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CHAPTER XXIII .- THE TEMPLE OF TRUTH.



UR preparations did not take us very long. We put a change of clothing apiece and some spare hoots into my-Gladstone bag, al so we took our revolvers and an express rifle each, together with a good supply of ammunition-a

precaution to which, under Providence, we subsequently owed our lives over and over again. The rest of our year, together with our heavy rifles, we left behind us.

A few minutes before the appointed time we once more attended in Ayesha's boudoir, and found her also ready, her dark cloak thrown over her winding-sheet-like wrappings.

"Are ye prepared for the great venture?" she said.

"We are." I answered, "though for my par'. Avesha, I have no faith in it." "' 'ny Holly," she said, "thou art of a truth ke those old Jews, of whom the memory plagues me so sorely, unbelieving and hard to accept that which they have not seen. But thou shalt see: for unless my mirror yonder lies"-and she pointed to the font of crystal water-"the path is yet open as it was of old time. And now let us start upon the new life which shall end —who knoweth where?"

"Ah," I echoed, "who knoweth where?" and we passed down into the great central cave, and out into the light of day. At the mouth of the cave we found a single litter with six bearers, all of them mutes, waiting, and with them I was relieved to see our old friend Billaii, for whom I had conceived a sort of affection. It appeared that, for reasons not necessary to explain at length, Ayesha had thought it best that, with the exception of herself, we should proceed on foot, and this we were nothing loathe to do, after our long confinement in caves, which, however suitable they might be for sarcophagi-a singularly inappropriate word, by the way, for these particular tombs, which certainly did not consume the bodies given to their keeping-were depressing habitations for breathing mortals like ourselves. Either by accident or by the orders of Shc, the space in front of the cave where we had beheld that awful dance was perfectly clear of spectators. Not a soul was to be seen, and consequently I do not believe that our departure was known to anybody except, perhaps, the mutes who waited on She, and they were, of course, in the habit of holding their

tongues as to what they saw. In a few minutes we were stepping out sharply across the great cultivated plain or lake bed framed like a vast emerald in its setting of frowning cliff, and had another opportunity of wondering at the ex-traordinary nature of the site chosen by these old people of Kor for their capital, and at the marvelous amount of labor, ingenuity, and engineering skill that must have been brought into requisition by the founders of the city to drain so huge a sheet of water, and to keep it clear of subsequent accumulations. It is, indeed, so far as my experience goes, an unequaled instance of what man can do in the face of nature, for in my opinion such achievements as the Suez Canal or even the Mont Cenis Tunnel do not approach this ancient

undertaking in magnitude. When we had been walking for about half an hour, enjoying ourselves exceedingly in the delightful cool which about this time of the day always appeared to descend upon the great plain of Kor, and in some degree atoned for the want of any land or see breeze, for all wind was kept off by the rocky mountain wall, we began to get a clear view of what Biliali had informed us were the ruins of the great city. And even from that distance we could see how wonderful those ruins were, a fact that with every step we took became more evident. The city was not very large if compared to Babylon or Thebes, or other cities of remote antiquity; perhaps its outer wall contained some tweive square miles of ground, or a little more. Nor had the wails, so far as we could judge when we reached them, been very high, probably not more than forty feet, which was about their present height where they had not, through the sinking of the ground or some such cause, fallen into ruin. The reason of this, no doubt, was that the people of Kor, being protected from any outside ateck by lar more tremendous ramparts an any that the hand of man could rear,

.y required them for show, and to guard an against civil discord. But on the ...er hand they were as broad as they were nigh, built entirely of dressed stone, newn, no noutst, from the vast caves, and surrounded by a great most about sixty feet la width, some portions of which were still ified with water. About ten initiates betore the sun finally sank we reached this most, and passed down and through ft, CHAID CLAIR across What evidently were the parent up an agments of a great bridge in oruer to uo so, and then with some little difficulty up the slope of the wall to its summit. I wish that it lay within the nower of my pen to give some idea of the randeur of the eight that then met our view. There, all bathed in the red glow of the sinking sun, were miles upon miles of ruins-columns, temples, shrines, and the palaces of kings, varied with patches of green bush. Of course the roofs of these builtings had long since fallen into decay and vanished, but owing to the extreme massiveness of the style of building, and to the hardness and durability of the rock employed, most of the party walls and great columns still remained standing.

There before us stretched away what had ewidently been the main thoroughfare of the city, for it was very wide, wider than the Thames Embankment, and regular. Being, as we afterward discovered paved, or rather built, throughout of blocks of dressed stone, such as were em-ployed in the walls, it was but little over-crown even now with grass and shrubs What had been the parks and gardens, on the contrary were now dense jungle. Indeed, it was easy even from a distance to trace the course of the various roads by the burnt-up appearance of the scanty grass that grew upon them. On either side of this great thoroughfare were vast blocks of ruins, each block, generally speaking, being separated from its neighbor by a space of what had once. I suppose, been garden ground, but was now dense and tangled bush. They were all built of the same colored stone, and most of them had pillars, which was as much as we could make out in the fading light as we passed swiftly up the main road, that I believe I am right in saying no living foot had passed for thousands of years.

Presently we came to an enormous pile, which we rightly took to be a temple, covering at least four acres of ground, appar ently arranged in a series of courts, each one inclosing another of smaller size, on the principle of a Chinese nest of boxes, and separated one from the other by rows of huge columns. And whilst I think of it I may as well state a remarkable thing about the shape of these columns, which resembled none that I have ever seen or heard of, being made with a kind of waist in the center, and swelling out above and below. At first we thought that the shape was meant to roughly symbolize or suggest the female form, as was a common habit amongst the ancient religious architects of all creeds. On the following day, however, as we went up the slopes of the mountain, we discovered a large quantity of the most stately-looking palms, of which the trunks grew exactly in this shape, and I have now no doubt that the first designer of those

commas drew his inspiration from the graceful bends of those very palms, or rather their ancestors, which then, some eight or ten thousand years ago, as now, beautified the slopes of the mountain that had once formed the shores of the volcanic

lake. At the facede of this huge temple, which, I should imagine, is almost as large as that of El-Karnac at Luxor, some of the largest columns, which I measured, being between eighteen and twenty feet in diameter at the base, by some sixty feet in height, our little procession was halted, and Ayesha descended from the litter.

"There used to be a spot here, Kallikrates," she said to Leo, who had run up to lift her down, "where one might sleep. Two thousand years ago did thou and I and that Egyptian snake rest therein, but since then have I not set foot here, nor any man, and perchance it has fallen;" and, followed by the rest of us, she passed up a vast flight of broken and ruined steps into the outer court, and looked round into the gloom Presently she seemed to recollect, and, walking a few paces along the wall to the left, halted.

"It is here," she said, and at the same time beckoned to the two mutes, who were loaded with provisions and our little belongings, to advance. One of them came forward, and soon produced a lamp and lit it from his brazier, for the Amahagger when on a journey nearly always carried with them a little lighted brazier, from which to provide fire. The tinder of this brazier was made of broken fragments of mummy carefully damped, and if the admixture of moisture was properly managed, this unholy compound would smolder away for hours. As soon as the lamp was lit we entered the place before which Ayesha had stopped. It turned out to be a chamber hollowed in the thickness of the wall, and, from the fact of there still being a massive stone table in it, I should think that it had probably served as a living-room, perhaps tor one of the doorkeepers of the

Here we stopped, and after cleaning the place out and making it as confortable as circumstances and the darkness would permit, we are some cold meat, at least Leo, Job, and I did, for Ayesh a as I thin c I have said elsewhere, hever todened anything except irun an a water. " laist we were enting, the moon which was at her full, rose above the nountain wall, and began to floor the place with silver.

"Wot ye way a anye orottent ye here tonight, my Honly!" said Ayes.a. leaning her head thou her had a did watching the great orbits she rose, time some heavenly queen, above the solving piliars of the temple. "I brought ve-yea, it is strange, but knowest thou, Kallikrates, that thou liest at this moment upon the very spot where thy dead body lav when I bore thee back to those caves of Kor so many years ago! It all returns to my mind now. I can see it, and horrible is it to my sight," and she shuddered.

Here Leo jumped up, and hastily changed his seat. However the reminiscence might affect Ayesha, it clearly had few charms

"I brought ye," went on Ayesha, presently, "that ye might look upon the most wonderful sight that ever the eye of man beheld-the full-moon shining over ruined Kor. When ye have done your eating-I would that I could teach thee to eat naught but fruit, Kallikrates, but that will come after thou hast laved in the fire; once I, too, ate flesh like a brute beast-when ye have done we will go out, and I will show ye this great temple, and the God that men once worshiped therein."

Of course we got up at once, and started. And here again my pen fails me. To give a string of measurements and details of the various courts of the temple would only be wearisome, supposing that I had them and yet I know not how I am to describe what we saw, magnificent as it was even in its ruin, almost beyond the power of realization. Court upon dim court, row upon row of mighty pillars-some of them (especially at the gateways) sculptured from pedestal to capital-space upon space of empty chambers that spoke more eloquently to the imagination than any crowded streets. And over all, the dead silence of the dead, the sense of utter loneliness, and brooding spirit of the Past' How beautiful it was, and yet how drear! We did not dare to speak aloud. Ayesha herself was awed in the presence of an antiquity compared to which even her length of days was but a little thing; we only whispered, and our whispers seemed to run from column to column till they were lost in the quiet air. Bright fell the moonlight on pillar and court and shattered wall, hiding all their rents and imperfections in its silver garment, and clothing their hoary majesty with the peculiar glory of the night. It was a wonderful sight to see the full moon looking down on the ruined fane of Kor. It was a wonderful thing to think for how many thousands of years the dead orb above and the dead city below had gazed thus upon each other, and in the utter solitude of space poured forth each to each the tale of their lost life and long-departed glory. The weird light fell, and minute by minute the quiet shadows crept across the grass-grown courts like the spirits of old priests haunting the habitations of their worship—the weird light fell, and the long shadows grew till the beauty and grandeur of the scene and the untamed majesty of its present Death seemed to sink into our very souls, and speak more loudly than the tongues of trumpets concerning the pomp and splendor that the grave had swallowed, and even

memory had forgotton. "Come," said Ayesha, after we had gazed and gazed, I know not for how long, "and I will show you the stony flower of Loveliness and Wonder's very crown, If yet it stands to mock time with its beauty and fill the heart of man with longing for that which is behind the veil," and, without waiting for an answer, she led us through two more pillared courts into the inner shrine of the old fane.

And there, in the center of the inmost court, that might have been some fifty yards square, or a little more, we stord face to face with what is perhaps the grandest allegorical work of art that the genius of her children has ever given to the world. For in the exact center of the court, placed upon a thick square slab of rock, was a huge round ball of dark stone, some forty feet in diameter, and standing on the ball was a colossal winged figure of



In the exact center of the court was a huge . round buil of dark stone.

a beauty so entrancing and divine, and when first I gazed upon it, illumined and shadowed as it was by the soft light of the moon, my breath stood still, and for an in-The statue was bewn from marble so pure and white, that even now, after all those ages, it shows us the moonbeams danced upon it, and its height was, I should

say, a trifle under twenty feet. It was the winged figure of a woman of such marvel-

our forengess are the ferry of form that the size seem of rather would than to detract from its so human and yet more spiritual beauty. Sie was bending forward, and poising herself upon her halfspread wings as though to preserve her balance as she leant. Her arms were outstretched, like those of some woman about to embrace one she dearly loved, while her whole attitude gave an incression of the tenderest berce bing. Il. perfect and most gracions form was natie, save-and here came the extract harr thing-the face, which was thinly viled, so that we could only trace the marking of her features. A gauzy veil was thrown round and about the head, and of its two ends. one fell down across her left breast, which was outlined beneath it, and one, now broken, streamed away upon the air be-

hind it. "What is she?" I asked, as soon as could take my eyes off the statue.

"Canst thou not guess, oh, Holly?" answered Ayesha. "Where, then, is thy immagination? It is Truth standing on the World, and calling to its children to unveil her face. See what is writ upon the pedestal. Without doubt it is taken from the book of the Scriptures of these men of Kor," and she led the way to the foot of the statue, where an inscription of the uual Chinese-looking hiere lyphics was so deeply graven as to be said quite legible, at least to Ayesha. According to her translation it ran thus:

"Is there no man that will draw my veil and look upon my face? for it is very fair. Unto him who draws my veil shall I be, and peace will I give him, and sweet children of knowl-

edge and good works.
"And a voice said, Though all those who seek after thee desire thee, behold, Virgin art thou, and Virgin shall thou go till Time be done. No man is there born of woman who may draw thy veil and live, nor shall be. In death only can thy veil be drawn, O Truth.' "And truth stretched out her arms and wept, because those who sought her might not find

her, nor look upon her face to face. "Thou seest," said Ayesha, when she finished translating, "Truth was the God-dess of the people of old Kor, and to her they built their shrines, and her they sought; knowing that they should never

find, still sought they." "And so," I added, sadly, "do men seek to this very hour, but they find not; and as this scripture says, nor shall they; for in

Death only is Truth found." Then, with one more look at the veiled and spiritualized loveliness, which was so perfect and so pure that one might almost fancy that the light of a living spirit shone through the marble prison to lead man on to high ethereal thoughts-this poet's dream of beauty frozen into stone, which I never shall forget while I live, though I find myself so helpless when I attempt to describe it, we turned and went back through the vast mounlit courts to the spot whence we had started. I never saw the statue again, which I the more regret because on the great ball of stone representing the world whereon the figure stood lines were drawn, that probably, had there been light enough, we should have discovered to be a map of the universe as it was known to the prople of Kor. It is at any rate suggestive of some ancient knowledge that these ancient worshipers of Truth had recognized the fact that the globe is round. To be continued.

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