

CHAPTER III

They Pass Through The Woods

Refreshed by our stay in the grove, we rose, and placed ourselves under the guidance of Mohi; who went on in advance.

Winding our way among jungles, we came to a deep hollow, planted with one gigantic palm-shaft, belted round by saplings, springing from its roots. But, Laocoon-like, sire and sons stood locked in the serpent folds of gnarled, distorted banyans; and the banyan-bark, eating into their vital wood, corrupted their veins of sap, till all those palm-nuts were poisoned chalices.

Near by stood clean-limbed, comely manchineels, with lustrous leaves and golden fruit. You would have deemed them Trees of Life; but underneath their branches grew no blade of grass, no herb, nor moss; the bare earth was scorched by heaven's own dews, filtrated through that fatal foliage.

Farther on, there frowned a grove of blended banyan boughs, thick-ranked manchineels, and many a upas; their summits gilded by the sun; but below, deep shadows, darkening night-shade ferns, and mandrakes. Buried in their midst, and dimly seen among large leaves, all halberd-shaped, were piles of stone, supporting falling temples of bamboo. Thereon frogs leaped in dampness, trailing round their slime. Thick

hung the rafters with lines of pendant sloths; the upas trees dropped
darkness round; so dense the shade, nocturnal birds found there
perpetual night; and, throve on poisoned air. Owls hooted from dead
boughs; or, one by one, sailed by on silent pinions; cranes stalked
abroad, or brooded, in the marshes; adders hissed; bats smote the
darkness; ravens croaked; and vampires, fixed on slumbering lizards,
fanned the sultry air.