

CHAPTER FIFTEENTH.

Kazeh.--The Noisy Market-place.--The Appearance of the Balloon.--The Wangaga.--The Sons of the Moon.--The Doctor's Walk.--The Population of the Place.--The Royal Tembe.--The Sultan's Wives.--A Royal Drunken-Bout.--Joe an Object of Worship.--How they Dance in the Moon.--A Reaction.--Two Moons in one Sky.--The Instability of Divine Honors.

Kazeh, an important point in Central Africa, is not a city; in truth, there are no cities in the interior. Kazeh is but a collection of six extensive excavations. There are enclosed a few houses and slave-huts, with little courtyards and small gardens, carefully cultivated with onions, potatoes, cucumbers, pumpkins, and mushrooms, of perfect flavor, growing most luxuriantly.

The Unyamwezy is the country of the Moon--above all the rest, the fertile and magnificent garden-spot of Africa. In its centre is the district of Unyanembe--a delicious region, where some families of Omani, who are of very pure Arabic origin, live in luxurious idleness.

They have, for a long period, held the commerce between the interior of Africa and Arabia: they trade in gums, ivory, fine muslin, and slaves. Their caravans traverse these equatorial regions on all sides; and they even make their way to the coast in search of those articles

of luxury and enjoyment which the wealthy merchants covet; while the latter, surrounded by their wives and their attendants, lead in this charming country the least disturbed and most horizontal of lives--always stretched at full length, laughing, smoking, or sleeping.

Around these excavations are numerous native dwellings; wide, open spaces for the markets; fields of cannabis and datura; superb trees and depths of freshest shade--such is Kazeh!

There, too, is held the general rendezvous of the caravans --those of the south, with their slaves and their freightage of ivory; and those of the west, which export cotton, glassware, and trinkets, to the tribes of the great lakes.

So in the market-place there reigns perpetual excitement, a nameless hubbub, made up of the cries of mixed-breed porters and carriers, the beating of drums, and the twanging of horns, the neighing of mules, the braying of donkeys, the singing of women, the squalling of children, and the banging of the huge rattan, wielded by the jemadar or leader of the caravans, who beats time to this pastoral symphony.

There, spread forth, without regard to order--indeed, we may say, in charming disorder--are the showy stuffs,

the glass beads, the ivory tusks, the rhinoceros'-teeth, the shark's-teeth, the honey, the tobacco, and the cotton of these regions, to be purchased at the strangest of bargains by customers in whose eyes each article has a price only in proportion to the desire it excites to possess it.

All at once this agitation, movement and noise stopped as though by magic. The balloon had just come in sight, far aloft in the sky, where it hovered majestically for a few moments, and then descended slowly, without deviating from its perpendicular. Men, women, children, merchants and slaves, Arabs and negroes, as suddenly disappeared within the "tembes" and the huts.

"My dear doctor," said Kennedy, "if we continue to produce such a sensation as this, we shall find some difficulty in establishing commercial relations with the people hereabouts."

"There's one kind of trade that we might carry on, though, easily enough," said Joe; "and that would be to go down there quietly, and walk off with the best of the goods, without troubling our heads about the merchants; we'd get rich that way!"

"Ah!" said the doctor, "these natives are a little scared at first; but they won't be long in coming back,

either through suspicion or through curiosity."

"Do you really think so, doctor?"

"Well, we'll see pretty soon. But it wouldn't be prudent to go too near to them, for the balloon is not iron-clad, and is, therefore, not proof against either an arrow or a bullet."

"Then you expect to hold a parley with these blacks?"

"If we can do so safely, why should we not? There must be some Arab merchants here at Kazeh, who are better informed than the rest, and not so barbarous. I remember that Burton and Speke had nothing but praises to utter concerning the hospitality of these people; so we might, at least, make the venture."

The balloon having, meanwhile, gradually approached the ground, one of the anchors lodged in the top of a tree near the market-place.

By this time the whole population had emerged from their hiding-places stealthily, thrusting their heads out first. Several "waganga," recognizable by their badges of conical shellwork, came boldly forward. They were the sorcerers of the place. They bore in their girdles

small gourds, coated with tallow, and several other articles of witchcraft, all of them, by-the-way, most professionally filthy.

Little by little the crowd gathered beside them, the women and children grouped around them, the drums renewed their deafening uproar, hands were violently clapped together, and then raised toward the sky.

"That's their style of praying," said the doctor; "and, if I'm not mistaken, we're going to be called upon to play a great part."

"Well, sir, play it!"

"You, too, my good Joe--perhaps you're to be a god!"

"Well, master, that won't trouble me much. I like a little flattery!"

At this moment, one of the sorcerers, a "myanga," made a sign, and all the clamor died away into the profoundest silence. He then addressed a few words to the strangers, but in an unknown tongue.

Dr. Ferguson, not having understood them, shouted some sentences in Arabic, at a venture, and was

immediately answered in that language.

The speaker below then delivered himself of a very copious harangue, which was also very flowery and very gravely listened to by his audience. From it the doctor was not slow in learning that the balloon was mistaken for nothing less than the moon in person, and that the amiable goddess in question had condescended to approach the town with her three sons--an honor that would never be forgotten in this land so greatly loved by the god of day.

The doctor responded, with much dignity, that the moon made her provincial tour every thousand years, feeling the necessity of showing herself nearer at hand to her worshippers. He, therefore, begged them not to be disturbed by her presence, but to take advantage of it to make known all their wants and longings.

The sorcerer, in his turn, replied that the sultan, the "mwani," who had been sick for many years, implored the aid of heaven, and he invited the son of the moon to visit him.

The doctor acquainted his companions with the invitation.

"And you are going to call upon this negro king?"
asked Kennedy.

"Undoubtedly so; these people appear well disposed; the air is calm; there is not a breath of wind, and we have nothing to fear for the balloon?"

"But, what will you do?"

"Be quiet on that score, my dear Dick. With a little medicine, I shall work my way through the affair!"

Then, addressing the crowd, he said:

"The moon, taking compassion on the sovereign who is so dear to the children of Unyamwezy, has charged us to restore him to health. Let him prepare to receive us!"

The clamor, the songs and demonstrations of all kinds increased twofold, and the whole immense ants' nest of black heads was again in motion.

"Now, my friends," said Dr. Ferguson, "we must look out for every thing beforehand; we may be forced to leave this at any moment, unexpectedly, and be off with extra speed. Dick had better remain, therefore, in the car, and keep the cylinder warm so as to secure a sufficient ascensional force for the balloon. The anchor is solidly fastened, and there is nothing to fear in that respect. I

shall descend, and Joe will go with me, only that he must remain at the foot of the ladder."

"What! are you going alone into that blackamoor's den?"

"How! doctor, am I not to go with you?"

"No! I shall go alone; these good folks imagine that the goddess of the moon has come to see them, and their superstition protects me; so have no fear, and each one remain at the post that I have assigned to him."

"Well, since you wish it," sighed Kennedy.

"Look closely to the dilation of the gas."

"Agreed!"

By this time the shouts of the natives had swelled to double volume as they vehemently implored the aid of the heavenly powers.

"There, there," said Joe, "they're rather rough in their orders to their good moon and her divine sons."

The doctor, equipped with his travelling medicine-chest, descended to the ground, preceded by Joe, who kept

a straight countenance and looked as grave and knowing as the circumstances of the case required. He then seated himself at the foot of the ladder in the Arab fashion, with his legs crossed under him, and a portion of the crowd collected around him in a circle, at respectful distances.

In the meanwhile the doctor, escorted to the sound of savage instruments, and with wild religious dances, slowly proceeded toward the royal "tembe," situated a considerable distance outside of the town. It was about three o'clock, and the sun was shining brilliantly. In fact, what less could it do upon so grand an occasion!

The doctor stepped along with great dignity, the waganga surrounding him and keeping off the crowd. He was soon joined by the natural son of the sultan, a handsomely-built young fellow, who, according to the custom of the country, was the sole heir of the paternal goods, to the exclusion of the old man's legitimate children. He prostrated himself before the son of the moon, but the latter graciously raised him to his feet.

Three-quarters of an hour later, through shady paths, surrounded by all the luxuriance of tropical vegetation, this enthusiastic procession arrived at the sultan's palace, a sort of square edifice called ititenya, and situated on the slope of a hill.

A kind of veranda, formed by the thatched roof, adorned the outside, supported upon wooden pillars, which had some pretensions to being carved. Long lines of dark-red clay decorated the walls in characters that strove to reproduce the forms of men and serpents, the latter better imitated, of course, than the former. The roofing of this abode did not rest directly upon the walls, and the air could, therefore, circulate freely, but windows there were none, and the door hardly deserved the name.

Dr. Ferguson was received with all the honors by the guards and favorites of the sultan; these were men of a fine race, the Wanyamwezi so-called, a pure type of the central African populations, strong, robust, well-made, and in splendid condition. Their hair, divided into a great number of small tresses, fell over their shoulders, and by means of black-and-blue incisions they had tattooed their cheeks from the temples to the mouth. Their ears, frightfully distended, held dangling to them disks of wood and plates of gum copal. They were clad in brilliantly-painted cloths, and the soldiers were armed with the saw-toothed war-club, the bow and arrows barbed and poisoned with the juice of the euphorbium, the cutlass, the "sima," a long sabre (also with saw-like teeth), and some small battle-axes.

The doctor advanced into the palace, and there, notwithstanding

the sultan's illness, the din, which was terrific before, redoubled the instant that he arrived. He noticed, at the lintels of the door, some rabbits' tails and zebras' manes, suspended as talismans. He was received by the whole troop of his majesty's wives, to the harmonious accords of the "upatu," a sort of cymbal made of the bottom of a copper kettle, and to the uproar of the "kilindo," a drum five feet high, hollowed out from the trunk of a tree, and hammered by the ponderous, horny fists of two jet-black virtuosi.

Most of the women were rather good-looking, and they laughed and chattered merrily as they smoked their tobacco and "thang" in huge black pipes. They seemed to be well made, too, under the long robes that they wore gracefully flung about their persons, and carried a sort of "kilt" woven from the fibres of calabash fastened around their girdles.

Six of them were not the least merry of the party, although put aside from the rest, and reserved for a cruel fate. On the death of the sultan, they were to be buried alive with him, so as to occupy and divert his mind during the period of eternal solitude.

Dr. Ferguson, taking in the whole scene at a rapid glance, approached the wooden couch on which the sultan lay reclining. There he saw a man of about forty, completely brutalized by orgies of every description, and in a

condition that left little or nothing to be done. The sickness that had afflicted him for so many years was simply perpetual drunkenness. The royal sot had nearly lost all consciousness, and all the ammonia in the world would not have set him on his feet again.

His favorites and the women kept on bended knees during this solemn visit. By means of a few drops of powerful cordial, the doctor for a moment reanimated the imbruted carcass that lay before him. The sultan stirred, and, for a dead body that had given no sign whatever of life for several hours previously, this symptom was received with a tremendous repetition of shouts and cries in the doctor's honor.

The latter, who had seen enough of it by this time, by a rapid motion put aside his too demonstrative admirers and went out of the palace, directing his steps immediately toward the balloon, for it was now six o'clock in the evening.

Joe, during his absence, had been quietly waiting at the foot of the ladder, where the crowd paid him their most humble respects. Like a genuine son of the moon, he let them keep on. For a divinity, he had the air of a very clever sort of fellow, by no means proud, nay, even pleasingly familiar with the young negresses, who seemed never to tire of looking at him. Besides, he went so far

as to chat agreeably with them.

"Worship me, ladies! worship me!" he said to them.

"I'm a clever sort of devil, if I am the son of a goddess."

They brought him propitiatory gifts, such as are usually deposited in the fetich huts or mzimu. These gifts consisted of stalks of barley and of "pombe." Joe considered himself in duty bound to taste the latter species of strong beer, but his palate, although accustomed to gin and whiskey, could not withstand the strength of the new beverage, and he had to make a horrible grimace, which his dusky friends took to be a benevolent smile.

Thereupon, the young damsels, conjoining their voices in a drawling chant, began to dance around him with the utmost gravity.

"Ah! you're dancing, are you?" said he. "Well, I won't be behind you in politeness, and so I'll give you one of my country reels."

So at it he went, in one of the wildest jigs that ever was seen, twisting, turning, and jerking himself in all directions; dancing with his hands, dancing with his body, dancing with his knees, dancing with his feet; describing the most fearful contortions and extravagant evolutions;

throwing himself into incredible attitudes; grimacing beyond all belief, and, in fine giving his savage admirers a strange idea of the style of ballet adopted by the deities in the moon.

Then, the whole collection of blacks, naturally as imitative as monkeys, at once reproduced all his airs and graces, his leaps and shakes and contortions; they did not lose a single gesticulation; they did not forget an attitude; and the result was, such a pandemonium of movement, noise, and excitement, as it would be out of the question even feebly to describe. But, in the very midst of the fun, Joe saw the doctor approaching.

The latter was coming at full speed, surrounded by a yelling and disorderly throng. The chiefs and sorcerers seemed to be highly excited. They were close upon the doctor's heels, crowding and threatening him.

Singular reaction! What had happened? Had the sultan unluckily perished in the hands of his celestial physician?

Kennedy, from his post of observation, saw the danger without knowing what had caused it, and the balloon, powerfully urged by the dilation of the gas, strained and tugged at the ropes that held it as though impatient to soar away.

The doctor had got as far as the foot of the ladder. A superstitious fear still held the crowd aloof and hindered them from committing any violence on his person. He rapidly scaled the ladder, and Joe followed him with his usual agility.

"Not a moment to lose!" said the doctor. "Don't attempt to let go the anchor! We'll cut the cord! Follow me!"

"But what's the matter?" asked Joe, clambering into the car.

"What's happened?" questioned Kennedy, rifle in hand.

"Look!" replied the doctor, pointing to the horizon.

"Well?" ejaculated the Scot.

"Well! the moon!"

And, in fact, there was the moon rising red and magnificent, a globe of fire in a field of blue! It was she, indeed--she and the balloon!--both in one sky!

Either there were two moons, then, or these strangers

were imposters, designing scamps, false deities!

Such were the very natural reflections of the crowd,
and hence the reaction in their feelings.

Joe could not, for the life of him, keep in a roar of
laughter; and the population of Kazeh, comprehending
that their prey was slipping through their clutches, set
up prolonged howlings, aiming, the while, their bows and
muskets at the balloon.

But one of the sorcerers made a sign, and all the
weapons were lowered. He then began to climb into the
tree, intending to seize the rope and bring the machine to
the ground.

Joe leaned out with a hatchet ready. "Shall I cut
away?" said he.

"No; wait a moment," replied the doctor.

"But this black?"

"We may, perhaps, save our anchor--and I hold a
great deal by that. There'll always be time enough to
cut loose."

The sorcerer, having climbed to the right place, worked so vigorously that he succeeded in detaching the anchor, and the latter, violently jerked, at that moment, by the start of the balloon, caught the rascal between the limbs, and carried him off astride of it through the air.

The stupefaction of the crowd was indescribable as they saw one of their waganga thus whirled away into space.

"Huzza!" roared Joe, as the balloon--thanks to its ascensional force--shot up higher into the sky, with increased rapidity.

"He holds on well," said Kennedy; "a little trip will do him good."

"Shall we let this darky drop all at once?" inquired Joe.

"Oh no," replied the doctor, "we'll let him down easily; and I warrant me that, after such an adventure, the power of the wizard will be enormously enhanced in the sight of his comrades."

"Why, I wouldn't put it past them to make a god of him!" said Joe, with a laugh.

The Victoria, by this time, had risen to the height of one thousand feet, and the black hung to the rope with desperate energy. He had become completely silent, and his eyes were fixed, for his terror was blended with amazement. A light west wind was sweeping the balloon right over the town, and far beyond it.

Half an hour later, the doctor, seeing the country deserted, moderated the flame of his cylinder, and descended toward the ground. At twenty feet above the turf, the affrighted sorcerer made up his mind in a twinkling: he let himself drop, fell on his feet, and scampered off at a furious pace toward Kazeh; while the balloon, suddenly relieved of his weight, again shot up on her course.