

## Chapter XX. Oro and Arbuthnot Travel by Night

As time went on, Oro began to visit me more and more frequently, till at last scarcely a night went by that he did not appear mysteriously in my sleeping-place. The odd thing was that neither Bickley nor Bastin seemed to be aware of these nocturnal calls. Indeed, when I mentioned them on one or two occasions, they stared at me and said it was strange that he should have come and gone as they saw nothing of him.

On my speaking again of the matter, Bickley at once turned the conversation, from which I gathered that he believed me to be suffering from delusions consequent on my illness, or perhaps to have taken to dreaming. This was not wonderful since, as I learned afterwards, Bickley, after he was sure that I was asleep, made a practice of tying a thread across my doorway and of ascertaining at the dawn that it remained unbroken. But Oro was not to be caught in that way. I suppose, as it was impossible for him to pass through the latticework of the open side of the house, that he undid the thread and fastened it again when he left; at least, that was Bastin's explanation, or, rather, one of them. Another was that he crawled beneath it, but this I could not believe. I am quite certain that during all his prolonged existence Oro never crawled.

At any rate, he came, or seemed to come, and pumped me--I can use no other word--most energetically as to existing conditions in the

world, especially those of the civilised countries, their methods of government, their social state, the physical characteristics of the various races, their religions, the exact degrees of civilisation that they had developed, their attainments in art, science and literature, their martial capacities, their laws, and I know not what besides.

I told him all I could, but did not in the least seem to satisfy his perennial thirst for information.

"I should prefer to judge for myself," he said at last. "Why are you so anxious to learn about all these nations, Oro?" I asked, exhausted.

"Because the knowledge I gather may affect my plans for the future," he replied darkly.

"I am told, Oro, that your people acquired the power of transporting themselves from place to place."

"It is true that the lords of the Sons of Wisdom had such power, and that I have it still, O Humphrey."

"Then why do you not go to look with your own eyes?" I suggested.

"Because I should need a guide; one who could explain much in a short time," he said, contemplating me with his burning glance until I began to feel uncomfortable.

To change the subject I asked him whether he had any further information about the war, which he had told me was raging in Europe.

He answered: "Not much; only that it was going on with varying success, and would continue to do so until the nations involved therein were exhausted," or so he believed. The war did not seem greatly to interest Oro. It was, he remarked, but a small affair compared to those which he had known in the old days. Then he departed, and I went to sleep.

Next night he appeared again, and, after talking a little on different subjects, remarked quietly that he had been thinking over what I had said as to his visiting the modern world, and intended to act upon the suggestion.

"When?" I asked.

"Now," he said. "I am going to visit this England of yours and the town you call London, and you will accompany me."

"It is not possible!" I exclaimed. "We have no ship."

"We can travel without a ship," said Oro.

I grew alarmed, and suggested that Bastin or Bickley would be a much better companion than I should in my present weak state.

"An empty-headed man, or one who always doubts and argues, would be useless," he replied sharply. "You shall come and you only."

I expostulated; I tried to get up and fly--which, indeed, I did do, in another sense.

But Oro fixed his eyes upon me and slowly waved his thin hand to and fro above my head.

My senses reeled. Then came a great darkness.

They returned again. Now I was standing in an icy, reeking fog, which I knew could belong to one place only--London, in December, and at my side was Oro.

"Is this the climate of your wonderful city?" he asked, or seemed to ask, in an aggrieved tone.

I replied that it was, for about three months in the year, and began to look about me.

Soon I found my bearings. In front of me were great piles of buildings, looking dim and mysterious in the fog, in which I recognised the Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey, for both could be seen from where

we stood in front of the Westminster Bridge Station. I explained their identity to Oro.

"Good," he said. "Let us enter your Place of Talk."

"But I am not a member, and we have no passes for the Strangers' Gallery," I expostulated.

"We shall not need any," he replied contemptuously. "Lead on."

Thus adjured, I crossed the road, Oro following me. Looking round, to my horror I saw him right in the path of a motor-bus which seemed to go over him.

"There's an end to Oro," thought I to myself. "Well, at any rate, I have got home."

Next instant he was at my side quite undisturbed by the incident of the bus. We came to a policeman at the door and I hesitated, expecting to be challenged. But the policeman seemed absolutely indifferent to our presence, even when Oro marched past him in his flowing robes. So I followed with a like success. Then I understood that we must be invisible.

We passed to the lobby, where members were hurrying to and fro, and constituents and pressmen were gathered, and so on into the House. Oro

walked up its floor and took his stand by the table, in front of the Speaker. I followed him, none saying us No.

As it chanced there was what is called a scene in progress--I think it was over Irish matters; the details are of no account. Members shouted, Ministers prevaricated and grew angry, the Speaker intervened. On the whole, it was rather a degrading spectacle. I stood, or seemed to stand, and watched it all. Oro, in his sweeping robes, which looked so incongruous in that place, stepped, or seemed to step, up to the principal personages of the Government and Opposition, whom I indicated to him, and inspected them one by one, as a naturalist might examine strange insects. Then, returning to me, he said:

"Come away; I have seen and heard enough. Who would have thought that this nation of yours was struggling for its life in war?"

We passed out of the House and somehow came to Trafalgar Square. A meeting was in progress there, convened, apparently, to advocate the rights of Labour, also those of women, also to protest against things in general, especially the threat of Conscription in the service of the country.

Here the noise was tremendous, and, the fog having lifted somewhat, we could see everything. Speakers bawled from the base of Nelson's column. Their supporters cheered, their adversaries rushed at them, and in one or two instances succeeded in pulling them down. A woman climbed up

and began to scream out something which could only be heard by a few reporters gathered round her. I thought her an unpleasant-looking person, and evidently her remarks were not palatable to the majority of her auditors. There was a rush, and she was dragged from the base of one of Landseer's lions on which she stood. Her skirt was half rent off her and her bodice split down the back. Finally, she was conveyed away, kicking, biting, and scratching, by a number of police. It was a disgusting sight, and tumult ensued.

"Let us go," said Oro. "Your officers of order are good; the rest is not good."

Later we found ourselves opposite to the doors of a famous restaurant where a magnificent and gigantic commissionaire helped ladies from motor-cars, receiving in return money from the men who attended on them. We entered; it was the hour of dinner. The place sparkled with gems, and the naked backs of the women gleamed in the electric light. Course followed upon course; champagne flowed, a fine band played, everything was costly; everything was, in a sense, repellent.

"These are the wealthy citizens of a nation engaged in fighting for its life," remarked Oro to me, stroking his long beard. "It is interesting, very interesting. Let us go."

We went out and on, passing a public-house crowded with women who had left their babies in charge of children in the icy street. It was a

day of Intercession for the success of England in the war. This was placarded everywhere. We entered, or, rather, Oro did, I following him, one of the churches in the Strand where an evening service was in progress. The preacher in the pulpit, a very able man, was holding forth upon the necessity for national repentance and self-denial; also of prayer. In the body of the church exactly thirty-two people, most of them elderly women, were listening to him with an air of placid acceptance.

"The priest talks well, but his hearers are not many," said Oro. "Let us go."

We came to the flaunting doors of a great music-hall and passed through them, though to others this would have been impossible, for the place was filled from floor to roof. In its promenades men were drinking and smoking, while gaudy women, painted and low-robed, leered at them. On the stage girls danced, throwing their legs above their heads. Then they vanished amidst applause, and a woman in a yellow robe, who pretended to be tipsy, sang a horrible and vulgar song full of topical allusions, which was received with screams of delight by the enormous audience.

"Here the hearers are very many, but those to whom they listen do not talk well. Let us go," said Oro, and we went.

At a recruiting station we paused a moment to consider posters supposed to be attractive, the very sight of which sent a thrill of shame through



me. I remember that the inscription under one of them was: "What will your best girl say?"

"Is that how you gather your soldiers? Later it will be otherwise," said Oro, and passed on.

We reached Blackfriars and entered a hall at the doors of which stood women in poke-bonnets, very sweet-faced, earnest-looking women. Their countenances seemed to strike Oro, and he motioned me to follow him into the hall. It was quite full of a miserable-looking congregation of perhaps a thousand people. A man in the blue and red uniform of the Salvation Army was preaching of duty to God and country, of self-denial, hope and forgiveness. He seemed a humble person, but his words were earnest, and love flowed from him. Some of his miserable congregation wept, others stared at him open-mouthed, a few, who were very weary, slept. He called them up to receive pardon, and a number, led by the sweet-faced women, came and knelt before him. He and others whispered to them, then seemed to bless them, and they rose with their faces changed.

"Let us go," said Oro. "I do not understand these rites, but at last in your great and wonderful city I have seen something that is pure and noble."

We went out. In the streets there was great excitement. People ran to and fro pointing upwards. Searchlights, like huge fingers of flame, stole across the sky; guns boomed. At last, in the glare of a

searchlight, we saw a long and sinister object floating high above us and gleaming as though it were made of silver. Flashes came from it followed by terrible booming reports that grew nearer and nearer. A house collapsed with a crash just behind us.

"Ah!" said Oro, with a smile. "I know this--it is war, war as it was when the world was different and yet the same."

As he spoke, a motor-bus rumbled past. Another flash and explosion. A man, walking with his arms round the waist of a girl just ahead of us; seemed to be tossed up and to melt. The girl fell in a heap on the pavement; somehow her head and her feet had come quite close together and yet she appeared to be sitting down. The motor-bus burst into fragments and its passengers hurtled through the air, mere hideous lumps that had been men and women. The head of one of them came dancing down the pavement towards us, a cigar still stuck in the corner of its mouth.

"Yes, this is war," said Oro. "It makes me young again to see it. But does this city of yours understand?"

We watched a while. A crowd gathered. Policemen ran up, ambulances came.

The place was cleared, and all that was left they carried away. A few minutes later another man passed by with his arm round the waist of another girl. Another motor-bus rumbled up, and, avoiding the hole in the roadway, travelled on, its conductor keeping a keen look-out for

fares.

The street was cleared by the police; the airship continued its course, spawning bombs in the distance, and vanished. The incident was closed.

"Let us go home," said Oro. "I have seen enough of your great and wonderful city. I would rest in the quiet of Nyo and think."

The next thing that I remember was the voice of Bastin, saying:

"If you don't mind, Arbuthnot, I wish that you would get up. The Glittering Lady (he still called her that) is coming here to have a talk with me which I should prefer to be private. Excuse me for disturbing you, but you have overslept yourself; indeed, I think it must be nine o'clock, so far as I can judge by the sun, for my watch is very erratic now, ever since Bickley tried to clean it."

"I am sorry, my dear fellow," I said sleepily, "but do you know I thought I was in London--in fact, I could swear that I have been there."

"Then," interrupted Bickley, who had followed Bastin into the hut, giving me that doubtful glance with which I was now familiar, "I wish to goodness that you had brought back an evening paper with you."

A night or two later I was again suddenly awakened to feel that Oro was approaching. He appeared like a ghost in the bright moonlight, greeted

me, and said:

"Tonight, Humphrey, we must make another journey. I would visit the seat of the war."

"I do not wish to go," I said feebly.

"What you wish does not matter," he replied. "I wish that you should go, and therefore you must."

"Listen, Oro," I exclaimed. "I do not like this business; it seems dangerous to me."

"There is no danger if you are obedient, Humphrey."

"I think there is. I do not understand what happens. Do you make use of what the Lady Yva called the Fourth Dimension, so that our bodies pass over the seas and through mountains, like the vibrations of our Wireless, of which I was speaking to you?"

"No, Humphrey. That method is good and easy, but I do not use it because if I did we should be visible in the places which we visit, since there all the atoms that make a man would collect together again and be a man."

"What, then, do you do?" I asked, exasperated.

"Man, Humphrey, is not one; he is many. Thus, amongst other things he has a Double, which can see and hear, as he can in the flesh, if it is separated from the flesh."

"The old Egyptians believed that," I said.

"Did they? Doubtless they inherited the knowledge from us, the Sons of Wisdom. The cup of our learning was so full that, keep it secret as we would, from time to time some of it overflowed among the vulgar, and doubtless thus the light of our knowledge still burns feebly in the world."

I reflected to myself that whatever might be their other characteristics, the Sons of Wisdom had lost that of modesty, but I only asked how he used his Double, supposing that it existed.

"Very easily," he answered. "In sleep it can be drawn from the body and sent upon its mission by one that is its master."

"Then while you were asleep for all those thousands of years your Double must have made many journeys."

"Perhaps," he replied quietly, "and my spirit also, which is another part of me that may have dwelt in the bodies of other men. But unhappily, if so I forget, and that is why I have so much to learn and

must even make use of such poor instruments as you, Humphrey."

"Then if I sleep and you distil my Double out of me, I suppose that you sleep too. In that case who distils your Double out of you, Lord Oro?"

He grew angry and answered:

"Ask no more questions, blind and ignorant as you are. It is your part not to examine, but to obey. Sleep now," and again he waved his hand over me.

In an instant, as it seemed, we were standing in a grey old town that I judged from its appearance must be either in northern France or Belgium. It was much shattered by bombardment; the church, for instance, was a ruin; also many of the houses had been burnt. Now, however, no firing was going on for the town had been taken. The streets were full of armed men wearing the German uniform and helmet. We passed down them and were able to see into the houses. In some of these were German soldiers engaged in looting and in other things so horrible that even the unmoved Oro turned away his head.

We came to the market-place. It was crowded with German troops, also with a great number of the inhabitants of the town, most of them elderly men and women with children, who had fallen into their power. The Germans, under the command of officers, were dragging the men from

the arms of their wives and children to one side, and with rifle-butts beating back the screaming women. Among the men I noticed two or three priests who were doing their best to soothe their companions and even giving them absolution in hurried whispers.

At length the separation was effected, whereon at a hoarse word of command, a company of soldiers began to fire at the men and continued doing so until all had fallen. Then petty officers went among the slaughtered and with pistols blew out the brains of any who still moved.

"These butchers, you say, are Germans?" asked Oro of me.

"Yes," I answered, sick with horror, for though I was in the mind and not in the body, I could feel as the mind does. Had I been in the body also, I should have fainted.

"Then we need not waste time in visiting their country. It is enough; let us go on."

We passed out into the open land and came to a village. It was in the occupation of German cavalry. Two of them held a little girl of nine or ten, one by her body, the other by her right hand. An officer stood between them with a drawn sword fronting the terrified child. He was a horrible, coarse-faced man who looked to me as though he had been drinking.

"I'll teach the young devil to show us the wrong road and let those French swine escape," he shouted, and struck with the sword. The girl's right hand fell to the ground.

"War as practised by the Germans!" remarked Oro. Then he stepped, or seemed to step up to the man and whispered, or seemed to whisper, in his ear.

I do not know what tongue or what spirit speech he used, or what he said, but the bloated-faced brute turned pale. Yes, he drew sick with fear.

"I think there are spirits in this place," he said with a German oath. "I could have sworn that something told me that I was going to die. Mount!"

The Uhlans mounted and began to ride away.

"Watch," said Oro.

As he spoke out of a dark cloud appeared an aeroplane. Its pilot saw the band of Germans beneath and dropped a bomb. The aim was good, for the missile exploded in the midst of them, causing a great cloud of dust from which arose the screams of men and horses.

"Come and see," said Oro.



We were there. Out of the cloud of dust appeared one man galloping furiously. He was a young fellow who, as I noted, had turned his head away and hidden his eyes with his hand when the horror was done yonder. All the others were dead except the officer who had worked the deed. He was still living, but both his hands and one of his feet had been blown away. Presently he died, screaming to God for mercy.

We passed on and came to a barn with wide doors that swung a little in the wind, causing the rusted hinges to scream like a creature in pain. On each of these doors hung a dead man crucified. The hat of one of them lay upon the ground, and I knew from the shape of it that he was a Colonial soldier.

"Did you not tell me," said Oro after surveying them, "that these Germans are of your Christian faith?"

"Yes; and the Name of God is always on their ruler's lips."

"Ah!" he said, "I am glad that I worship Fate. Bastin the priest need trouble me no more."

"There is something behind Fate," I said, quoting Bastin himself.

"Perhaps. So indeed I have always held, but after much study I cannot understand the manner of its working. Fate is enough for me."

We went on and came to a flat country that was lined with ditches, all of them full of men, Germans on one side, English and French upon the other. A terrible bombardment shook the earth, the shells raining upon the ditches. Presently that from the English guns ceased and out of the trenches in front of them thousands of men were vomited, who ran forward through a hail of fire in which scores and hundreds fell, across an open piece of ground that was pitted with shell craters. They came to barbed wire defenses, or what remained of them, cut the wire with nippers and pulled up the posts. Then through the gaps they surged in, shouting and hurling hand grenades. They reached the German trenches, they leapt into them and from those holes arose a hellish din. Pistols were fired and everywhere bayonets flashed.

Behind them rushed a horde of little, dark-skinned men, Indians who carried great knives in their hands. Those leapt over the first trench and running on with wild yells, dived into the second, those who were left of them, and there began hacking with their knives at the defenders and the soldiers who worked the spitting maxim guns. In twenty minutes it was over; those lines of trenches were taken, and once more from either side the guns began to boom.

"War again," said Oro, "clean, honest war, such as the god I call Fate decrees for man. I have seen enough. Now I would visit those whom you call Turks. I understand they have another worship and perhaps they are nobler than these Christians."

We came to a hilly country which I recognised as Armenia, for once I travelled there, and stopped on an seashore. Here were the Turks in thousands. They were engaged in driving before them mobs of men, women and children in countless numbers. On and on they drove them till they reached the shore. There they massacred them with bayonets, with bullets, or by drowning. I remember a dreadful scene of a poor woman standing up to her waist in the water. Three children were clinging to her--but I cannot go on, really I cannot go on. In the end a Turk waded out and bayoneted her while she strove to protect the last living child with her poor body whence it sprang.

"These, I understand," said Oro, pointing to the Turkish soldiers, "worship a prophet who they say is the voice of God."

"Yes," I answered, "and therefore they massacre these who are Christians because they worship God without a prophet."

"And what do the Christians massacre each other for?"

"Power and the wealth and territories that are power. That is, the King of the Germans wishes to rule the world, but the other Nations do not desire his dominion. Therefore they fight for Liberty and Justice."

"As it was, so it is and shall be," remarked Oro, "only with this difference. In the old world some were wise, but here--" and he stopped,

his eyes fixed upon the Armenian woman struggling in her death agony while the murderer drowned her child, then added: "Let us go."

Our road ran across the sea. On it we saw a ship so large that it attracted Oro's attention, and for once he expressed astonishment.

"In my day," he said, "we had no vessels of this greatness in the world. I wish to look upon it."

We landed on the deck of the ship, or rather the floating palace, and examined her. She carried many passengers, some English, some American, and I pointed out to Oro the differences between the two peoples. These were not, he remarked, very wide except that the American women wore more jewels, also that some of the American men, to whom we listened as they conversed, spoke of the greatness of their country, whereas the Englishmen, if they said anything concerning it, belittled their country.

Presently, on the surface of the sea at a little distance appeared something strange, a small and ominous object like a can on the top of a pole. A voice cried out "Submarine!" and everyone near rushed to look.

"If those Germans try any of their monkey tricks on us, I guess the United States will give them hell," said another voice near by.

Then from the direction of the pole with the tin can on the top of

it, came something which caused a disturbance in the smooth water and bubbles to rise in its wake.

"A torpedo!" cried some.

"Shut your mouth," said the voice. "Who dare torpedo a vessel full of the citizens of the United States?"

Next came a booming crash and a flood of upthrown water, in the wash of which that speaker was carried away into the deep. Then horror! horror! horror! indescribable, as the mighty vessel went wallowing to her doom. Boats launched; boats upset; boats dragged under by her rush through the water which could not be stayed. Maddened men and women running to and fro, their eyes starting from their heads, clasping children, fastening lifebelts over their costly gowns, or appearing from their cabins, their hands filled with jewels that they sought to save. Orders cried from high places by stern-faced officers doing their duty to the last. And a little way off that thin pole with a tin can on the top of it watching its work.

Then the plunge of the enormous ship into the deep, its huge screws still whirling in the air and the boom of the bursting boilers. Lastly everything gone save a few boats floating on the quiet sea and around them dots that were the heads of struggling human beings.

"Let us go home," said Oro. "I grow tired of this war of your Christian

peoples. It is no better than that of the barbarian nations of the early world. Indeed it is worse, since then we worshipped Fate and but a few of us had wisdom. Now you all claim wisdom and declare that you worship a God of Mercy."

With these words still ringing in my ears I woke up upon the Island of Orofena, filled with terror at the horrible possibilities of nightmare.

What else could it be? There was the brown and ancient cone of the extinct volcano. There were the tall palms of the main island and the lake glittering in the sunlight between. There was Bastin conducting a kind of Sunday school of Orofenans upon the point of the Rock of Offerings, as now he had obtained the leave of Oro to do. There was the mouth of the cave, and issuing from it Bickley, who by help of one of the hurricane lamps had been making an examination of the buried remains of what he supposed to be flying machines. Without doubt it was nightmare, and I would say nothing to them about it for fear of mockery.

Yet two nights later Oro came again and after the usual preliminaries, said:

"Humphrey, this night we will visit that mighty American nation, of which you have told me so much, and the other Neutral Countries."

[At this point there is a gap in Mr. Arbuthnot's M.S., so Oro's reflections on the Neutral Nations, if any, remain unrecorded. It continues:]

On our homeward way we passed over Australia, making a detour to do so. Of the cities Oro took no account. He said that they were too large and too many, but the country interested him so much that I gathered he must have given great attention to agriculture at some time in the past. He pointed out to me that the climate was fine, and the land so fertile that with a proper system of irrigation and water-storage it could support tens of millions and feed not only itself but a great part of the outlying world.

"But where are the people?" he asked. "Outside of those huge hives," and he indicated the great cities, "I see few of them, though doubtless some of the men are fighting in this war. Well, in the days to come this must be remedied."

Over New Zealand, which he found beautiful, he shook his head for the same reason.

On another night we visited the East. China with its teeming millions interested him extremely, partly because he declared these to be the descendants of one of the barbarian nations of his own day. He made a remark to the effect that this race had always possessed points

and capacities, and that he thought that with proper government and instruction their Chinese offspring would be of use in a regenerated world.

For the Japanese and all that they had done in two short generations, he went so far as to express real admiration, a very rare thing with Oro, who was by nature critical. I could see that mentally he put a white mark against their name.

India, too, really moved him. He admired the ancient buildings at Delhi and Agra, especially the Taj Mahal. This, he declared, was reminiscent of some of the palaces that stood at Pani, the capital city of the Sons of Wisdom, before it was destroyed by the Barbarians.

The English administration of the country also attracted a word of praise from him, I think because of its rather autocratic character. Indeed he went so far as to declare that, with certain modifications, it should be continued in the future, and even to intimate that he would bear the matter in mind. Democratic forms of government had no charms for Oro.

Amongst other places, we stopped at Benares and watched the funeral rites in progress upon the banks of the holy Ganges. The bearers of the dead brought the body of a woman wrapped in a red shroud that glittered with tinsel ornaments. Coming forward at a run and chanting as they ran, they placed it upon the stones for a little while, then lifted it up



again and carried it down the steps to the edge of the river. Here they took water and poured it over the corpse, thus performing the rite of the baptism of death. This done, they placed its feet in the water and left it looking very small and lonely. Presently appeared a tall, white-draped woman who took her stand by the body and wailed. It was the dead one's mother. Again the bearers approached and laid the corpse upon the flaming pyre.

"These rites are ancient," said Oro. "When I ruled as King of the World they were practised in this very place. It is pleasant to me to find something that has survived the changefulness of Time. Let it continue till the end."

Here I will cease. These experiences that I have recorded are but samples, for also we visited Russia and other countries. Perhaps, too, they were not experiences at all, but only dreams consequent on my state of health. I cannot say for certain, though much of what I seemed to see fitted in very well indeed with what I learned in after days, and certainly at the time they appeared as real as though Oro and I had stood together upon those various shores.