

CHAPTER XII

MORE MARVELS

It was not until long afterwards that we fully comprehended all that Ala had done in that simple act; but I will tell you now what it meant. By the unwritten law of this realm of Venus, she, as queen, had the right to interpose between justice and its victim, and such interposition was always expressed in the way which we had witnessed. It was a right rarely exercised, and probably few then present had ever before seen it put into action. The sensation which it caused was, in consequence, exceedingly great, and a murmur of astonishment arose from the throng in the great apartment, and hundreds pressed around the throne, staring at us and at the queen. The majestic look which had accompanied her act gradually faded, and her features resumed their customary expression of kindness. The old judge had risen as she stepped from her place beside him, and he seemed as much astonished as any onlooker. His hands trembled, he shook his head, and a single word came from his mouth, pronounced with a curious emphasis. Ala turned to him, with a new defiance in her eyes, before which his opposition seemed to wither, and he sank back into his seat.

But there was at least one person present who accepted the decision with a bad grace--Ingra. He had been sure of victory in his incomprehensible persecution of us, he had played a master card, and now his

disappointment was written upon his face. With surprise, I saw Ala approach him, smiling, and I was convinced that she was trying to persuade him to cease his opposition. There was a gentleness in her manner--almost a deference--which grated upon my feelings, while Jack's disgust could find no words sufficient to express itself:

"Beauty and the beast!" he growled. "By Jo, if he's got any influence over her, I'm sorry for her."

"Well, well, don't worry about him," I said. "He's played his hand and lost, and if you were in his place, you wouldn't feel any better about it."

"No, I'd go and hang myself, and that's what he ought to do. But isn't she a queen, though!"

Ala now resumed her place upon the throne, and issued orders which resulted in our being conducted to apartments that were set aside for us in the palace. There were four connecting rooms, and Juba had one of them. But we immediately assembled in the chief apartment, which had been

assigned to Edmund. There was much more deference in the manner of our attendants than we had observed before, and as soon as they left us we fell to discussing the recent events. Jack's first characteristic act was joyously to slap Juba on the back:

"Bully old boy!" he exclaimed. "Edmund, where'd we have been without Juba?"

"I ought to have foreseen that," said Edmund. "If I had been as wise as I sometimes think myself, I'd have arranged the thing differently. Of course it should have been obvious all the while that Juba would be our trump card. I dimly saw that, but I ought to have instructed him in advance. As it was, his own intelligence did the business. He understood my claim to an origin outside this planet, when they could not. It must have come over him all at a flash."

"But do you think that they understand it now?" I asked.

"To a certain extent, yes. But it is an utterly new idea to them, and all the better for us that it is so. It is so much the more mysterious; so much the more effective with the imagination. But this is not the end of it; they will want to know more--especially Ala--and now that Juba has broken the ice, it will be comparatively easy to fortify the new opinion which they have conceived of us."

"But Ingra nearly wrecked it all," I remarked.

"Yes, that was a stunning surprise. How devilish cunning the fellow is; and how inexplicable his antipathy to us."

"I believe that it is a kind of jealousy," I said.

"A kind of natural cussedness, I guess," put in Jack.

"Why should he be jealous?" asked Edmund.

"I don't know, exactly; but you know we are not simple barbarians in their eyes, and Ingra may have conceived a prejudice against us, somehow, on that very account."

"Very unlikely," Edmund returned, "but we shall find out all about it in time; in the meanwhile, do nothing to prejudice him further, for he is a power that we have got to reckon with."

The conversation then turned upon the mysterious language that had been employed at what we called the trial. I expressed the admiration which I had felt for such a means of communication when I had observed the effect that Juba had been able to produce.

"Yes," said Edmund, "it seems as wonderful as it is beautiful, but there is no reason why it should not have been acquired by the inhabitants of the earth. We have the elements, not merely in what we call telepathy, or mind reading, but in our everyday converse. Try it yourself, and you will be astonished at what the eyes, the looks, are able to convey. Even abstract ideas are not beyond their reach. Often we abandon speech for this better method of conveying our meaning. How many a turn in the history of mankind has depended upon the unspoken diplomacy of the eyes;

how many a crisis in our personal lives is determined, not by words, but by looks."

"That's right," said Jack, "more matches are made with eyes than with lips."

Edmund smiled and continued: "There's nothing really mysterious about it. It has a purely physical basis, and only needs attention and development to become the most perfect mode of mental communication that intellectual beings could possibly possess."

"And the music and language of color?" I asked. "How has that been developed?"

"As naturally as the silent speech. We have it, and we feel it, in pictures, in flower gardens, and in landscapes; only with us it is a frozen music. Living music exists on the earth only in the form of sonorous vibrations because we have not developed our sense of the harmony of colors except when they lie dead and motionless before us. A great painting by Raphael or Turner is to one of these color hymns of Venus like a printed score, which merely suggests its harmonies, compared with the same composition when poured forth from a perfect instrument under the fingers of a master player."

"Well, Edmund," interposed Jack, "I've no doubt it's all as you say, and I'd like to know just enough of their speechless speech to tell Ingra

what he ought to hear; and if I understood their music, I'd play him a dead march, sure."

"But," continued Edmund, disregarding Jack's interruption, "mark me, there's something else behind all this. I have a dim foreglimpse of it, and if we have luck, we'll know more before long."

I find that the enthusiasm which these wonderful memories arouse, as they flood back into my mind, is leading me to dwell upon too many details, and I must sum up in fewer words the story of the events which immediately followed our acquittal, although it involves some of the most astonishing discoveries that we made in the world of Venus.

As Edmund had surmised, Ala lost no time in seeking more light upon the mystery surrounding us. Within twenty-four hours after the dramatic scene in the hall of judgment, we were summoned before her, in a splendid apartment, which was apparently an audience chamber, where we found her surrounded by several of her female attendants, as well as by what seemed to be high officers of the court; and among them, to our displeasure, was Ingra. He, in fact, appeared to be the most respected and important personage there, next to the queen herself, and he kept close by her side. Edmund glanced at him, and half turning to us, shook his head. I took his meaning to be that we were not to manifest any annoyance over Ingra's presence.

The queen was very gracious, and seats were offered to us. Immediately

she began to question Edmund, as I could see; but with all my efforts I could make out nothing of what was "said." But Juba evidently was able to follow much of the conversation, in which he manifested the liveliest interest. The conference lasted about an hour, and at its conclusion, we retired to our apartments. There we eagerly questioned Edmund concerning what had occurred.

He seemed to be greatly impressed and pleased. He told us that he had learned more than he had communicated, but that he had succeeded, as he believed, in making clearer to Ala our celestial origin. Still, he doubted if she fully comprehended it, while as for Ingra, he was sure that the fellow rejected our claim entirely, and persisted in regarding us as inhabitants of the dark hemisphere.

"Bosh!" cried Jack. "He's too stupid to understand anything above the level of his nose, and I'd like to flatten that for him!"

"No," said Edmund, "he's not stupid, but I'm afraid he's malicious. If he were a little more stupid, it would be the better for us."

"But does Ala comprehend the difference between us and Juba--I mean in regard to origin?" I asked.

"I think so. In fact Juba bears unmistakable signs that he is of their world, although so different in physical appearance. His remarkable comprehension of their method of mental communication is alone sufficient

to stamp him as ancestrally one of them. And yet," Edmund continued, musing, "think of the vast stretch of ages that separates the inhabitants of the two sides of this planet, the countless eons of evolution that have brought about the differences now existing! I am delighted to find that Ala has some understanding of all this. She has had good teachers--do not smile--for what you have seen of their mechanical achievements proves that science exists and is cultivated here; and from her savants she has learned--what our astronomers have deduced--that formerly Venus turned rapidly on her axis, and had days and nights swiftly succeeding one another. But they do not know the scientific reasons as completely as we do. With them this is knowledge based largely upon tradition, 'ancestral voices' echoing down through periods of time so vast that our most ancient legends seem but tales of yesterday. Whatever may be the measure of man's antiquity on the earth, I am certain that here intellectual life has existed for millions upon millions of years, and its history stretches back beyond the time when the brake of tidal friction had so far destroyed the rotation of the planet that its surface became permanently divided between the reigns of day and night."

I listened with amazement and could not help exclaiming:

"But, Edmund, how could you learn all this in so short a time?"

"Because," he replied, smiling, "the language of the mind, unhampered by dragging words and blundering sentences, plays back and forth with the quickness of thought. There is another thing, too, which I have learned,

a thing so amazing that it daunts me. I have found, I believe, the explanation of that minor note of infinite sadness which, as I told you, I always feel, even in the most joyous-seeming paeans of their color music. I think it is due to their forereaching science, which assures them that this world has entered upon the last stage of its existence which began with the arrest of its axial rotation, and which will end with the total extinction of life through the evaporation of all the waters under the never-setting sun, and the consequent complete desiccation of this now so beautiful land."

"But," I objected, "you have said that they never see the sun."

"That was, I believe, a mistake, I am sure that they never see the stars or the planets, but I think that sometimes they see the sun, or, at least that there is a tradition of its having been seen. The whole thing is yet obscure to me, but I have received an inkling of something very, very strange in that regard."

"Then, Ala may think that it is from the sun that we claim to come," I said, disregarding his last remark, which had a significance which even he could not then have appreciated.

"I am not sure; we must wait for further light. But I have still another communication not so instinct with mystery. We are to be shown the sources of their mechanical power--the means by which they run all their motors."

"Hurrah," cried Jack. "Now, that's something I like! I can understand a machine--if you don't ask me to run it--but as for this talking through the eyes, and playing Jim Crow with rainbows, it's too much for me."

It was not many hours later when we were conducted by Ala, accompanied as

usual by the inevitable Ingra, and a brilliant cortège of attendants, upon our first excursion through the capital. We embarked in a gorgeous air ship, and flying low at first, skirted the roofs of the innumerable houses which constituted the bulk of the city resting on the ground. The oriental magnificence of the views which we caught in the winding streets and frequent squares crowded with people, excited our interest to the utmost. But we kept on without descending or stopping until, at length, we passed the limits of the immense metropolis, and, flying more rapidly, and at a greater elevation, soon approached what, at a distance, appeared to be a waterfall, greater than Niagara, pouring out of the air!

"What marvel can this be?" I asked.

"A fountain," responded Edmund.

"A cataract turned upside down," exclaimed Jack. "Well, I've ceased to be surprised at anything I see here. I wouldn't be astonished now to find that their whole old planet was hollow, and full of gnomes, or whatever you call 'em."

When we got nearer we saw that Edmund's description was substantially correct. The vast mass of water gushed from the top of a broad plateau, in the form of a gigantic vertical fountain, with a roar so stupendous that Ala and her attendants immediately covered their ears with protectors, and we should not have been sorry to follow their example, for our eardrums were almost burst by the billowing force of the sound waves. The water shot upward four or five hundred feet with geyser-like plumes reaching a thousand feet, and then descended in floods on all sides. But the slope of the ground was such that eventually it was all collected in a river, which flowed away with great swiftness, past the distant city, and disappeared in the direction of the sea from which we had come. The solid column of rising water must have been, at its base, three hundred feet in diameter!

But our amazement was redoubled when we recognized, at various points of vantage, squat, metallic towers of enormous strength, which caught the descending water, allowing it to issue in roaring torrents from their bases.

"Those," shouted Edmund in our ears, "are power houses. I knew already that these people had learned the mechanical uses of electricity; and if we have seen no electric lights as yet, it is because, in a world of perpetual daylight, they have little or no use for them. They employ the power for other purposes."

"But how do you account for this incredible fountain?" I asked.

"It must be due to geological causes, if I may use a terrestrial term.

You observe that the land all has a slope hitherward from the distant range of mountains, and that between us and the sea there is a chain of hills. The metropolis lies at the lower edge of a vast basin, and it must be that the relatively porous surface, over many thousands of square miles, is underlain by an almost unbroken shell of rock, impermeable to water. The result is that the drainage of this whole immense region, after being collected under ground, flows together to this point, where the existence of a huge vent in the upper layer offers it a way of escape, and it comes spouting out of the great crater with the consequences which you behold."

Many objections to Edmund's theory occurred to my mind; but he spoke so confidently, the course of things on this strange planet had so often followed his indications, and I felt myself so incapable of suggesting a more satisfactory hypothesis, that I made no reply, as a geologist, perhaps, would have done. At any rate the wonderful phenomenon existed before our eyes, explanation or no explanation. We learned afterwards that the river formed by the giant fountain passed through a gap in the hills to the seaward, and the more I reflected upon Edmund's idea the more acceptable I found it.

A great deal of the water was led away from the foot of the plateau out of which the fountain issued by ditches constructed to irrigate the rich

gardens surrounding the metropolis and the open agricultural country for many miles around. At the queen's invitation, although she did not accompany us, we inspected one of the power houses, and Edmund found the greatest delight in studying the details of the enormous dynamos and the system of cables by which, quite in our own manner, the electric power was conveyed to the city. We noticed that everywhere the most ingenious devices were employed for killing noise.

"I knew we should find all this," said Edmund--"although I did not precisely anticipate the form that the natural supply of energy would take--as soon as I saw the aerial screws that give buoyancy to the great towers. In fact, I foresaw it as soon as I found, in inspecting the machinery of the air ship which brought us from the sea, that their motors were driven by storage batteries. It was obvious, then, that they had some extraordinary source of energy."

"Oh, of course, you knew it all!" muttered Henry under his breath. "But if you were as omniscient as you think yourself, you'd not be in this fool's paradise."

"What's that you're saying?" demanded Jack, partly catching the import of Henry's remark, and beginning to ruffle his feathers.

"Oh, nothing," mumbled Henry, and I shook my head at Jack to keep quiet. We all felt at times Edmund's assumption of superiority, but Jack and I

were willing to put up with it as one of the privileges of genius. If Edmund had not believed in himself, he would never have brought us through. And besides, we always found that he was right, and if he sometimes spoke rather boastingly of his knowledge and foresight, at least it was real knowledge and genuine foresight.