

CHAPTER VIII

LANGUAGE WITHOUT SPEECH

"That breaks the ice," said the irrepressible Jack. "We're introduced! Now for the conquest of Venus."

We had all instinctively returned the smile of our beautiful interlocutor, with bows and gestures of amity, and it looked as though we might soon be within touch of her hand, for the vessels continued to drift nearer, when suddenly Juba clambered out of the window and stood beside us, his moon eyes blinking in the unaccustomed light. The greatest agitation was immediately manifest among the crowd on the deck of the air ship. They seemed to be even more startled than they had been by the sound of Jack's voice. They interchanged looks, and, apparently, a few words, spoken in very low voices, and glanced from Juba to us in a way which plainly showed that they were astonished at our being together.

Edmund, whose perspicacity never deserted him, immediately penetrated their thoughts.

"It is clear," he said, "that these people recognize Juba as an inhabitant of the dark hemisphere, while, as to us, they are puzzled, and all the more so now that Juba has made his appearance. I think it certain that they have never actually met any representative of Juba's race

before, but no doubt he bears, to their eyes, ethnological characteristics which escape our discernment, and it is likely that tradition has handed down to them facts about the inhabitants of the other side of their planet which accord with his appearance."

"Then, they must conclude that we have come from the other side, and brought Juba along as a captive," I said.

"Undoubtedly."

"And what must they think of us--that we are inhabitants of the dark hemisphere also?"

"What else can they think?"

I do not know into what train of speculation this might have led us if a new incident had not suddenly changed the current of our thoughts. Unnoticed by us the second air ship had drawn near. Signals were interchanged between it and the first, and we observed that she who seemed to be the commander in chief gave orders that the second air ship should lay us aboard. The order was no sooner given than executed, and we found ourselves face to face with a dozen of the blond-haired natives, led by one who was clearly their captain. The deck of the air ship touched the side of the car, and, as if instinctively recognizing our leader, the captain laid his hand on Edmund's arm, but with a smile which gave assurance that no violence was intended.

"Come," said Edmund, in a low voice, "it is best that we should go aboard their craft. We are in their hands, and luckily so, for they will take us where we want to go."

Accordingly, all, including Juba, passed upon the deck of the air ship. You will readily imagine the intensity of interest with which we studied the faces and forms of those whom I will call our captors. Now that we were in contact with them we could better observe their resemblances to, and differences from, ourselves. In all the main features of body they were human beings, but of a somewhat superior stature. Noses and mouths were small and delicate; hair long, silken, and either light gold or rich chestnut in color; skin white and smooth; ears small and peculiarly formed, with a curious mobility; and eyes large, round, invariably light blue, and possessing that strange luminousness of which I have already spoken. One could not look directly into these eyes without a certain shrinking, for some wonderful power seemed to radiate from them, and one had the feeling that the intelligence behind them could dip to the bottom of his mind. We were gently treated and could perceive no indication of peril to ourselves. Nevertheless, we were glad to feel our pistols in our pockets. There were seats on the deck to which we were civilly conducted, but Edmund refused to sit.

"I must see the commander herself," he whispered. "These are only subordinates, and I cannot deal with them. It will not do to leave the car here at the mercy of the waves. I must find the means of making them

understand that it is to go with us."

Accordingly, he approached the captain, and we watched him with beating hearts, not being able to divine what an attempt to dictate terms on our part might lead to. Jack shook his head, and put his hand on his pistol, which Edmund had restored to him while we were in the ice mountains.

"I'll drop the jackanapes in his tracks if he shows up ugly," he said.

"You'd better keep quiet," I whispered, "and don't let them see your weapon. They appear to have no arms, and you should trust to Edmund to manage the affair. When he gives the word it will be time enough to begin shooting."

Jack grumbled, but kept the pistol in his pocket, although he did not withdraw his hand from it.

I have already told you how, at the caverns, Edmund had discovered that the inhabitants there possessed a means of converse which he likened to telepathy, and from what I had seen of the people here I was convinced that they had the same mysterious power, and probably in a higher degree. To be sure, they used words occasionally, but for the most part they communed together in some other way. I felt sure that Edmund was now about to apply what he had learned, and his actions quickly demonstrated that my conjecture was well founded. Just what he did, I do not know, but the result of his conference was promptly apparent.

The first air ship had withdrawn a short distance when the other boarded the car, but now the two mutually approached until it was possible to step from one deck to the other. As soon as they touched, Edmund was conducted by the captain, at whose side he had remained standing, to the presence of the important personage whom Jack had begun to designate as the queen. We remained where we were, watching with all eyes, while Jack persisted in keeping his hand on the pistol in his pocket. A crowd immediately surrounded Edmund and we were unable to see exactly what went on, a fact that rendered Jack so much the more impatient. But it turned out that there was no cause for alarm. In about ten minutes the crowd opened and Edmund appeared. Uninterfered with, he came to the edge of the deck, close by us, and said:

"It is all arranged. The car will be towed by one of the air ships. I am to stay here and you will remain where you are until we reach our destination."

"Have you had a talk with her?" asked Jack.

"Not in any language that you understand," Edmund responded, smiling. "But I have made good use of what I learned in the caverns. These people are intellectually vastly superior to the others, and, as I guessed, they possess a more perfect command of the sort of telepathy that I told you about. I have not found much difficulty in making my wish understood, and

your amazon is a very obliging person. It is only necessary to be discreet and we shall have no trouble."

"But why are you to be separated from us?" asked Jack anxiously. "That looks bad, for it is exactly what they would do if they meant to kill us one at a time."

"Why should they kill us?" retorted Edmund.

"And why should we be separated?" persisted Jack. "I tell you, Edmund, I don't like it."

"Very well, then," Edmund said, after a moment's thought; "if that's the way you feel about it, I'll see what I can do. It will be another exercise for me in this new kind of language. But, mark this, if I succeed in persuading the chieftainess to keep us together, you will have to acknowledge that your fears were groundless. Perhaps it's worth trying on that very account."

He disappeared from our eyes again--for as soon as he approached their leader the people of the air ship crowded close around as if to afford her protection--and, after another ten minutes' conference, came back smiling to the edge of the deck.

"Dismiss your fears, friend Jack," he said cheerfully. "You are all to come aboard here with me. So you see there could have been no thought of

treachery; but I'm glad that we are not to be separated, and I thank you for your solicitude on my account. I'm sure that the original arrangement was made only because of lack of room aboard this craft, and you'll see that that was the reason."

He was right, for immediately half a dozen of the crew of the principal air ship were sent aboard ours while we were transferred to take their place.

We now had an opportunity to study the countenance of the "amazon" commander, and we found her to be an even more remarkable personage than she had appeared at a distance. Of the beauty of her features and form I shall say no more, but about her eyes I could write a chapter. The pupils, widely expanded amidst their circles of sky-blue iris, seemed to speak. I can describe the impression that they made in no other way. I no longer wondered at Edmund's ability to converse with her, for I felt that, with a little instruction, and more of our leader's mental penetration, I could do it myself. At times I shrank from encountering her gaze, for I verily believed that she read my inmost thoughts. And I could see that thought came out of her eyes, but it escaped all my efforts to grasp it; it was too evanescent, or I was too dull. Sometimes I imagined that the meaning was at the threshold of comprehension, but yet it evaded me, like forgotten words whose general sense dimly irradiates the mind, while they refuse to take a definite shape, and keep flitting just beyond the reach of memory. Still, charity and good will

shone out so plainly that anybody could read them, and I do not know how to express the feeling that came over me at this evidence of friendliness exhibited by an inhabitant of a world so far from our own. It was as if a dim sense of ultimate fraternity bound her to us. Jack's enthusiasm, as you may guess, was without bounds, and strangely enough it rendered him almost speechless.

"By Jo!" he kept repeating to himself in an undertone, without venturing upon any further expression of his feelings.

Henry, as usual, was silent, but I know that he felt the influence no less than the rest of us. Edmund, too, said nothing, but it was plain that he was continually studying the phenomenon, and I felt sure that his analytic mind would find a more complete explanation than we yet possessed. Of course you are not to suppose that the power that I have been trying to describe was peculiar to this woman. On the contrary, as I have already intimated, it was common to all of them; but with her it seemed to have reached a higher development, and, what was of special interest, she alone exhibited a marked benevolence toward us.

The car was attached by a cable to the air ship that we had just quitted, and our voyage into a new unknown began. The other air ships, which had been hovering about, moved up into line, and, with the exception of the one which towed the car, all rose to an elevation of perhaps a thousand feet, and moved rapidly away from a row of dark clouds which we could now see low on the horizon behind. We found the air ship splendidly fitted

up, with everything that could contribute to the comfort of its inmates. And what a voyage it was! "Yachting on Venus," as Jack called it. We sat on the deck, with a pleasant breeze, produced by the swift, steady motion, fanning our faces; the temperature was delightful; the air was wonderfully stimulating; the light, softly and evenly diffused from the great shell-like dome of the sky, seemed to bewitch the eyesight; and the sea beneath us, reflecting the dome, was a marvel of refluent colors.

We had left the calendar clock in the car, but, with our watches, which we had never ceased to wind up regularly, we were able to measure the time. The voyage lasted about seventy-two hours, but could, perhaps, have been performed in less time if we had not been somewhat delayed by the towing of the car. They had on the air ship ingenious clocks, driven by weights, and governed by pendulums, but the divisions of time were unlike ours, and there was nothing corresponding to our days. This, of course, arose from the fact that there was never any night, and, being unable to see either sun or stars, they had no measure of the year. With them time was simply endless duration, with no return in cycles.

"What interests me most," said Edmund, "is the fact that they should have established any chronological measure at all. It would puzzle some of our metaphysicians on the earth to account for the origin of their sense of time. To me it seems evident that the consciousness of duration is fundamental in all intelligent life, and does not necessarily demand natural recurrences, like the succession of day and night, and the passage of sun and stars across the meridian, to give it birth. Did you

ever read St. Augustine's reply to the question, 'What is time'--'I know if you don't ask me'?"

"If they haven't any years," said Jack, "how do they know when they are old enough to die?"

"They have the years, but no measure for them," replied Edmund, and then added quizzically, "Perhaps they don't die."

"Well, I shouldn't wonder," Jack returned, "for this seems to me to be Paradise for sure."

When we felt sleepy, we imitated the natives themselves, and, just as we had done during the voyage from the earth, created an artificial night by shutting ourselves up in the cabins that had been assigned to us. Rest was taken by all of them in this manner as regularly as it is taken at night on the earth.

One subject which we frequently discussed during the voyage was the astonishing resemblance of our hosts to the genus homo. Influenced by speculations which I had read at home about the probable unlikeness to one another of the inhabitants of different planets, I was particularly insistent upon this point, and declared that the facts as we found them were utterly inexplicable.

"Not at all," Edmund averred. "It is perfectly natural, and quite as I

expected. Venus resembles the earth in composition, in form, in physical constitution, and in subordination to the sun, the great ruler of the entire system. Here are the same chemical elements, and the same laws of matter. The human type is manifestly the highest possible that could be developed with such materials to work upon. Why, then, should you be surprised to find that it prevails here as well as upon our planet? Intelligent life could find no more suitable abode than in a human body. The details are simply varied in accordance with the environment--a principle that works on the earth also."

I was not altogether satisfied with the reasoning--but as to the facts, we had to believe our eyes.

Palatable food was served to us, and during the waking time Edmund was frequently engaged in his mysterious conversation with the "queen." Within forty-eight hours after we had set out in the air ship, he came to us, wearing one of his enigmatic smiles, and said:

"I've got another aphroditic word for you to remember. It is the name of our hostess--Ala."

We were not so much surprised by this news as we should have been but for what had occurred at the caverns, where he had discovered the patronymic of Juba.

"Good!" cried Jack, "it's a fine name. I was going to call her Aphrodite,

myself, but this is better as well as shorter."

"But, Edmund," I said, "how does it happen that these people, if they converse by 'telepathy' as you say, and as I fully believe, nevertheless occasionally use sounds and words? I should think it would be all one thing or all the other."

"Think a moment," he replied. "Is it so with us? Do we not use signs and gestures as well as words? And what do we mean by 'silent converse,' when mind speaks to mind and soul to soul without the intervention of spoken language? We have the potentiality of telepathic intercommunication, but we have not yet developed it into a kinetic form as these people have done. Ah, when will men begin to appreciate what mind means?"

I made no reply, and after a moment's musing, he continued:

"I suspect that here, too, speech preceded the higher form of converse, and that the spoken language remains only as a survival, presenting certain advantages for particular cases. But we shall learn more as time goes on."

There was no disputing Edmund's conclusions. He was the greatest acceptor and defender of facts as he found them that I have ever known.

It was written that before this voyage ended we should have another phase of language without speech presented for our wonderment. It came about

near the end of the trip. We were standing apart in a group, greatly interested and excited by the discovery, which had just been made, of land ahead. Far in advance we could see a curving, yellow shore line, and, dim in the distance behind it, a range of mountains. Edmund had just called our attention to these, with the remark that now I must admit that he had reasoned correctly about the existence of elevated regions on this side of Venus, when Jack, always the first to note a new phenomenon, exclaimed:

"Hurrah! Here they come! We're going to have a royal reception."

He pointed toward the land in a different direction from that in which we had been gazing, and immediately we beheld an extraordinary assemblage of air ships, perhaps ten miles off, but rapidly making toward us. More were coming up from behind, as if rising out of the land, and soon they resembled flocks of large birds all converging to a common center. In a little while they became almost innumerable, but their number soon ceased to be as great a cause of surprise to us as their peculiar appearance.

Viewed with our binoculars they showed an infinite variety of shapes and sizes. Chinese kites could not, for a moment, be compared in grotesqueness with the forms which many of them presented. Some soared in

vast circles at a great height, with the steady flight of eagles; others spread out to right and left, as if to flank us on either hand; and in the center, directly ahead, about a hundred advanced in column deployed in a semicircle, each keeping its place with the precision of a soldier

in line of battle.

As we continued to gaze, fascinated by the splendor and strangeness of the spectacle, suddenly the air was filled with fluttering colors. I do not mean flags and streamers, but colors in the air itself! Colors the most exquisite that ever the eye looked upon! They changed, flickered, melted, brightened, flowed over one another in iridescent waves, mingled, separated, turned the whole atmosphere into a spectral kaleidoscope. And it was evident that, in some inexplicable way, the approaching squadrons were the sources of this marvelous display. Presently from the craft that carried us, answering colors flashed out, as if the air around us had suddenly been changed to crystal with a thousand quivering rainbows shot through it, their beautiful arches shifting and interchanging so rapidly that the eye could not follow them.

Then I began to notice that all this incessant play of colors was based upon an unmistakable rhythm. I can think of no better way to describe it than to say that it was as if a great organ should send forth from its keys harmonic vibrations consisting not of concordant sounds but of even more perfectly related undulations of color. The permutations and combinations of this truly chromatic scale were marvelous and magical in their infinite variety. It thrilled us with awe and wonder. But none was so rapt as Edmund himself. He gazed as if his soul were in his eyes, and finally he turned to us, with a strange look, and said, almost under his breath:

"This, too, is language, and more than that--it is music!"

"Impossible!" I exclaimed.

"No, not impossible, since it is. They are not only exchanging intelligence in this way, but we are being greeted with a great anthem played in the heaven itself!"

There was the force of enthusiastic conviction in Edmund's words, and we could only look at him, and at one another, in silent astonishment.

"Oh, what a people! What a people!" he muttered. "And yet I am not surprised. I dimly fore-read this in Ala's eyes."

Even Jack's levity was subdued for the time, but after a while he said to me with a shrug, half in earnest, half in derision:

"Well, this Yankee-doodling in the air gets me! I'd prefer a little plain English and the Old Folks at Home."

After about ten minutes the display ceased as suddenly as it had begun, and the nearer of the approaching air craft began to circle around us. Finally one of them ran so close alongside that an officer of high rank, for such he seemed to be, leaped aboard us, and was quickly at Ala's side. There was a rapid interchange of communications between them, and then the newcomer was, I may say, presented. Ala led him to where we were

standing, and I could read in his eyes the astonishment that the sight of such strangers produced in him.