

## Chapter XVI. Visions of the Past

She led us to the back of the statue and pointed to each of us where we should remain. Then she took her place at right angles to us, as a showman might do, and for a while stood immovable. Watching her face, once more I saw it, and indeed all her body, informed with that strange air of power, and noted that her eyes flashed and that her hair grew even more brilliant than was common, as though some abnormal strength were flowing through it and her. Presently she spoke, saying:

"I shall show you first our people in the day of their glory. Look in front of you."

We looked and by degrees the vast space of the apse before us became alive with forms. At first these were vague and shadowy, not to be separated or distinguished. Then they became so real that until he was reproved by a kick, Tommy growled at them and threatened to break out into one of his peals of barking.

A wonderful scene appeared. There was a palace of white marble and in front of it a great courtyard upon which the sun beat vividly. At the foot of the steps of the palace, beneath a silken awning, sat a king enthroned, a crown upon his head and wearing glorious robes. In his hand was a jewelled sceptre. He was a noble-looking man of middle age and about him were gathered the glittering officers of his court. Fair women

fanned him and to right and left, but a little behind, sat other fair and jewelled women who, I suppose, were his wives or daughters.

"One of the Kings of the Children of Wisdom new-crowned, receives the homage of the world," said Yva.

As she spoke there appeared, walking in front of the throne one by one, other kings, for all were crowned and bore sceptres. At the foot of the throne each of them kneeled and kissed the foot of him who sat thereon, as he did so laying down his sceptre which at a sign he lifted again and passed away. Of these kings there must have been quite fifty, men of all colours and of various types, white men, black men, yellow men, red men.

Then came their ministers bearing gifts, apparently of gold and jewels, which were piled on trays in front of the throne. I remember noting an incident. An old fellow with a lame leg stumbled and upset his tray, so that the contents rolled hither and thither. His attempts to recover them were ludicrous and caused the monarch on the throne to relax from his dignity and smile. I mention this to show that what we witnessed was no set scene but apparently a living piece of the past. Had it been so the absurdity of the bedizened old man tumbling down in the midst of the gorgeous pageant would certainly have been omitted.

No, it must be life, real life, something that had happened, and the same may be said of what followed. For instance, there was what we call a review. Infantry marched, some of them armed with swords and spears,

though these I took to be an ornamental bodyguard, and others with tubes like savage blowpipes of which I could not guess the use. There were no cannon, but carriages came by loaded with bags that had spouts to them. Probably these were charged with poisonous gases. There were some cavalry also, mounted on a different stamp of horse from ours, thicker set and nearer the ground, but with arched necks and fiery eyes and, I should say, very strong. These again, I take it, were ornamental. Then came other men upon a long machine, slung in pairs in armoured sacks, out of which only their heads and arms projected. This machine, which resembled an elongated bicycle, went by at a tremendous rate, though whence its motive power came did not appear. It carried twenty pairs of men, each of whom held in his hand some small but doubtless deadly weapon, that in appearance resembled an orange. Other similar machines which followed carried from forty to a hundred pairs of men.

The marvel of the piece, however, were the aircraft. These came by in great numbers. Sometimes they flew in flocks like wild geese, sometimes singly, sometimes in line and sometimes in ordered squadrons, with outpost and officer ships and an exact distance kept between craft and craft. None of them seemed to be very large or to carry more than four or five men, but they were extraordinarily swift and as agile as swallows. Moreover they flew as birds do by beating their wings, but again we could not guess whence came their motive power.

The review vanished, and next appeared a scene of festivity in a huge, illuminated hall. The Great King sat upon a dais and behind him was that

statue of Fate, or one very similar to it, beneath which we stood. Below him in the hall were the feasters seated at long tables, clad in the various costumes of their countries. He rose and, turning, knelt before the statue of Fate. Indeed he prostrated himself thrice in prayer. Then taking his seat again, he lifted a cup of wine and pledged that vast company. They drank back to him and prostrated themselves before him as he had done before the image of Fate. Only I noted that certain men clad in sacerdotal garments not at all unlike those which are worn in the Greek Church to-day, remained standing.

Now all this exhibition of terrestrial pomp faded. The next scene was simple, that of the death-bed of this same king--we knew him by his wizened features. There he lay, terribly old and dying. Physicians, women, courtiers, all were there watching the end. The tableau vanished and in place of it appeared that of the youthful successor amidst cheering crowds, with joy breaking through the clouds of simulated grief upon his face. It vanished also.

"Thus did great king succeed great king for ages upon ages," said Yva. "There were eighty of them and the average of their reigns was 700 years. They ruled the earth as it was in those days. They gathered up learning, they wielded power, their wealth was boundless. They nurtured the arts, they discovered secrets. They had intercourse with the stars; they were as gods. But like the gods they grew jealous. They and their councillors became a race apart who alone had the secret of long life. The rest of the world and the commonplace people about them suffered and

died. They of the Household of Wisdom lived on in pomp for generations till the earth was mad with envy of them.

"Fewer and fewer grew the divine race of the Sons of Wisdom since children are not given to the aged and to those of an ancient, outworn blood. Then the World said:

"They are great but they are not many; let us make an end of them by numbers and take their place and power and drink of their Life-water, that they will not give to us. If myriads of us perish by their arts, what does it matter, since we are countless?' So the World made war upon the Sons of Wisdom. See!"

Again a picture formed. The sky was full of aircraft which rained down fire like flashes of lightning upon cities beneath. From these cities leapt up other fires that destroyed the swift-travelling things above, so that they fell in numbers like gnats burned by a lamp. Still more and more of them came till the cities crumbled away and the flashes that darted from them ceased to rush upwards. The Sons of Wisdom were driven from the face of the earth.

Again the scene changed. Now it showed this subterranean hall in which we stood. There was pomp here, yet it was but a shadow of that which had been in the earlier days upon the face of the earth. Courtiers moved about the palace and there were people in the radiant streets and the houses, for most of them were occupied, but rarely did the vision show

children coming through their gates.

Of a sudden this scene shifted. Now we saw that same hall in which we had visited Oro not an hour before. There he sat, yes, Oro himself, upon the dais beneath the overhanging marble shell. Round him were some ancient councillors. In the body of the hall on either side of the dais were men in military array, guards without doubt though their only weapon was a black rod not unlike a ruler, if indeed it were a weapon and not a badge of office.

Yva, whose face had suddenly grown strange and fixed, began to detail to us what was passing in this scene, in a curious monotone such as a person might use who was repeating something learned by heart. This was the substance of what she said:

"The case of the Sons of Wisdom is desperate. But few of them are left. Like other men they need food which is hard to come by, since the foe holds the upper earth and that which their doctors can make here in the Shades does not satisfy them, even though they drink the Life-water. They die and die. There comes an embassy from the High King of the confederated Nations to talk of terms of peace. See, it enters."

As she spoke, up the hall advanced the embassy. At the head of it walked a young man, tall, dark, handsome and commanding, whose aspect seemed in

some way to be familiar to me. He was richly clothed in a purple cloak and wore upon his head a golden circlet that suggested royal rank. Those who followed him were mostly old men who had the astute faces of diplomatists, but a few seemed to be generals. Yva continued in her monotonous voice:

"Comes the son of the King of the confederated Nations, the Prince who will be king. He bows before the Lord Oro. He says 'Great and Ancient Monarch of the divine blood, Heaven-born One, your strait, and that of those who remain to you, is sore. Yet on behalf of the Nations I am sent to offer terms of peace, but this I may only do in the presence of your child who is your heiress and the Queen-to-be of the Sons of Wisdom.'"

Here, in the picture, Oro waved his hand and from behind the marble shell appeared Yva herself, gloriously apparelled, wearing royal ornaments and with her train held by waiting ladies. She bowed to the Prince and his company and they bowed back to her. More, we saw a glance of recognition pass between her and the Prince.

Now the real Yva by our side pointed to the shadow Yva of the vision or the picture, whichever it might be called, a strange thing to see her do, and went on:

"The daughter of the Lord Oro comes. The Prince of the Nations salutes her. He says that the great war has endured for hundreds of years between the Children of Wisdom fighting for absolute rule and the common

people of the earth fighting for liberty. In that war many millions of the Sons of the Nations had perished, brought to their death by fearful arts, by wizardries and by plagues sown among them by the Sons of Wisdom. Yet they were winning, for the glorious cities of the Sons of Wisdom were destroyed and those who remained of them were driven to dwell in the caves of the earth where with all their strength and magic they could not increase, but faded like flowers in the dark.

"The Lord Oro asks what are the terms of peace proposed by the Nations. The Prince answers that they are these: That the Sons of Wisdom shall teach all their wisdom to the wise men among the Nations. That they shall give them to drink of the Life-water, so that their length of days also may be increased. That they shall cease to destroy them by sickness and their mastery of the forces which are hid in the womb of the world. If they will do these things, then the Nations on their part will cease from war, will rebuild the cities they have destroyed by means of their flying ships that rain down death, and will agree that the Lord Oro and his seed shall rule them for ever as the King of kings.

"The Lord Oro asks if that be all. The Prince answers that it is not all. He says that when he dwelt a hostage at the court of the Sons of Wisdom he and the divine Lady, the daughter of the Lord Oro, and his only living child, learned to love each other. He demands, and the Nations demand, that she shall be given to him to wife, that in a day to come he may rule with her and their children after them.



"See!" went on Yva in her chanting, dreamy voice, "the Lord Oro asks his daughter if this be true. She says," here the real Yva at my side turned and looked me straight in the eyes, "that it is true; that she loves the Prince of the Nations and that if she lives a million years she will wed no other man, since she who is her father's slave in all else is still the mistress of herself, as has ever been the right of her royal mothers.

"See again! The Lord Oro, the divine King, the Ancient, grows wroth. He says that it is enough and more than enough that the Barbarians should ask to eat of the bread of hidden learning and to drink of the Life-water of the Sons of Wisdom, gifts that were given to them of old by Heaven whence they sprang in the beginning. But that one of them, however highly placed, should dare to ask to mix his blood with that of the divine Lady, the Heiress, the Queen of the Earth to be, and claim to share her imperial throne that had been held by her pure race from age to age, was an insult that could only be purged by death. Sooner would he give his daughter in marriage to an ape than to a child of the Barbarians who had worked on them so many woes and striven to break the golden fetters of their rule.

"Look again!" continued Yva. "The Lord Oro, the divine, grows angrier still" (which in truth he did, for never did I see such dreadful rage as that which the picture revealed in him). "He warns, he threatens. He says that hitherto out of gentle love and pity he has held his hand; that he has strength at his command which will slay them, not by

millions in slow war, but by tens of millions at one blow; that will blot them and their peoples from the face of earth and that will cause the deep seas to roll where now their pleasant lands are fruitful in the sun. They shrink before his fury; behold, their knees tremble because they know that he has this power. He mocks them, does the Lord Oro. He asks for their submission here and now, and that in the name of the Nations they should take the great oath which may not be broken, swearing to cease from war upon the Sons of Wisdom and to obey them in all things to the ends of the earth. Some of the ambassadors would yield. They look about them like wild things that are trapped. But madness takes the Prince. He cries that the oath of an ape is of no account, but that he will tear up the Children of Wisdom as an ape tears leaves, and afterwards take the divine Lady to be his wife.

"Look on the Lord Oro!" continued the living Yva, "his wrath leaves him. He grows cold and smiles. His daughter throws herself upon her knees and pleads with him. He thrusts her away. She would spring to the side of the Prince; he commands his councillors to hold her. She cries to the Prince that she loves him and him only, and that in a day to come him she will wed and no other. He thanks her, saying that as it is with her, so it is with him, and that because of his love he fears nothing. She swoons. The Lord Oro motions with his hand to the guard. They lift their death-rods. Fire leaps from them. The Prince and his companions, all save those who were afraid and would have sworn the oath, twist and writhe. They turn black; they die. The Lord Oro commands those who are left to enter their flying ships and bear to the Nations of the Earth

tidings of what befalls those who dare to defy and insult him; to warn them also to eat and drink and be merry while they may, since for their wickedness they are about to perish."

The scene faded and there followed another which really I cannot describe. It represented some vast underground place and what appeared to be a huge mountain of iron clothed in light, literally a thing like an alp, rocking and spinning down a declivity, which farther on separated into two branches because of a huge razor-edge precipice that rose between. There in the middle of this vast space with the dazzling mountain whirling towards him, stood Oro encased in some transparent armour, as though to keep off heat, and with him his daughter who under his direction was handling something in the rock behind her. Then there was a blinding flash and everything vanished. All of this picture passed so swiftly that we could not grasp its details; only a general impression remained.

"The Lord Oro, using the strength that is in the world whereof he alone has the secret, changes the world's balance causing that which was land to become sea and that which was sea to become land," said Yva in her chanting, unnatural voice.

Another scene of stupendous and changing awfulness. Countries were sinking, cities crashing down, volcanoes were spouting fire; the end of the earth seemed to be at hand. We could see human beings running to and

fro in thousands like ants. Then in huge waves hundreds and hundreds of feet high, the ocean flowed in and all was troubled, yeasty sea.

"Oro carries out his threat to destroy the Nations who had rebelled against him," said Yva. "Much of the world sinks beneath the waves, but in place of it other lands arise above the waves, to be inhabited by the seed of those who remain living in those portions of the Earth that the deluge spared."

This horrible vision passed and was succeeded by one more, that of Oro standing in the sepulchre of the cave by the side of the crystal coffin which contained what appeared to be the body of his daughter. He gazed at her, then drank some potion and laid himself down in the companion coffin, that in which we had found him.

All vanished away and Yva, appearing to wake from some kind of trance, smiled, and in her natural voice asked if we had seen enough.

"Quite," I answered in a tone that caused her to say:

"I wonder what you have seen, Humphrey. Myself I do not know, since it is through me that you see at all and when you see I am in you who see."

"Indeed," I replied. "Well, I will tell you about it later."

"Thank you so much," exclaimed Bastin, recovering suddenly from his amazement. "I have heard a great deal of these moving-picture shows which are becoming so popular, but have always avoided attending them because their influence on the young is supposed to be doubtful, and a priest must set a good example to his congregation. Now I see that they can have a distinct educational value, even if it is presented in the form of romance."

"How is it done?" asked Bickley, almost fiercely.

"I do not altogether know," she answered. "This I do know, however, that everything which has happened on this world can be seen from moment to moment at some point in the depths of space, for thither the sun's light takes it. There, too, it can be caught and thence in an instant returned to earth again, to be reflected in the mirror of the present by those who know how that mirror should be held. Ask me no more; one so wise as you, O Bickley, can solve such problems for himself."

"If you don't mind, Lady Yva," said Bastin, "I think I should like to get out of this place, interesting as it is. I have food to cook up above and lots of things to attend to, especially as I understand I am to come back here tomorrow. Would you mind showing me the way to that lift or moving staircase?"

"Come," she said, smiling.

So we went past the image of Fate, out of the temple, down the vast and lonely streets so unnaturally illuminated, to the place where we had first found ourselves on arrival in the depths. There we stood.

A moment later and we were whirling up as we had whirled down. I suppose that Yva came with us though I never saw her do so, and the odd thing was that when we arrived in the sepulchre, she seemed already to be standing there waiting to direct us.

"Really," remarked Bastin, "this is exactly like Maskelyne and Cook. Did you ever see their performance, Bickley? If so, it must have given you lots to explain for quite a long while."

"Jugglery never appealed to me, whether in London or in Orofena," replied Bickley in a sour voice as he extracted from his pocket an end of candle to which he set light.

"What is jugglery?" asked Bastin, and they departed arguing, leaving me alone with Yva in the sepulchre.

"What have I seen?" I asked her.

"I do not know, Humphrey. Everyone sees different things, but perhaps something of the truth."

"I hope not, Yva, for amongst other things I seemed to see you swear

yourself to a man for ever."

"Yes, and this I did. What of it?"

"Only that it might be hard for another man."

"Yes, for another man it might be hard. You were once married, were you not, Humphrey, to a wife who died?"

"Yes, I was married."

"And did you not swear to that wife that you would never look in love upon another woman?"

"I did," I answered in a shamed voice. "But how do you know? I never told you so."

"Oh! I know you and therefore guessed."

"Well, what of it, Yva?"

"Nothing, except that you must find your wife before you love again, and before I love again I must find him whom I wish to be my husband."

"How can that happen," I asked, "when both are dead?"

"How did all that you have seen to-day in Nyo happen?" she replied, laughing softly. "Perhaps you are very blind, Humphrey, or perhaps we both are blind. If so, mayhap light will come to us. Meanwhile do not be sad. Tomorrow I will meet you and you shall teach me--your English tongue, Humphrey, and other things."

"Then let it be in the sunlight, Yva. I do not love those darksome halls of Nyo that glow like something dead."

"It is fitting, for are they not dead?" she answered, with a little laugh. "So be it. Bastin shall teach my father down below, since sun and shade are the same to him who only thinks of his religion, and you shall teach me up above."

"I am not so certain about Bastin and of what he thinks," I said doubtfully. "Also will the Lord Oro permit you to come?"

"Yes, for in such matters I rule myself. Also," she added meaningly, "he remembers my oath that I will wed no man--save one who is dead. Now farewell a while and bid Bastin be here when the sun is three hours high, not before or after."

Then I left her.