

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINTH.

Signs of Vegetation.--The Fantastic Notion of a French Author.--A Magnificent Country.--The Kingdom of Adamova.--The Explorations of Speke and Burton connected with those of Dr. Barth.--The Atlantika Mountains.--The River Benoue.--The City of Yola.--The Bagele.--Mount Mendif.

From the moment of their departure, the travellers moved with great velocity. They longed to leave behind them the desert, which had so nearly been fatal to them.

About a quarter-past nine in the morning, they caught a glimpse of some signs of vegetation: herbage floating on that sea of sand, and announcing, as the weeds upon the ocean did to Christopher Columbus, the nearness of the shore--green shoots peeping up timidly between pebbles that were, in their turn, to be the rocks of that vast expanse.

Hills, but of trifling height, were seen in wavy lines upon the horizon. Their profile, muffled by the heavy mist, was defined but vaguely. The monotony, however, was beginning to disappear.

The doctor hailed with joy the new country thus disclosed, and, like a seaman on lookout at the mast-head, he

was ready to shout aloud:

"Land, ho! land!"

An hour later the continent spread broadly before their gaze, still wild in aspect, but less flat, less denuded, and with a few trees standing out against the gray sky.

"We are in a civilized country at last!" said the hunter.

"Civilized? Well, that's one way of speaking; but there are no people to be seen yet."

"It will not be long before we see them," said Ferguson, "at our present rate of travel."

"Are we still in the negro country, doctor?"

"Yes, and on our way to the country of the Arabs."

"What! real Arabs, sir, with their camels?"

"No, not many camels; they are scarce, if not altogether unknown, in these regions. We must go a few degrees farther north to see them."

"What a pity!"

"And why, Joe?"

"Because, if the wind fell contrary, they might be of use to us."

"How so?"

"Well, sir, it's just a notion that's got into my head: we might hitch them to the car, and make them tow us along. What do you say to that, doctor?"

"Poor Joe! Another person had that idea in advance of you. It was used by a very gifted French author-- M. Mery--in a romance, it is true. He has his travellers drawn along in a balloon by a team of camels; then a lion comes up, devours the camels, swallows the tow-rope, and hauls the balloon in their stead; and so on through the story. You see that the whole thing is the top-flower of fancy, but has nothing in common with our style of locomotion."

Joe, a little cut down at learning that his idea had been used already, cudgelled his wits to imagine what animal could have devoured the lion; but he could not guess it, and so quietly went on scanning the appearance of the country.

A lake of medium extent stretched away before him, surrounded by an amphitheatre of hills, which yet could not be dignified with the name of mountains. There were winding valleys, numerous and fertile, with their tangled thickets of the most various trees. The African oil-tree rose above the mass, with leaves fifteen feet in length upon its stalk, the latter studded with sharp thorns; the bombax, or silk-cotton-tree, filled the wind, as it swept by, with the fine down of its seeds; the pungent odors of the pendanus, the "kenda" of the Arabs, perfumed the air up to the height where the Victoria was sailing; the papaw-tree, with its palm-shaped leaves; the sterculier, which produces the Soudan-nut; the baobab, and the banana-tree, completed the luxuriant flora of these inter-tropical regions.

"The country is superb!" said the doctor.

"Here are some animals," added Joe. "Men are not far away."

"Oh, what magnificent elephants!" exclaimed Kennedy.

"Is there no way to get a little shooting?"

"How could we manage to halt in a current as strong as this? No, Dick; you must taste a little of the torture of Tantalus just now. You shall make up for it afterward."

And, in truth, there was enough to excite the fancy of a sportsman. Dick's heart fairly leaped in his breast as he grasped the butt of his Purdy.

The fauna of the region were as striking as its flora. The wild-ox revelled in dense herbage that often concealed his whole body; gray, black, and yellow elephants of the most gigantic size burst headlong, like a living hurricane, through the forests, breaking, rending, tearing down, devastating every thing in their path; upon the woody slopes of the hills trickled cascades and springs flowing northward; there, too, the hippopotami bathed their huge forms, splashing and snorting as they frolicked in the water, and lamantines, twelve feet long, with bodies like seals, stretched themselves along the banks, turning up toward the sun their rounded teats swollen with milk.

It was a whole menagerie of rare and curious beasts in a wondrous hot-house, where numberless birds with plumage of a thousand hues gleamed and fluttered in the sunshine.

By this prodigality of Nature, the doctor recognized the splendid kingdom of Adamova.

"We are now beginning to trench upon the realm of modern discovery. I have taken up the lost scent of preceding

travellers. It is a happy chance, my friends, for we shall be enabled to link the toils of Captains Burton and Speke with the explorations of Dr. Barth. We have left the Englishmen behind us, and now have caught up with the Hamburger. It will not be long, either, before we arrive at the extreme point attained by that daring explorer."

"It seems to me that there is a vast extent of country between the two explored routes," remarked Kennedy; "at least, if I am to judge by the distance that we have made."

"It is easy to determine: take the map and see what is the longitude of the southern point of Lake Ukereoue, reached by Speke."

"It is near the thirty-seventh degree."

"And the city of Yola, which we shall sight this evening, and to which Barth penetrated, what is its position?"

"It is about in the twelfth degree of east longitude."

"Then there are twenty-five degrees, or, counting sixty miles to each, about fifteen hundred miles in all."

"A nice little walk," said Joe, "for people who have

to go on foot."

"It will be accomplished, however. Livingstone and Moffat are pushing on up this line toward the interior. Nyassa, which they have discovered, is not far from Lake Tanganayika, seen by Burton. Ere the close of the century these regions will, undoubtedly, be explored. But," added the doctor, consulting his compass, "I regret that the wind is carrying us so far to the westward. I wanted to get to the north."

After twelve hours of progress, the Victoria found herself on the confines of Nigritia. The first inhabitants of this region, the Chouas Arabs, were feeding their wandering flocks. The immense summits of the Atlantika Mountains seen above the horizon--mountains that no European foot had yet scaled, and whose height is computed to be ten thousand feet! Their western slope determines the flow of all the waters in this region of Africa toward the ocean. They are the Mountains of the Moon to this part of the continent.

At length a real river greeted the gaze of our travellers, and, by the enormous ant-hills seen in its vicinity, the doctor recognized the Benoue, one of the great tributaries of the Niger, the one which the natives have called "The Fountain of the Waters."

"This river," said the doctor to his companions, "will, one day, be the natural channel of communication with the interior of Nigritia. Under the command of one of our brave captains, the steamer Pleiad has already ascended as far as the town of Yola. You see that we are not in an unknown country."

Numerous slaves were engaged in the labors of the field, cultivating sorgho, a kind of millet which forms the chief basis of their diet; and the most stupid expressions of astonishment ensued as the Victoria sped past like a meteor. That evening the balloon halted about forty miles from Yola, and ahead of it, but in the distance, rose the two sharp cones of Mount Mendif.

The doctor threw out his anchors and made fast to the top of a high tree; but a very violent wind beat upon the balloon with such force as to throw it over on its side, thus rendering the position of the car sometimes extremely dangerous. Ferguson did not close his all night, and he was repeatedly on the point of cutting the anchor-rope and scudding away before the gale. At length, however, the storm abated, and the oscillations of the balloon ceased to be alarming.

On the morrow the wind was more moderate, but it

carried our travellers away from the city of Yola, which recently rebuilt by the Fouillans, excited Ferguson's curiosity. However, he had to make up his mind to being borne farther to the northward and even a little to the east.

Kennedy proposed to halt in this fine hunting-country, and Joe declared that the need of fresh meat was beginning to be felt; but the savage customs of the country, the attitude of the population, and some shots fired at the Victoria, admonished the doctor to continue his journey. They were then crossing a region that was the scene of massacres and burnings, and where warlike conflicts between the barbarian sultans, contending for their power amid the most atrocious carnage, never cease.

Numerous and populous villages of long low huts stretched away between broad pasture-fields whose dense herbage was besprinkled with violet-colored blossoms. The huts, looking like huge beehives, were sheltered behind bristling palisades. The wild hill-sides and hollows frequently reminded the beholder of the glens in the Highlands of Scotland, as Kennedy more than once remarked.

In spite of all he could do, the doctor bore directly to the northeast, toward Mount Mendif, which was lost in the midst of environing clouds. The lofty summits of these mountains separate the valley of the Niger from the

basin of Lake Tchad.

Soon afterward was seen the Bagele, with its eighteen villages clinging to its flanks like a whole brood of children to their mother's bosom--a magnificent spectacle for the beholder whose gaze commanded and took in the entire picture at one view. Even the ravines were seen to be covered with fields of rice and of arachides.

By three o'clock the Victoria was directly in front of Mount Mendif. It had been impossible to avoid it; the only thing to be done was to cross it. The doctor, by means of a temperature increased to one hundred and eighty degrees, gave the balloon a fresh ascensional force of nearly sixteen hundred pounds, and it went up to an elevation of more than eight thousand feet, the greatest height attained during the journey. The temperature of the atmosphere was so much cooler at that point that the aeronauts had to resort to their blankets and thick coverings.

Ferguson was in haste to descend; the covering of the balloon gave indications of bursting, but in the meanwhile he had time to satisfy himself of the volcanic origin of the mountain, whose extinct craters are now but deep abysses. Immense accumulations of bird-guano gave the sides of Mount Mendif the appearance of calcareous rocks, and there was enough of the deposit there to manure all the lands in

the United Kingdom.

At five o'clock the Victoria, sheltered from the south winds, went gently gliding along the slopes of the mountain, and stopped in a wide clearing remote from any habitation. The instant it touched the soil, all needful precautions were taken to hold it there firmly; and Kennedy, fowling-piece in hand, sallied out upon the sloping plain. Ere long, he returned with half a dozen wild ducks and a kind of snipe, which Joe served up in his best style. The meal was heartily relished, and the night was passed in undisturbed and refreshing slumber.