

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVENTH.

The Western Route.--Joe wakes up.--His Obstinacy.--End of Joe's Narrative.--Tagelei.--Kennedy's Anxieties.--The Route to the North.--A Night near Aghades.

During the night the wind lulled as though reposing after the boisterousness of the day, and the Victoria remained quietly at the top of the tall sycamore. The doctor and Kennedy kept watch by turns, and Joe availed himself of the chance to sleep most sturdily for twenty-four hours at a stretch.

"That's the remedy he needs," said Dr. Ferguson.

"Nature will take charge of his care."

With the dawn the wind sprang up again in quite strong, and moreover capricious gusts. It shifted abruptly from south to north, but finally the Victoria was carried away by it toward the west.

The doctor, map in hand, recognized the kingdom of Damerghou, an undulating region of great fertility, in which the huts that compose the villages are constructed of long reeds interwoven with branches of the asclepia. The grain-mills were seen raised in the cultivated fields, upon small scaffoldings or platforms, to keep them out of

the reach of the mice and the huge ants of that country.

They soon passed the town of Zinder, recognized by its spacious place of execution, in the centre of which stands the "tree of death." At its foot the executioner stands waiting, and whoever passes beneath its shadow is immediately hung!

Upon consulting his compass, Kennedy could not refrain from saying:

"Look! we are again moving northward."

"No matter; if it only takes us to Timbuctoo, we shall not complain. Never was a finer voyage accomplished under better circumstances!"

"Nor in better health," said Joe, at that instant thrusting his jolly countenance from between the curtains of the awning.

"There he is! there's our gallant friend--our preserver!" exclaimed Kennedy, cordially.--"How goes it, Joe?"

"Oh! why, naturally enough, Mr. Kennedy, very naturally! I never felt better in my life! Nothing sets a man up like a little pleasure-trip with a bath in Lake

Tchad to start on--eh, doctor?"

"Brave fellow!" said Ferguson, pressing Joe's hand,
"what terrible anxiety you caused us!"

"Humph! and you, sir? Do you think that I felt
easy in my mind about you, gentlemen? You gave me
a fine fright, let me tell you!"

"We shall never agree in the world, Joe, if you take
things in that style."

"I see that his tumble hasn't changed him a bit,"
added Kennedy.

"Your devotion and self-forgetfulness were sublime,
my brave lad, and they saved us, for the Victoria was falling
into the lake, and, once there, nobody could have extricated her."

"But, if my devotion, as you are pleased to call my
summerset, saved you, did it not save me too, for here we
are, all three of us, in first-rate health? Consequently we
have nothing to squabble about in the whole affair."

"Oh! we can never come to a settlement with that
youth," said the sportsman.

"The best way to settle it," replied Joe, "is to say nothing more about the matter. What's done is done. Good or bad, we can't take it back."

"You obstinate fellow!" said the doctor, laughing; "you can't refuse, though, to tell us your adventures, at all events."

"Not if you think it worth while. But, in the first place, I'm going to cook this fat goose to a turn, for I see that Mr. Kennedy has not wasted his time."

"All right, Joe!"

"Well, let us see then how this African game will sit on a European stomach!"

The goose was soon roasted by the flame of the blow-pipe, and not long afterward was comfortably stowed away. Joe took his own good share, like a man who had eaten nothing for several days. After the tea and the punch, he acquainted his friends with his recent adventures. He spoke with some emotion, even while looking at things with his usual philosophy. The doctor could not refrain from frequently pressing his hand when he saw his worthy servant more considerate of his master's safety than of his own, and, in relation to the sinking of the island

of the Biddiomahs, he explained to him the frequency of this phenomenon upon Lake Tchad.

At length Joe, continuing his recital, arrived at the point where, sinking in the swamp, he had uttered a last cry of despair.

"I thought I was gone," said he, "and as you came right into my mind, I made a hard fight for it. How, I couldn't tell you--but I'd made up my mind that I wouldn't go under without knowing why. Just then, I saw--two or three feet from me--what do you think? the end of a rope that had been fresh cut; so I took leave to make another jerk, and, by hook or by crook, I got to the rope. When I pulled, it didn't give; so I pulled again and hauled away and there I was on dry ground! At the end of the rope, I found an anchor! Ah, master, I've a right to call that the anchor of safety, anyhow, if you have no objection. I knew it again! It was the anchor of the Victoria! You had grounded there! So I followed the direction of the rope and that gave me your direction, and, after trying hard a few times more, I got out of the swamp. I had got my strength back with my spunk, and I walked on part of the night away from the lake, until I got to the edge of a very big wood. There I saw a fenced-in place, where some horses were grazing, without thinking of any harm. Now, there are times when everybody knows how

to ride a horse, are there not, doctor? So I didn't spend much time thinking about it, but jumped right on the back of one of those innocent animals and away we went galloping north as fast as our legs could carry us. I needn't tell you about the towns that I didn't see nor the villages that I took good care to go around. No! I crossed the ploughed fields; I leaped the hedges; I scrambled over the fences; I dug my heels into my nag; I thrashed him; I fairly lifted the poor fellow off his feet! At last I got to the end of the tilled land. Good! There was the desert. 'That suits me!' said I, 'for I can see better ahead of me and farther too.' I was hoping all the time to see the balloon tacking about and waiting for me. But not a bit of it; and so, in about three hours, I go plump, like a fool, into a camp of Arabs! Whew! what a hunt that was! You see, Mr. Kennedy, a hunter don't know what a real hunt is until he's been hunted himself! Still I advise him not to try it if he can keep out of it! My horse was so tired, he was ready to drop off his legs; they were close on me; I threw myself to the ground; then I jumped up again behind an Arab! I didn't mean the fellow any harm, and I hope he has no grudge against me for choking him, but I saw you--and you know the rest. The Victoria came on at my heels, and you caught me up flying, as a circus-rider does a ring. Wasn't I right in counting on you? Now, doctor, you see how simple all that was! Nothing more natural in the world! I'm ready to begin

over again, if it would be of any service to you. And besides, master, as I said a while ago, it's not worth mentioning."

"My noble, gallant Joe!" said the doctor, with great feeling. "Heart of gold! we were not astray in trusting to your intelligence and skill."

"Poh! doctor, one has only just to follow things along as they happen, and he can always work his way out of a scrape! The safest plan, you see, is to take matters as they come."

While Joe was telling his experience, the balloon had rapidly passed over a long reach of country, and Kennedy soon pointed out on the horizon a collection of structures that looked like a town. The doctor glanced at his map and recognized the place as the large village of Tagelei, in the Damerghou country.

"Here," said he, "we come upon Dr. Barth's route. It was at this place that he parted from his companions, Richardson and Overweg; the first was to follow the Zinder route, and the second that of Maradi; and you may remember that, of these three travellers, Barth was the only one who ever returned to Europe."

"Then," said Kennedy, following out on the map the direction of the Victoria, "we are going due north."

"Due north, Dick."

"And don't that give you a little uneasiness?"

"Why should it?"

"Because that line leads to Tripoli, and over the Great Desert."

"Oh, we shall not go so far as that, my friend--at least, I hope not."

"But where do you expect to halt?"

"Come, Dick, don't you feel some curiosity to see Timbuctoo?"

"Timbuctoo?"

"Certainly," said Joe; "nobody nowadays can think of making the trip to Africa without going to see Timbuctoo."

"You will be only the fifth or sixth European who has

ever set eyes on that mysterious city."

"Ho, then, for Timbuctoo!"

"Well, then, let us try to get as far as between the seventeenth and eighteenth degrees of north latitude, and there we will seek a favorable wind to carry us westward."

"Good!" said the hunter. "But have we still far to go to the northward?"

"One hundred and fifty miles at least."

"In that case," said Kennedy, "I'll turn in and sleep a bit."

"Sleep, sir; sleep!" urged Joe. "And you, doctor, do the same yourself: you must have need of rest, for I made you keep watch a little out of time."

The sportsman stretched himself under the awning; but Ferguson, who was not easily conquered by fatigue, remained at his post.

In about three hours the Victoria was crossing with extreme rapidity an expanse of stony country, with ranges of lofty, naked mountains of granitic formation at the

base. A few isolated peaks attained the height of even four thousand feet. Giraffes, antelopes, and ostriches were seen running and bounding with marvellous agility in the midst of forests of acacias, mimosas, souahs, and date-trees. After the barrenness of the desert, vegetation was now resuming its empire. This was the country of the Kailouas, who veil their faces with a bandage of cotton, like their dangerous neighbors, the Touaregs.

At ten o'clock in the evening, after a splendid trip of two hundred and fifty miles, the Victoria halted over an important town. The moonlight revealed glimpses of one district half in ruins; and some pinnacles of mosques and minarets shot up here and there, glistening in the silvery rays. The doctor took a stellar observation, and discovered that he was in the latitude of Aghades.

This city, once the seat of an immense trade, was already falling into ruin when Dr. Barth visited it.

The Victoria, not being seen in the obscurity of night, descended about two miles above Aghades, in a field of millet. The night was calm, and began to break into dawn about three o'clock A.M.; while a light wind coaxed the balloon westward, and even a little toward the south.

Dr. Ferguson hastened to avail himself of such good

fortune, and rapidly ascending resumed his aerial journey amid a long wake of golden morning sunshine.