

so. stay, he would go down to sharnalls room and see if he could find any trace of his taking luggage; perhaps he had left some message to explain his absence. he lit a candle and went down, down the great well staircase where the stone steps echoed under his feet. a patch of bright moonshine fell on the stairs from the skylight at the top, and a noise of someone moving in the attics told him that miss joliffe was not yet asleep. there was nothing in the organists room to give any explanation of his absence. the light of the candle was reflected on the front of the piano, and westray shuddered involuntarily as he remembered the conversation which he had a few weeks before with this friend, and mr sharnalls strange hallucinations as to the man that walked behind him with a hammer. he looked into the bedroom with a momentary apprehension that his friend might have been seized with illness, and be lying all this time unconscious; but there was no one there the bed was undisturbed. so he went back to his own room upstairs, but the night had turned so chill that he could no longer bear the open window. he stood with his hand upon the sash looking out for a moment before he pulled it down, and noticed how the centre tower dominated and prevailed over all the town. it was impossible, surely, that this rock like mass could be insecure; how puny and insufficient to uphold such a tottering giant seemed the tie rods whose section he was working out. and then he thought of the crack above the south transept arch that he had seen from the organ loft, and remembered how sharnall in a flat had been interrupted by the discovery. why, mr sharnall might be in the church; perhaps he had gone down to practise and been shut in. perhaps his key had broken, and he could not get out; he wondered that supper, the natives, in order to have as much of our company as possible, crowded it till it was literally crammed. however annoying this might be, still i was recompensed by the novelty and picturesque appearance of the scene. salvator rosa could not have conceived a finer study of the horrible. a dozen men, of the largest and most athletic forms, their cakahoos or mat dresses laid aside, and their huge limbs exposed to the red glare of the fire; their faces rendered hideous by being tattooed all over, showing by the firelight quite a bright blue; their eyes, which are remarkable for their fierce expression, all fixed upon us, but with a look of good temper, so mingled with intense curiosity. all my fears had by this time subsided, and, being master of myself, i had leisure to study and enjoy the scene; we smoked a social pipe with them for they are all immoderately fond of tobacco, and i then stretched myself down to sleep amidst all their chattering and smoke. but all my attempts at slumber were fruitless. i underwent a simultaneous attack of vermin of all descriptions; fleas, mosquitoes, and sand flies, which, beside their depredations on my person, made such a buzzing noise, that even the chattering of the natives could not drown it, or the smoke from the fire or pipes drive them away.

chapter viii. toilsome journey through the forest. next morning, at daybreak, we took leave of our hosts, and proceeded on our journey; we had eight miles more of this thick forest to scramble through, and this part we found considerably worse than that we had traversed yesterday. the roots of trees covered the path in all directions, rendering it necessary to watch every step we took, in order to prevent being thrown down; the supple jacks, suspended and twining from tree to tree, making in many or two.

he hastily left the dark room, refreshed himself in the kitchen with a gulp of wine, and went up to the open window to gaze at the stars. it was long past midnight; he was reminded of his companions now sacrificing on the mountain, and addressed a long prayer to the crown, the invincible sun god, the great light, the god begotten of the rock, and to many other names of mithras; for since he had belonged to the mystics of this divinity, he had become a zealous devotee, and could fast too with extraordinary constancy. he had already passed through several of the eighty trials, to which a man had to subject himself before he could attain to the highest grades of the initiated, and the weakness which had just now overpowered him, had attacked him for the first time, after he had for a whole week lain for hours in the snow, besides fasting severely, in order to attain the grade of lion. sironas rigorous mind was revolted by all these practices, and the decision with which she had always refused to take any part in them, had widened the breach which, without that, parted her from her husband.