour, which formed a roof above him.

The wind was rising, but in uncertain gusts; however, he hoisted the sail, and floated slowly before it. Nothing but excitement could have kept him awake. Reclining in the canoe, he watched the serpent-like flames playing over the surface, and forced himself by sheer power of will not to sleep. The two dark clouds which had accompanied him to

the shore now faded away, and the cooling wind enabled him to bear up better against his parching thirst. His hope was to reach the clear and beautiful Lake; his dread that in the uncertain light he might strike a concealed sandbank and become firmly fixed.

Twice he passed islands, distinguishable as masses of visible darkness. While the twisted flames played up to the shore, and the luminous vapour overhung the ground, the island itself appeared as a black mass. The wind became by degrees steadier, and the canoe shot swiftly over the water. His hopes rose; he sat up and kept a keener look-out ahead. All at once the canoe shook as if she had struck a rock. She vibrated from one end to the other, and stopped for a moment in her course. Felix sprang up alarmed. At the same instant a bellowing noise reached him, succeeded by a frightful belching and roaring, as if a volcano had burst forth under the surface of the water; he looked back but could see nothing. The canoe had not touched ground; she sailed as rapidly as before.

Again the shock, and again the hideous roaring, as if some force beneath the water were forcing itself up, vast bubbles rising and bursting. Fortunately it was at a great distance. Hardly was it silent before it was reiterated for the third time. Next Felix felt the canoe heave up, and he was aware that a large roller had passed under him. A second and a third followed. They were without crests, and were not raised by the wind; they obviously started from the scene of the disturbance. Soon afterwards the canoe moved quicker, and he detected a strong current setting in the direction he was sailing.

The noise did not recur, nor did any more rollers pass under. Felix felt better and less dazed, but his weariness and sleepiness increased every moment. He fancied that the serpent flames were less brilliant or farther apart, and that the luminous vapour was thinner. How long he sat at the rudder he could not tell; he noticed that it seemed to grow darker, the serpent flames faded away, and the luminous vapour was succeeded by something like the natural gloom of night. At last he saw a star overhead, and hailed it with joy. He thought of Aurora; the next instant he fell back in the canoe firm asleep.

His arm, however, still retained the rudder-paddle in position, so that the canoe sped on with equal swiftness. She would have struck more than one of the sandbanks and islets had it not been for the strong current that was running. Instead of carrying her against the banks this warded her off, for it drew her between the islets in the channels where it ran fastest, and the undertow, where it struck the shore, bore her back from the land. Driving before the wind, the canoe swept onward steadily to the west. In an hour it had passed the line of the

black water, and entered the sweet Lake. Another hour and all trace of the marshes had utterly disappeared, the last faint glow of the vapour had vanished. The dawn of the coming summer's day appeared, and the sky became a lovely azure. The canoe sailed on, but Felix remained immovable in slumber.

Long since the strong current had ceased, it scarcely extended into the sweet waters, and the wind only impelled the canoe. As the sun rose the breeze gradually fell away, and in an hour or so there was only a light air. The canoe had left most of the islets and was approaching the open Lake when, as she passed almost the last, the yard caught the overhanging branch of a willow, the canoe swung round and grounded gently under the shadow of the tree. For some time the little wavelets beat against the side of the boat, gradually they ceased, and the clear and beautiful water became still. Felix slept till nearly noon, when he awoke and sat up. At the sudden movement a pike struck, and two moorhens scuttled out of the water into the grass on the shore. A thrush was singing sweetly, whitethroats were busy in the bushes, and swallows swept by overhead.

Felix drew a long deep breath of intense relief; it was like awaking in Paradise. He snatched up a cup, dipped, and satisfied his craving thirst, then washed his hands over the side, and threw the water over his face. But when he came to stand up and move, he found that his limbs were almost powerless. Like a child he tottered, his joints had no strength, his legs tingled as if they had been benumbed. He was so weak he crawled on all fours along to the mast, furlled the sail kneeling, and dragged himself rather than stepped ashore with the painter. The instant he had fastened the rope to a branch, he threw himself at full length on the grass, and grasped a handful of it. Merely to touch the grass after such an experience was intense delight.

The song of the thrush, the chatter of the whitethroats, the sight of a hedge-sparrow, gave him inexpressible pleasure. Lying on the sward he watched the curves traced by the swallows in the sky. From the sedges came the curious cry of the moorhen; a bright kingfisher went by. He rested as he had never rested before. His whole body, his whole being was resigned to rest. It was fully two hours before he rose and crept on all fours into the canoe for food. There was only sufficient left for one meal, but that gave him no concern now he was out of the marshes; he could fish and use his crossbow.

He now observed what had escaped him during the night, the canoe was black from end to end. Stem, stern, gunwale,* thwart, outrigger,

* The upper edge or lip of a ship or boat.

mast and sail were black. The stain did not come off on being touched, it seemed burnt in. As he leaned over the side to dip water, and saw his reflection, he started; his face was black, his clothes were black, his hair black. In his eagerness to drink, the first time, he had noticed nothing. His hands were less dark; contact with the paddle and ropes had partly rubbed it off, he supposed. He washed, but the water did not materially diminish the discoloration.

After eating, he returned to the grass and rested again; and it was not till the sun was sinking that he felt any return of vigour. Still weak, but able now to walk, leaning on a stick, he began to make a camp for the coming night. But a few scraps, the remnant of his former meal, were left; on these he supped after a fashion, and long before the white owl began his rounds Felix was fast asleep on his hunter's hide from the canoe. He found next morning that the island was small, only a few acres; it was well-wooded, dry, and sandy in places. He had little inclination or strength to resume his expedition; he erected a booth of branches, and resolved to stay a few days till his strength returned.

By shooting wildfowl, and fishing, he fared very well, and soon recovered. In two days the discoloration of the skin had faded to an olive tint, which, too, grew fainter. The canoe lost its blackness, and became a rusty colour. By rubbing the coins he had carried away he found they were gold; part of the inscription remained, but he could not read it. The blue china-tile was less injured than the metal; after washing it, it was bright. But the diamond pleased him most; it would be a splendid present for Aurora. Never had he seen anything like it in the palaces; he believed it was twice the size of the largest possessed by any king or prince.

It was as big as his finger nail, and shone and gleamed in the sunlight, sparkling and reflecting the beams. Its value must be very great. But well he knew how dangerous it would be to exhibit it; on some pretext or other he would be thrown into prison, and the gem seized. It must be hidden with the greatest care till he could produce it in Thyma Castle, when the Baron would protect it. Felix regretted now that he had not searched further; perhaps he might have found other treasures for Aurora; the next instant he repudiated his greed, and was only thankful that he had escaped with his life. He wondered and marvelled that he had done so, it was so well known that almost all who had ventured in had perished.

Reflecting on the circumstances which had accompanied his entrance to the marshes, the migration of the birds seemed almost the most singular. They were evidently flying from some apprehended danger, and that most probably would be in the air. The gale at that time, however,

was blowing in a direction which would appear to ensure safety to them; into, and not out of, the poisonous marshes. Did they, then, foresee that it would change? Did they expect it to veer like a cyclone and presently blow east with the same vigour as it then blew west? That would carry the vapour from the inky waters out over the sweet Lake, and might even cause the foul water itself to temporarily encroach on the sweet. The more he thought of it, the more he felt convinced that this was the explanation; and, as a fact, the wind, after dropping, did arise again and blow from the east, though, as it happened, not with nearly the same strength. It fell, too, before long, fortunately for him. Clearly the birds had anticipated a cyclone, and that the wind turning would carry the gases out upon them to their destruction. They had therefore hurried away, and the fishes had done the same.

The velocity of the gale which had carried him into the black waters had proved his safety, by driving before it the thicker and most poisonous portion of the vapour, compressing it towards the east, so that he had entered the dreaded precincts under favourable conditions. When it dropped, while he was on the black island, he soon began to feel the effect of the gases rising imperceptibly from the soil, and had he not had the good fortune to escape so soon no doubt he would have fallen a victim. He could not congratulate himself sufficiently upon his good fortune. The other circumstances appeared to be due to the decay of the ancient city, to the decomposition of accumulated matter, to phosphorescence and gaseous exhalations. The black rocks that crumbled at a touch were doubtless the remains of ancient buildings saturated with the dark water and vapours. Inland similar remains were white, and resembled salt.

But the great explosions which occurred as he was leaving, and which sent heavy rollers after him, were not easily understood, till he remembered that in Sylvester's 'Book of Natural Things' it was related that 'the ancient city had been undermined with vast conduits, sewers, and tunnels, and that these communicated with the sea'. It had been much disputed whether the sea did or did not still send its tides up to the site of the old quays. Felix now thought that the explosions were due to compressed air, or more probably to gases met with by the ascending tide.

CHAPTER XXV

THE SHEPHERDS

FOR four days Felix remained on the island recovering his strength. By degrees the memory of the scenes he had witnessed grew less vivid, and his nerves regained their tone. The fifth morning he sailed again, making due south with a gentle breeze from the west, which suited the canoe very well. He considered that he was now at the eastern extremity of the Lake, and that by sailing south he should presently reach the place where the shore turned to the east again. The sharp prow of the canoe cut swiftly through the waves, a light spray flew occasionally in his face, and the wind blew pleasantly. In the cloudless sky swallows and swifts were wheeling, and on the water half-a-dozen mallards moved aside to let him pass.

About two hours after he started he encountered a mist which came softly over the surface of the water with the wind, and in an instant shut out all view. Even the sun was scarcely visible. It was very warm, and left no moisture. In five minutes he passed through and emerged again in the bright sunlight. These dry warm mists are frequently seen on the Lake in summer, and are believed to portend a continuance of fine weather.

Felix kept a good distance from the mainland, which was hilly and wooded, and with few islands. Presently he observed in the extreme distance, on his right hand, a line of mountainous hills, which he supposed to be the southern shore of the Lake, and that he was sailing into a gulf or bay. He debated with himself whether he should alter his course and work across to the mountains, or continue to trace the shore. Unless he did trace the shore, he could scarcely say that he had circumnavigated the Lake, as he would leave this great bay unexplored. He continued, therefore, to sail directly south.

The wind freshened towards noon, and the canoe flew at a great pace. Twice he passed through similar mists. There were now no islands at all, but a line of low chalk cliffs marked the shore. Considering that it must be deep, and safe to do so, Felix bore in closer to look at the land. Woods ran along the hills right to the verge of the cliff, but he saw no signs of inhabitants, no smoke, boat, or house. The sound of the surf beating on the beach was audible, though the waves were not

large. High over the cliff he noticed a kite soaring, with forked tail, at a great height.

Immediately afterwards he ran into another mist or vapour, thicker, if anything, and which quite obscured his view. It seemed like a great cloud on the surface of the water, and broader than those he had previously entered. Suddenly the canoe stopped with a tremendous jerk, which pitched him forward on his knees, the mast cracked, and there was a noise of splitting wood. As soon as he could get up, Felix saw, to his bitter sorrow, that the canoe had split longitudinally; the water came up through the split, and the boat was held together only by the beams of the outrigger. He had run aground on a large sharp flint imbedded in a chalk floor, which had split the poplar wood of the canoe like an axe. The voyage was over, for the least strain would cause the canoe to part in two, and if she were washed off the ground she would be water-logged. In half a minute the mist passed, leaving him in the bright day, shipwrecked.

Felix now saw that the waters were white with suspended chalk, and sounding with the paddle, found that the depth was but a few inches. He had driven at full speed on a reef. There was no danger, for the distance to the shore was hardly two hundred yards, and judging by the appearance of the water, it was shallow all the way. But his canoe, the product of so much labour, and in which he had voyaged so far, his canoe was destroyed. He could not repair her; he doubted whether it could have been done successfully even at home with Oliver to help him. He could sail no farther; there was nothing for it but to get ashore and travel on foot. If the wind rose higher, the waves would soon break clean over her, and she would go to pieces.

With a heavy heart, Felix took his paddle and stepped overboard. Feeling with the paddle, he plumbed the depth in front of him, and, as he expected, walked all the way to the shore, no deeper than his knees. This was fortunate, as it enabled him to convey his things to land without loss. He wrapped up the tools and MSS. in one of his hunter's hides. When the whole cargo was landed, he sat down sorrowfully at the foot of the cliff, and looked out at the broken mast and sail, still flapping uselessly in the breeze.

It was a long time before he recovered himself, and set to work mechanically to bury the crossbow, hunter's hides, tools, and MSS. under a heap of pebbles. As the cliff, though low, was perpendicular, he could not scale it, else he would have preferred to conceal them in the woods above. To pile pebbles over them was the best he could do for the present; he intended to return for them when he discovered a path up the cliff. He then started, taking only his bow and arrows.

But no such path was to be found; he walked on and on till weary, and still the cliff ran like a wall on his left hand. After an hour's rest, he started again; and, as the sun was declining, came suddenly to a gap in the cliff, where a grassy sward came down to the shore. It was now too late, and he was too weary, to think of returning for his things that evening. He made a scanty meal, and endeavoured to rest. But the excitement of losing the canoe, the long march since, the lack of good food, all tended to render him restless. Weary, he could not rest, nor move farther. The time passed slowly, the sun sank, the wind ceased; after an interminable time the stars appeared, and still he could not sleep. He had chosen a spot under an oak on the green slope. The night was warm, and even sultry, so that he did not miss his covering, but there was no rest in him. Towards the dawn, which comes very early at that season, he at last slept, with his back to the tree. He awoke with a start in broad daylight, to see a man standing in front of him armed with a long spear.

Felix sprang to his feet, instinctively feeling for his hunting-knife; but he saw in an instant that no injury was meant, for the man was leaning on the shaft of his weapon, and, of course, could, if so he had wished, have run him through while sleeping. They looked at each other for a moment. The stranger was clad in a tunic and wore a hat of plaited straw. He was very tall and strongly built; his single weapon, a spear of twice his own length. His beard came down on his chest. He spoke to Felix in a dialect the latter did not understand. Felix held out his hand as a token of amity, which the other took. He spoke again. Felix, on his part, tried to explain his shipwreck, when a word the stranger uttered recalled to Felix's memory the peculiar dialect used by the shepherd race on the hills in the neighbourhood of his home.

He spoke in this dialect, which the stranger in part at least understood, and the sound of which at once rendered him more friendly. By degrees they comprehended each other's meaning the easier, as the shepherd had come the same way and had seen the wreck of the canoe. Felix learned that the shepherd was a scout sent on ahead to see that the road was clear of enemies. His tribe were on the march with their flocks, and to avoid the steep woods and hills which there blocked their course, they had followed the level and open beach at the foot of the cliff, aware, of course, of the gap which Felix had found. While they were talking, Felix saw the cloud of dust raised by the sheep as the flocks wound round a jutting buttress of cliff.

His friend explained that they marched in the night and early morning to avoid the heat of the day. Their proposed halting-place was close at hand; he must go on and see that all was clear. Felix accompanied

him, and found within the wood at the summit a grassy coombe, where a spring rose. The shepherd threw down his spear, and began to dam up the channel of the spring with stones, flints, and sods of earth, in order to form a pool at which the sheep might drink. Felix assisted him, and the water speedily began to rise.

The flocks were not allowed to rush tumultuously to the water, they came in about fifty at a time, each division with its shepherds and their dogs, so that confusion was avoided and all had their share. There were about twenty of these divisions, besides eighty cows and a few goats. They had no horses; their baggage came on the backs of asses.

After the whole of the flocks and herds had been watered several fires were lit by the women, who in stature and hardihood scarcely differed from the men. Not till this work was over did the others gather about Felix to hear his story. Finding that he was hungry they ran to the baggage for food, and pressed on him a little dark bread, plentiful cheese and butter, dried tongue, and horns of mead. He could not devour a fiftieth part of what these hospitable people brought him. Having nothing else to give them, he took from his pocket one of the gold coins he had brought from the site of the ancient city, and offered it.

They laughed, and made him understand that it was of no value to them; but they passed it from hand to hand, and he noticed that they began to look at him curiously. From its blackened appearance they conjectured whence he had obtained it; one, too, pointed to his shoes, which were still blackened, and appeared to have been scorched. The whole camp now pressed on him, their wonder and interest rising to a great height. With some trouble Felix described his journey over the site of the ancient city, interrupted with constant exclamations, questions, and excited conversation. He told them everything, except about the diamond.

Their manner towards him perceptibly altered. From the first they had been hospitable; they now became respectful, and even reverent. The elders and their chief, not to be distinguished by dress or ornament from the rest, treated him with ceremony and marked deference. The children were brought to see and even to touch him. So great was their amazement that any one should have escaped from these pestilential vapours, that they attributed it to divine interposition, and looked upon him with some of the awe of superstition. He was asked to stay with them altogether, and to take command of the tribe.

The latter Felix declined; to stay with them for awhile, at least, he was, of course, willing enough. He mentioned his hidden possessions, and got up to return for them, but they would not permit him. Two

men started at once. He gave them the bearings of the spot, and they had not the least doubt but that they should find it, especially as, the wind being still, the canoe would not yet have broken up, and would guide them. The tribe remained in the green coombe the whole day, resting from their long journey. They wearied Felix with questions, still he answered them as copiously as he could; he felt too grateful for their kindness not to satisfy them. His bow was handled, his arrows carried about so that the quiver for the time was empty, and the arrows scattered in twenty hands. He astonished them by exhibiting his skill with the weapon, striking a tree with an arrow at nearly three hundred yards.

Though familiar, of course, with the bow, they had never seen shooting like that, nor, indeed, any archery except at short quarters. They had no other arms themselves but spears and knives. Seeing one of the women cutting the boughs from a fallen tree, dead and dry, and, therefore, preferable for fuel, Felix naturally went to help her, and, taking the axe, soon made a bundle, which he carried for her. It was his duty as a noble to see that no woman, not a slave, laboured; he had been bred in that idea, and would have felt disgraced had he permitted it. The women looked on with astonishment, for in these rude tribes the labour of the women was considered valuable and appraised like that of a horse.

Without any conscious design, Felix thus in one day conciliated and won the regard of the two most powerful parties in the camp, the chief and the women. By his refusing the command the chief was flattered, and his possible hostility prevented. The act of cutting the wood and carrying the bundle gave him the hearts of the women. They did not, indeed, think their labour in any degree oppressive; still, to be relieved of it was pleasing.

The two men who had gone for Felix's buried treasure did not return till breakfast next morning. They stepped into the camp, each with his spear reddened and dripping with fresh blood. Felix no sooner saw the blood than he fainted. He quickly recovered, but he could not endure the sight of the spears, which were removed and hidden from his view. He had seen blood enough spilt at the siege of Iwis, but this came upon him in all its horror unrelieved by the excitement of war.

The two shepherds had been dogged by gipsies, and had been obliged to make a round to escape. They took their revenge by climbing into trees, and as their pursuers passed under thrust them through with their long spears. The shepherds, like all their related tribes, had been at feud with the gipsies for many generations. The gipsies followed them to and from their pastures, cut off stragglers, destroyed or stole

their sheep and cattle, and now and then overwhelmed a whole tribe. Of late the contest had become more sanguinary and almost ceaseless.

Mounted on swift, though small, horses, the gipsies had the advantage of the shepherds. On the other hand, the shepherds, being men of great stature and strength, could not be carried away by a rush if they had time to form a circle, as was their custom of battle. They lost many men by the javelins thrown by the gipsies, who rode up to the edge of the circle, cast their darts and retreated. If the shepherds left their circle they were easily ridden over; while they maintained formation they lost individuals, but saved the mass. Battles were of rare occurrence; the gipsies watched for opportunities and executed raids, the shepherds retaliated, and thus the endless war continued. The shepherds invariably posted sentinels, and sent forward scouts to ascertain if the way were clear. Accustomed to the horrid scenes of war from childhood, they could not understand Felix's sensitiveness.

They laughed, and then petted him like a spoilt child. This galled him exceedingly; he felt humiliated, and eager to reassert his manhood. He was willing to stay with them before for awhile, nothing would have induced him to leave them now till he had vindicated himself in their sight. The incident happened soon after sunrise, which is very early at the end of June. The camp had only waited for the return of these men, and on their appearance began to move. The march that morning was not a long one, as the sky was clear and the heat soon wearied the flocks. Felix accompanied the scout in advance, armed with his bow, eager to encounter the gipsies.

CHAPTER XXVI

BOW AND ARROW

THREE mornings the shepherds marched in the same manner, when they came in view of a range of hills so high that to Felix they appeared mountains. The home of the tribe was in these hills, and once there they were comparatively safe from attack. In early spring when the herbage on the downs was scarce, the flocks moved to the meadow-like lands far in the valleys; in summer they returned to the hills; in autumn they went to the vales again. Soon after noon on the third day the scouts reported that a large body of gipsies were moving in a direction which would cut off their course to the hills on the morrow.

The chief held a council, and it was determined that a forced march should be made at once by another route, more to the left, and it was thought that in this way they might reach the base of the slopes by evening. The distance was not great, and could easily have been traversed by the men; the flocks and herds, however, could not be hurried much. A messenger was despatched to the hills for assistance, and the march began. It was a tedious movement. Felix was wearied, and walked in a drowsy state. Towards six o'clock, as he guessed, the trees began to thin, and the column reached the first slopes of the hills. Here about thirty shepherds joined them, a contingent from the nearest camp. It was considered that the danger was now past, and that the gipsies would not attack them on the hill; but it was a mistake.

A large body almost immediately appeared, coming along the slope on the right, not less than two hundred; and from their open movements and numbers it was evident that they intended battle. The flocks and herds were driven hastily into a coombe, or narrow valley, and there left to their fate. All the armed men formed in a circle; the women occupied the centre. Felix took his stand outside the circle by a gnarled and decayed oak. There was just there a slight rise in the ground, which he knew would give him some advantage in discharging his arrows, and would also allow him a clear view. His friends earnestly entreated him to enter the circle, and even sought to bring him within it by force, till he explained to them that he could not shoot if so surrounded, and promised if the gipsies charged to rush inside.

Felix unslung his quiver, and placed it on the ground before him;

a second quiver he put beside it; four or five arrows he stuck upright in the sward, so that he could catch hold of them quickly; two arrows he held in his left hand, another he fitted to the string. Thus prepared, he watched the gipsies advance. They came walking their short wiry horses to within half-a-mile, when they began to trot down the slope; they could not surround the shepherds because of the steep-sided coombe and some brushwood, and could advance only on two fronts. Felix rapidly became so excited that his sight was affected, and his head whirled. His heart beat with such speed that his breath seemed going. His limbs tottered, and he dreaded lest he should faint.

His intensely nervous organisation, strung up to its highest pitch, shook him in its grasp, and his will was powerless to control it. He felt that he should disgrace himself once more before these rugged but brave shepherds, who betrayed not the slightest symptom of agitation. For one hour of Oliver's calm courage and utter absence of nervousness he would have given years of his life. His friends in the circle observed his agitation, and renewed their entreaties to him to come inside it. This only was needed to complete his discomfiture. He lost his head altogether; he saw nothing but a confused mass of yellow and red rushing towards him, for each of the gipsies wore a yellow or red scarf, some about the body, some over the shoulder, others round the head. They were now within three hundred yards.

A murmur from the shepherd spearmen. Felix had discharged an arrow. It stuck in the ground about twenty paces from him. He shot again; it flew wild and quivering, and dropped harmlessly. Another murmur; they expressed to each other their contempt for the bow. This immediately restored Felix; he forgot the enemy as an enemy, he forgot himself; he thought only of his skill as an archer, now in question. Pride upheld him. The third arrow he fitted properly to the string, he planted his left foot slightly in advance, and looked steadfastly at the horsemen before he drew his bow.

At a distance of one hundred and fifty yards they had paused, and were widening out so as to advance in loose open rank and allow each man to throw his javelin. They shouted; the spearmen in the circle replied, and levelled their spears. Felix fixed his eye on one of the gipsies who was ordering and marshalling the rest, a chief. He drew the arrow swiftly but quietly, the string hummed, the pliant yew obeyed, and the long arrow shot forward in a steady swift flight like a line of gossamer drawn through the air. It missed the chief, but pierced the horse he rode just in front of the rider's thigh. The maddened horse reared and fell backwards on his rider.

The spearmen shouted. Before the sound could leave their lips

another arrow had sped; a gipsy threw up his arms with a shriek; the arrow had gone through his body. A third, a fourth, a fifth; six gipsies rolled on the sward. Shout upon shout rent the air from the spearmen. Utterly unused to this mode of fighting, the gipsies fell back. Still the fatal arrows pursued them, and ere they were out of range three others fell. Now the rage of battle burned in Felix; his eyes gleamed, his lips were open, his nostrils wide like a horse running a race. He shouted to the spearmen to follow him, and snatching up his quiver ran forward. Gathered together in a group, the gipsy band consulted.

Felix ran at full speed; swift of foot, he left the heavy spearmen behind. Alone he approached the horsemen; all the Aquila courage was up within him. He kept the higher ground as he ran, and stopped suddenly on a little knoll or tumulus. His arrow flew, a gipsy fell. Again, and a third. Their anger gave them fresh courage; to be repulsed by one only! Twenty of them started to charge and run him down. The keen arrows flew faster than their horses' feet. Now the horse and now the man met those sharp points. Six fell; the rest returned. The shepherds came running; Felix ordered them to charge the gipsies. His success gave him authority; they obeyed; and as they charged, he shot nine more arrows; nine more deadly wounds. Suddenly the gipsy band turned and fled into the brushwood on the lower slopes.

Breathless, Felix sat down on the knoll, and the spearmen swarmed around him. Hardly had they begun to speak to him than there was a shout, and they saw a body of shepherds descending the hill. There were three hundred of them; warned by the messenger, the whole country had risen to repel the gipsies. Too late to join in the fight, they had seen the last of it. They examined the field. There were ten dead and six wounded, who were taken prisoners; the rest escaped, though hurt. In many cases the arrow had gone clean through the body. Then, for the first time, they understood the immense power of the yew bow in strong and skilful hands.

Felix was overwhelmed; they almost crushed him with their attentions; the women fell at his feet and kissed them. But the archer could scarcely reply; his intense nervous excitement had left him weak and almost faint; his one idea was to rest. As he walked back to the camp between the chiefs of the shepherd spearmen, his eyes closed, his limbs tottered, and they had to support him. At the camp he threw himself on the sward, under the gnarled oak, and was instantly fast asleep. Immediately the camp was stilled, not to disturb him.

His adventures in the marshes of the buried city, his canoe, his archery, were talked of the livelong night. Next morning the camp set out for their home in the mountains, and he was escorted by nearly

four hundred spearmen. They had saved for him the ornaments of the gipsies who had fallen, golden earrings and nose-rings. He gave them to the women, except one, a finger ring, set with turquoise, and evidently of ancient make, which he kept for Aurora. Two marches brought them to the home of the tribe, where the rest of the spearmen left them. The place was called Wolfstead.

Felix saw at once how easily this spot might be fortified. There was a deep and narrow valley like a groove or green trench opening to the south. At the upper end of the valley rose a hill, not very high, but steep, narrow at the ridge, and steep again on the other side. Over it was a broad, wooded, and beautiful vale; beyond that again the higher mountains. Towards the foot of the narrow ridge here, there was a succession of chalk cliffs, so that to climb up on that side in the face of opposition would be extremely difficult. In the gorge of the enclosed narrow valley a spring rose. The shepherds had formed eight pools, one after the other, water being of great importance to them; and farther down, where the valley opened, there were forty or fifty acres of irrigated meadow. The spring then ran into a considerable brook, across which was the forest.

Felix's idea was to run a palisade along the margin of the brook, and up both sides of the valley to the ridge. There he would build a fort. The edges of the chalk cliffs he would connect with a palisade or a wall, and so form a complete enclosure. He mentioned his scheme to the shepherds; they did not greatly care for it, as they had always been secure without it, the rugged nature of the country not permitting horsemen to penetrate. But they were so completely under his influence that to please him they set about the work. He had to show them how to make a palisade; they had never seen one, and he made the first part of it himself. At building a wall with loose stones, without mortar, the shepherds were skilful; the wall along the verge of the cliffs was soon up, and so was the fort on the top of the ridge. The fort consisted merely of a circular wall, breast high, with embrasures or crenellations.*

When this was finished, Felix had a sense of mastership, for in this fort he felt as if he could rule the whole country. From day to day shepherds came from the more distant parts to see the famous archer, and to admire the enclosure. Though the idea of it had never occurred to them, now they saw it they fully understood its advantages, and two other chiefs began to erect similar forts and palisades.

* An embrasure is generally an opening, such as an arrow slit, in a defensive wall. A crenellation usually refers to a series of regular notches at the top of a defensive parapet. Jefferies appears to merge the two terms here.

CHAPTER XXVII

SURPRISED

FELIX was now anxious to continue his journey, yet he did not like to leave the shepherds, with whom his life was so pleasant. As usual, when deliberating, he wandered about the hills, and thus into the forest. The shepherds at first insisted on at least two of their number accompanying him; they were fearful lest the gipsies should seize him, or a Bushman assassinate him. This company was irksome to Felix. In time he convinced them that he was a much better hunter than any of the tribe, and they permitted him to roam alone. During one of these excursions into the forest he discovered a beautiful lake. He looked down on the water from the summit of one of the green mountains.

It was, he thought, half a mile across, and the opposite shore was open woodland, grassy and meadow-like, and dotted with fine old oaks. By degrees these closed together, and the forest succeeded; beyond it again, at a distance of two miles, were green hills. A little clearing only was wanted to make the place fit for a castle and enclosure. Through the grass land opposite he traced the course of a large brook down to the lake; another entered it on the right, and the lake gradually narrowed to a river on his left. Could he erect a tower there, and bring Aurora to it, how happy he would be! A more beautiful spot he had never seen, nor one more suited for every purpose of life.

He followed the course of the stream which left the lake, every now and then disturbing wild goats from the cliffs, and twice he saw deer under the oaks across it. On rounding a spur of down he saw that the river debouched into a much wider lake, which he conjectured must be the Sweet Waters. He went on till he reached the mouth of the river, and had then no doubt that he was standing once more on the shore of the Sweet Water sea. On this, the southern side, the banks were low; on the other, a steep chalky cliff almost overhung the river, and jutted out into the lake, curving somewhat towards him. A fort on that cliff would command the entrance to the river; the cliff was a natural breakwater, so that there was a haven at its base. The river appeared broad and deep enough for navigation, so that vessels could pass from the great Lake to the inland water; about six or seven miles, he supposed.

Felix was much taken with this spot; the beauty of the inland lake, the evident richness of the soil, the river communicating with the great Lake, the cliff commanding its entrance; never, in all his wanderings, had he seen a district so well suited for a settlement and the founding of a city. If he had but a thousand men! How soon he would bring Aurora there, and build a tower, and erect a palisade! So occupied was he with the thought that he returned the whole distance to the spot where he had made the discovery. There he remained a long time, designing it all in his mind.

The tower he would build yonder, threequarters of a mile, perhaps a mile, inland from the opposite shore, on a green knoll, at the base of which the brook flowed. It would be even more pleasant there than on the shore of the lake. The forest he would clear back a little, and put up a stout palisade, enclosing at least three miles of grassy land. By the shore of the lake he would build his town, so that his vessels might be able to go forth into the great Sweet Water sea. So strongly did imagination hold him that he did not observe how near it was to sunset, nor did he remark the threatening aspect of the sky. Thunder awoke him from his dream; he looked, and saw a storm rapidly coming from the north-east.

He descended the hill, and sheltered himself as well as possible among some thick fir trees. After the lightning, the rain poured so heavily that it penetrated the branches, and he unstrung his bow and placed the string in his pocket, that it might not become wet. Instantly there was a whoop on either side, and two gipsies darted from the undergrowth towards him. While the terrible bow was bent they had followed him, tracking his footsteps; the moment he unstrung the bow, they rushed out. Felix crushed through between the firs, by main force getting through, but only opening a passage for them to follow. They could easily have thrust their darts through him, but their object was to take him alive, and gratify the revenge of the tribes with torture.

Felix doubled from the firs, and made towards the far-distant camp; but he was faced by three more gipsies. He turned again and made for the steep hill he had descended. With all his strength he raced up it; his lightness of foot carried him in advance, and he reached the summit a hundred yards ahead; but he knew he must be overtaken presently, unless he could hit upon some stratagem. In the instant that he paused to breathe on the summit a thought struck him. Like the wind he raced along the ridge, making for the great Sweet Water, the same path he had followed in the morning. Once on the ridge the five pursuers shouted; they knew they should have him now there were no more hills to breast. It was not so easy as they imagined.

Felix was in splendid training; he kept his lead, and even drew a little on them. Still he knew in time he must succumb, just as the stag, though swifter of foot, ultimately succumbs to the hounds. They would track him till they had him. If only he could gain enough to have time to string and bend his bow! But with all his efforts he could not get away more than the hundred yards, and that was not far enough. It could be traversed in ten seconds, they would have him before he could string it and fit an arrow. If only he had been fresh as in the morning! But he had had a long walk during the day and not much food. He knew that his burst of speed must soon slacken, but he had a stratagem yet.

Keeping along the ridge till he reached the place where the lake narrowed to the river, suddenly he rushed down the hill towards the water. The edge was encumbered with brushwood and fallen trees; he scrambled over and through anyhow; he tore a path through the bushes and plunged in. But his jacket caught in a branch; he had his knife out and cut off the shred of cloth. Then with the bow and knife in one hand he struck out for the opposite shore. His hope was that the gipsies, being horsemen, and passing all their lives on their horses, might not know how to swim. His conjecture was right; they stopped on the brink, and yelled their loudest. When he had passed the middle of the slow stream their rage rose to a shriek, startling a heron far down the water.

Felix reached the opposite shore in safety, but the bow-string was now wet and useless. He struck off at once straight across the grass lands, past the oaks he had admired, past the green knoll where in imagination he had built his castle and brought Aurora, through the brook, which he found was larger than it appeared at a distance, and required two or three strokes to cross. A few more paces and the forest sheltered him. Under the trees he rested, and considered what course to pursue. The gipsies would expect him to endeavour to regain his friends, and would watch to cut off his return. Felix determined to make, instead, for another camp farther east, and to get even there by a detour.

Bitterly he reproached himself for his folly in leaving the camp, knowing that gipsies were about, with no other weapon than the bow. The knife at his belt was practically no weapon at all, useful only in the last extremity. Had he had a short sword, or javelin, he would have faced the two gipsies who first sprang towards him. Worse than this was the folly of wandering without the least precaution into a territory at that time full of gipsies, who had every reason to desire his capture. If he had used the ordinary precautions of woodcraft, he would have noticed their traces, and he would not have exposed himself in full view on the ridges of the hills, where a man was visible for miles. If

he perished through his carelessness, how bitter it would be! To lose Aurora by the merest folly would, indeed, be humiliating.

He braced himself to the journey before him, and set off at a good swinging hunter's pace, as it is called, that is, a pace rather more than a walk and less than a run, with the limbs somewhat bent, and long springy steps. The forest was in the worst possible condition for movement; the rain had damped the fern and undergrowth, and every branch showered raindrops upon him. It was now past sunset and the dusk was increasing; this he welcomed as hiding him. He travelled on till nearly dawn, and then, turning to the right, swept round, and regained the line of the mountainous hills after sunrise. There he rested, and reached a camp about nine in the morning, having walked altogether since the preceding morning fully fifty miles. This camp was about fifteen miles from that of his friends; the shepherds knew him, and one of them started with the news of his safety. In the afternoon ten of his friends came over to see him, and to reproach him.

His weariness was so great that for three days he scarcely moved from the hut, during which time the weather was wet and stormy, as is often the case in summer after a thunderstorm. On the fourth morning it was fine, and Felix, now quite restored to his usual strength, went out with the shepherds. He found some of them engaged in throwing up a heap of stones, flint, and chalk lumps near an oak tree in a plain at the foot of the hill. They told him that during the thunderstorm two cows and ten sheep had been killed there by lightning, which had scarcely injured the oak.

It was their custom to pile up a heap of stones wherever such an event occurred, to warn others from staying themselves, or allowing their sheep or cattle to stay, near the spot in thunder, as it was observed that where lightning struck once it was sure to strike again, sooner or later. 'Then,' said Felix, 'you may be sure there is water there!' He knew from his study of the knowledge of the ancients that lightning frequently leaped from trees or buildings to concealed water, but he had no intention of indicating water in that particular spot. He meant the remark in a general sense.

But the shepherds, ever desirous of water, and looking on Felix as a being of a different order to themselves, took his casual observation in its literal sense. They brought their tools and dug, and, as it chanced, found a copious spring. The water gushed forth and formed a streamlet. Upon this the whole tribe gathered, and they saluted Felix as one almost divine. It was in vain that he endeavoured to repel this homage, and to explain the reason of his remark, and that it was only in a general way that he intended it. Facts were too strong for him. They had

heard his words, which they considered an inspiration, and there was the water. It was no use; there was the spring, the very thing they most wanted. Perforce Felix was invested with attributes beyond nature.

The report spread; his own old friends came in a crowd to see the new spring, others journeyed from afar. In a week, Felix having meanwhile returned to Wolfstead, his fame had for the second time spread all over the district. Some came a hundred miles to see him. Nothing he could say was listened to; these simple, straightforward people understood nothing but facts, and the defeat of the gipsies and the discovery of the spring seemed to them little less than supernatural. Besides which, in innumerable little ways Felix's superior knowledge had told upon them. His very manners spoke of high training. His persuasive voice won them. His constructive skill and power of planning, as shown in the palisades and enclosure, showed a grasp of circumstances new to them. This was a man such as they had never before seen.

They began to bring him disputes to settle; he shrank from this position of judge, but it was useless to struggle; they would wait as long as he liked, but his decision they would have, and no other. Next came the sick begging to be cured. Here Felix was firm; he would not attempt to be a physician, and they went away. But, unfortunately, it happened that he let out his knowledge of plants, and back they came. Felix did not know what course to pursue; if by chance he did any one good, crowds would beset him; if injury resulted, perhaps he would be assassinated. This fear was quite unfounded; he really had not the smallest idea how high he stood in their estimation.

After much consideration, Felix hit upon a method which would save him from many inconveniences. He announced his intention of forming a herb-garden in which to grow the best kind of herbs, and at the same time said he would not administer any medicine himself, but would tell their own native physicians and nurses all he knew, so that they could use his knowledge. The herbgarden was at once begun in the valley; it could not contain much till next year, and meantime if any diseased persons came Felix saw them, expressed his opinion to the old shepherd who was the doctor of the tribe, and the latter carried out his instructions. Felix did succeed in relieving some small ailments, and thereby added to his reputation.

CHAPTER XXVIII

FOR AURORA

FELIX now began to find out for himself the ancient truth, that difficulties always confront man. Success only changes them, and increases their number. Difficulties faced him in every direction; at home it had seemed impossible for him to do anything. Now that success seemed to smile on him and he had become a power, instead of everything being smooth and easy, new difficulties sprang up for solution at every point. He wished to continue his journey, but he feared that he would not be permitted to depart. He would have to start away in the night, in which case he could hardly return to them again, and yet he wished to return to these, the first friends he had had, and amongst whom he hoped to found a city.

Another week slipped away, and Felix was meditating his escape, when one afternoon a deputation of ten spearmen arrived from a distant tribe, who had nominated him their king, and sent their principal men to convey the intelligence. Fame is always greatest at a distance, and this tribe in the mountains of the east had actually chosen him as king, and declared that they would obey him whether he took up his residence with them or not. Felix was naturally greatly pleased; how delighted Aurora would be! but he was in perplexity what to do, for he could not tell whether the Wolfstead people would be favourably inclined or would resent his selection.

He had not long to consider. There was an assembly of the tribe, and they, too, chose him by common consent as their king. Secretly they were annoyed that another tribe had been more forward than themselves, and were anxious that Felix should not leave them. Felix declined the honour; in spite of his refusal, he was treated as if he were the most despotic monarch. Four days afterwards two other tribes joined the movement, and sent their acceptance of him as their monarch. Others followed, and so quickly now that a day never passed without another tribe sending a deputation.

Felix thought deeply on the matter. He was, of course, flattered, and ready to accept the dignity, but he was alive to considerations of policy. He resolved that he would not use the title, nor exercise the functions of a king as usually understood. He explained his plan to

the chiefs; it was that he should be called simply 'Leader', the Leader of the War; that he should only assume royal authority in time of war; that the present chiefs should retain their authority, and each govern as before, in accordance with ancient custom. He proposed to be king only during war-time. He would, if they liked, write out their laws for them in a book, and so give their customs cohesion and shape. To this plan the tribes readily agreed; it retained all the former customs, it left the chiefs their simple patriarchal authority, and it gave all of them the advantage of combination in war. As the Leader, Felix was henceforth known.

In the course of a fortnight, upwards of six thousand men had joined the Confederacy, and Felix wrote down the names of twenty tribes on a sheet of parchment which he took from his chest. A hut had long since been built for him; but he received all the deputations, and held the assemblies which were necessary, in the circular fort. He was so pressed to visit the tribes that he could not refuse to go to the nearest, and thus his journey was again postponed. During this progress from tribal camp to tribal camp, Felix gained the adhesion of twelve more, making a total of thirty-two names of camps, representing about eight thousand spearmen. With pride Felix reflected that he commanded a far larger army than the Prince of Ponze. But he was not happy.

Months had now elapsed since he had parted from Aurora. There were no means of communicating with her. A letter could be conveyed only by a special messenger; he could not get a messenger, and even if one had been forthcoming, he could not instruct him how to reach Thyma Castle. He did not know himself; the country was entirely unexplored. Except that the direction was west, he had no knowledge whatever. He had often inquired of the shepherds, but they were perfectly ignorant. Anker's Gate was the most westerly of all their settlements, which chiefly extended eastwards. Beyond Anker's Gate was the trackless forest, of which none but the Bushmen knew anything. They did not understand what he meant by a map; all they could tell him was that the range of mountainous hills continued westerly and southerly for an unascertained distance, and that the country was uninhabited except by wandering gipsy tribes.

South was the sea, the salt water; but they never went down to it, or near it, because there was no sustenance for their flocks and herds. Till now, Felix did not know that he was near the sea; he resolved at once to visit it. As nearly as he could discover, the great fresh water Lake did not reach any farther south; Wolfstead was not far from its southern margin. He concluded, therefore, that the shore of the Lake must run continually westward, and that if he followed it he should ultimately

reach the very creek from which he had started in the canoe. How far it was he could not reckon.

There were none of the shepherds who could be sent with a letter; they were not hunters, and were unused to woodcraft; there was not one capable of the journey. Unless he went himself he could not communicate with Aurora. Two routes were open to him, one straight through the forest on foot, the other by water, which latter entailed the construction of another canoe. Journey by water, too, he had found was subject to unforeseen risks. Till he could train some of the younger men to row a galley, he decided not to attempt the voyage. There was but the forest route left, and that he resolved to attempt; but when? And how, without offending his friends?

Meantime, while he revolved the subject in his mind, he visited the river and the shore of the great Lake, this time accompanied by ten spears. The second visit only increased his admiration of the place and his desire to take possession of it. He ascended a tall larch, from whose boughs he had a view out over the Lake; the shore seemed to go almost directly west. There were no islands, and no land in sight; the water was open and clear. Next day he started for the sea; he wished to see it for its own sake, and, secondly, because if he could trace the trend of the shore, he would perhaps be able to put together a mental map of the country, and so assure himself of the right route to pursue when he started for Thyma Castle.

His guides took him directly south, and in three marches (three days) brought him to the strand. This journey was not in a straight line; they considered it was about five-and-thirty or forty miles to the sea, but the country was covered with almost impenetrable forests, which compelled a circuitous path. They had also to avoid a great ridge of hills, and to slip through a pass or river valley, because these hills were frequently traversed by the gipsies who were said, indeed, to travel along them for hundreds of miles. Through the river valley, therefore, which wound between the hills, they approached the sea, so much on a level with it that Felix did not catch a distant glimpse.

In the afternoon of the third day they heard a low murmur, and soon afterwards came out from the forest itself upon a wide bed of shingle, thinly bordered with scattered bushes on the inland side. Climbing over this, Felix saw the green line of the sea rise and extend itself on either hand; in the glory of the scene he forgot his anxieties and his hopes, they fell from him together, leaving the mind alone with itself and love. For the memory of Aurora rendered the beauty before him still more beautiful; love, like the sunshine, threw a glamour over the waves. His old and highest thoughts returned to him in all their strength. He

must follow them, he could not help himself. Standing where the foam came nearly to his feet, the resolution to pursue his aspirations took possession of him as strong as the sea. When he turned from it, he said to himself, 'This is the first step homewards to her; this is the first step of my renewed labour.' To fulfil his love and his ambition was one and the same thing. He must see her, and then again endeavour with all his abilities to make himself a position which she could share.

Towards the evening, leaving his escort, he partly ascended the nearest slope of the hills to ascertain more perfectly than was possible at a lower level the direction in which the shore trended. It was nearly east and west, and as the shore of the inland Lake ran west, it appeared that between them there was a broad belt of forest. Through this he must pass, and he thought if he continued due west he should cross an imaginary line drawn south from his own home through Thyma Castle; then by turning to the north he should presently reach that settlement. But when he should cross this line, how many days' travelling it would need to reach it, was a matter of conjecture, and he must be guided by circumstances, the appearance of the country, and his hunter's instinct.

On the way back to Wolfstead Felix was occupied in considering how he could leave his friends, and yet be able to return to them and resume his position. His general idea was to build a fortified house or castle at the spot which had so pleased him, and to bring Aurora to it. He could then devote himself to increasing and consolidating his rule over these people, and perhaps in time organise a kingdom. But without Aurora the time it would require would be unendurable; by some means he must bring her. The whole day long as he walked he thought and thought, trying to discover some means by which he could accomplish these things, yet the more he considered the more difficult they appeared to him. There seemed no plan that promised success; all he could do would be to risk the attempt.

But two days after returning from the sea it chanced towards the afternoon he fell asleep, and on awaking found his mind full of ideas which he felt sure would succeed if anything would. The question had solved itself during sleep; the mind, like a wearied limb, strained by too much effort, had recovered its elasticity and freshness, and he saw clearly what he ought to do.

He convened an assembly of the chief men of the nearest tribes, and addressed them in the circular fort. He asked them if they could place sufficient confidence in him to assist him in carrying out certain plans, although he should not be able to altogether disclose the object he had in view.

They replied as one man that they had perfect confidence in him, and would implicitly obey.

He then said that the first thing he wished was the clearing of the land by the river in order that he might erect a fortified dwelling suitable to his position as their Leader in war. Next he desired their permission to leave them for two months, at the end of which he would return. He could not at that time explain his reasons, but until this journey had been made he could not finally settle among them.

To this announcement they listened in profound silence. It was evident that they disliked his leaving them, yet did not wish to seem distrustful by expressing the feeling.

Thirdly, he continued, he wanted them to clear a path through the forest, commencing at Anker's Gate and proceeding exactly west. The track to be thirty yards wide in order that the undergrowth might not encroach upon it, and to be carried on straight to the westward until his return. The distance to which this path was cleared he should take as the measure of their loyalty to him.

They immediately promised to fulfil this desire, but added that there was no necessity to wait till he left them, it should be commenced the very next morning. To his reiterated request for leave of absence they preserved an ominous silence, and as he had no more to say, the assembly then broke up.

It was afternoon, and Felix, as he watched the departing chiefs, reflected that these men would certainly set a watch upon him to prevent his escape. Without another moment's delay he entered his hut, and took from their hidingplace the diamond bracelet, the turquoise ring, and other presents for Aurora. He also secured some provisions, and put two spare bowstrings in his pocket. His bow of course he carried.

Telling the people about that he was going to the next settlement, Bedeston, and was anxious to overtake the chief from that place who had attended the assembly, he started. So soon as he knew he could not be seen from the settlement he quitted the trail, and made a wide circuit till he faced westwards. Anker's Gate was a small outlying post, the most westerly from Wolfstead; he went near it to get a true direction, but not sufficiently near to be observed. This was on the fourth of September. The sun was declining as he finally left the country of his friends, and entered the immense forest which lay between him and Aurora. Not only was there no track, but no one had ever traversed it, unless indeed it were Bushmen, who to all intents might be confused with the wild animals which it contained.

Yet his heart rose as he walked rapidly among the oaks; already

he saw her, he felt the welcoming touch of her hand; the danger of Bushman or gipsy was as nothing. The forest at the commencement consisted chiefly of oaks, trees which do not grow close together, and so permitted of quick walking. Felix pushed on, absorbed in thought. The sun sank; still onward; and as the dusk fell he was still moving rapidly westwards.

THE END