The Lost Continent

By CUTCLIFFE HYNE.

CHAPTER IX.

PHORENICE, GODDESS.

A motley crowd filled the street which ran past the front of the obscure temple, through which I gained entrance to the city, and all were hurrying one way. With what I had been told, it did not take much art to guess that the great stone circle of our Lord the Sun was their mark, and it grieved me to think of how many venerable centuries that great fane had upreared before the weather and the earth tremors, without such profanation as it would witness to-day. And also the thought occurred to me: "Was our Great Lord above drawing this woman on to her destruction? Would He take some vast and final act of vengeance when she consummated her final sacrifice?"

But the crowd pressed on, thrilled and excited, and thinking little (as is a crowd's wont) on the deeper matters which lay beneath the bare spectacle. From one quarter of the city walls the din of an attack from the besiegers made itself clearly heard from over the houses, and the temples and the palaces intervening, but no one heeded it. They had grown callous, these townsfolk, to the battering of rams, and the flight of fire-darts, and the other emotions of a bombardment. Their nerves, their hunger, their desperation were stung to such a pitch that little short of an actual storm could stir them into new excitement over the siege.

All were weaponed. The naked carried arms in the hope of meeting some one whom they could overcome and rob; those that had a possession walked ready to do a battle for its ownership. There was no security, no trust; the lesson of civilization had dropped away from these common people as mud is washed from the feet by rain, and in their new habits and their thoughts they had gone back to the grade from which savages like those of Europe have never yet emerged. It was a grim commentary on the success of Phorenice's rule.

The crowd merged me into their ranks without question, and with them I pressed forward down the winding streets, once so clean and trim, now so foul and mud-strewn. Men and women had died of hunger in these streets these latter years, and rotted where they lay, and we trod their bones under foot as we walked. Yet rising out of this squalor and this misery were great pyramids and palaces, the like of which for splendor and magnificence had never been seen before. It was a jarring admixture.

In time we came to the open space in the center of the city, which even Phorenice had not dared to encroach upon with her ambitious building scaemes, and stood on the secular ground which surrounds the most ancient, the most grand, and the barest of all this world's temples.

Since the beginning of time, when man first emerged among the beasts, our Lord the Sun has always been his chiefest god, and legend says that he raised this circle of stones himself to be a place where votaries should offer him worship. It is the fashion among us moderns not to take these old tales in a too literal sense; but for myself, this one satisfies me. By our wits we can lift blocks weighing 600 men, and set them as the capstones of our great pyramids. But to uprear the stones of that great circle would be beyond all our art, and much more would it be impossible to-day to transport them from their distant quarries across the rugged mountains.

There were nine-and-forty of the stones, alternating with spaces, and set in an accurate circle, and across the tops of them other stones were set, equally huge. The stones were undressed and rugged; but the huge massiveness of them impressed the eye more than all the temples and daintily tooled pyramids of our wondrous city. And in the center of the circle was that still greater stone which formed the altar, and round which was carved, in the rude chiseling of the ancients, the snake and the outstretched hand.

The crowd which bore me on came to a standstill before the circle of stones. To trespass beyond this is death for the common people; and for myself, although I had the right of entrance, I chose to stay where I was for the present, unnoticed among the mob, and wait upon events.

Nearer and nearer drew the drums and the braying of the other music, and presently the head of a glittering procession began to arrive and dispose itself in the space which had been set apart. Many a thousand poor, starving wretches sighed when they saw the wanton splendor of it. But these lords and these courtiers of this new Atlantis had no concern beyond their own bellies and their own backs, except for their one alien regard—their simpering affection for Phorenice.

I think, though, their loyalty for the empress was real enough; and it was not to be wondered at, since everything they had came from her lavish hands. Indeed, the woman had a charm that cannot be denied; for when she appeared riding in the golden castle (where I also had ridden) on the back of her monstrous shaggy mammoth, the starved, sullen faces of the crowd brightened as though a meal and sudden prosperity had been bestowed upon them; and without a word of command, without a trace of compulsion, they burst into spontaneous shouts of welcome.

She acknowledged it with a smile of thanks. Her cheeks were a little flushed, her movements quick, her manner high-strung, as all well might be, seeing the horrible sacrilege she had in mind. But she was undeniably lovely; yes, more adorably beautiful than ever with her present thrill of excitement; and when the stair was brought, and she walked down from the mammoth's back to the ground, those near fell to their knees and gave her worship, out of sheer fascination for her beauty and charm.

Yiga, the fan-girl, alone of all that vast multitude round the sun temple, contained herself within her formal paces and duties. She looked pained and troubled. It was plain to see, even from the distance where I stood, that she carried a heavy heart under the jewels of her robe. It was fitting, too, that this should be so. Though she had been long enough divorced from his care and fostered by the empress, Yiga was a daughter of Zaemon, and he was the chiefest of our Lord the Sun's ministers here on earth. She could not forget her upbringing now at this supreme moment when the highest of the old gods was to be formally defied. And perhaps also (having a kindness for Phorenice) she was not a little dreadful of the consequences.

But the empress had no eye for one sad look among all the sea of glowing faces. Boldly and proudly she strode out into the circle, as though she had been the duly appointed priest for the sacrifice. And after her came a knot of men, dressed as priests, and bearing the victim. Some of these were creatures of her own, and it was easy to forgive mere ignorant laymen, won over by the glamour of Phorenice's presence. But some, to their shame, were men born in the Priests' clan, and brought up in the groves and colleges of the Sacred Mountain, and for their apostasy there could be no palliation.

The wood had already been stacked on the altar-stone in the due form required by the ancient symbolism, and the empress stood aside while those who followed did what was needful. As they opened out, I saw that the victim was one of the small, cloven-hoofed horses that roam the plains—a most acceptable sacrifice. They bound its feet with metal gyves, and put it on the pyre, where, for awhile, it lay neighing. Then they stepped aside, and left it living. Here was an innovation.

The false priests went back to the farther side of the circle, and Phorenice stood alone before the altar. She lifted up her voice, sweet, tuneful and carrying, and, though the din of the siege still came from over the city, no ear there lost a word of what was spoken.

She raised her glance aloft, and all other eyes followed it. The heaven was clear as the deep sea, a gorgeous blue. But as the words came

"BACK WITH YOU, OUTSIDE THIS CIRCLE."

from her, so a small mist was born in the sky, wheeling and circling like a ball, although the day was windless, and rapidly growing darker and more compact. So dense had it become that presently it threw a shadow on part of the sacred circle that soothed it into twilight, though all without, where the people stood, was still garish day. And in the ball of mist were little quick stabs and splashes of noiseless flame.

She spoke not in the priests' sacred tongue—though such was her wicked cleverness that she may very well have learned it—but in the common speech of the people, so that all who heard might understand, and she told of her wondrous birth (as she chose to name it), and of the direct aid of the most high gods, which had enabled her to work so many marvels. And in the end she lifted both of her fair white arms towards the blackness above, and with her lovely face set with the strain of will, uttered her final cry:

"O my high father, the sun, I pray you now to acknowledge me as your very daughter. Give this people a sign that I am indeed a child of the gods, and no frail mortal. Here is sacrifice unlit, where mortal priests with their puny fires had weekly, since the foundation of this land, sent savory smoke towards the sky. I pray you send down the heavenly fire to burn this beast here offered, in token that though you still rule on high, you have given me Atlantis to be my kingdom, and the people of the earth to be my worshipers."

She broke off and strained towards the sky. Her face was contorted. Her limbs shook. "O mighty father," she cried, "who hast made me a god and an equal, hear me! hear me!"

Out of the black cloud overhead there came a blinding flash of light, which spat downward on to the altar. The cloven-hoofed horse gave one shrill neigh, and one convulsion, and fell back dead. Flames crackled out from the woodpile, and the air became rich with the smell of burning flesh. And lo! in another moment the cloud above had melted into nothingness, and the flames burned pale, and the smoke went up in a thin blue spiral towards the deeper blueness of the sky.

Phorenice the empress stood there before the great stone, and before the snake and the outstretched hand of life which were inscribed upon it, flushed, exultant, and once more radiantly lovely; and the knot of priests within the circle, and the great mob of people without, fell to the ground adoring.

"Phorenice, goddess!" they cried. "Phorenice, goddess of all Atlantis!"

But for myself, I did not kneel. I would have no part in [illegible] so I stood there awaiting [illegible]

CHAPTER X.

A WOOING.

When the silence had grown again, and Phorenice turned and saw me standing alone among all the prostrate worshipers, I stepped out from the crowd and passed between two of the great stones, and went across to where she stood beside the altar. I did not prostrate myself. At the prescribed distance I made the salutation which she herself had ordered when she made me her chief minister, and then hailed her with formal decorum as empress.

"Deucalion, man of ice," she retorted.

"I still adhere to the old gods!"

"I was not referring to that," said she, and looked at me with a sidelong smile.

But here Yiga came up to us with a face that was white and a hand that shook and made supplication for my life. "If he will not leave the old gods yet," she pleaded, "surely you will pardon him? He is a strong man, and does not become a convert easily. You may change him later. But think, Phorenice, he is a Deucalion; and if you slay him here for this one thing, there is no other man within all the marches of Atlantis who could so worthily serve—"

The empress took the words from her. "You slut," she cried out. "I have you near me to appoint my wardrobe and carry my fan, and you dare to put a meddling finger in my policies? Back with you, outside this circle, or I'll have you whipped. Aye, and I'll do more. I'll serve you as Zaemon served my captain, Tarca. Shall I point a finger at you, and smite your pretty skin with a sudden leprosy?"

The girl bowed her shoulders and went away cowed, and Phorenice turned to me. "My lord," she said, "I am like a young bird in the nest that has suddenly found its wings. Wings have so many uses that I am curious to try them all."

"May each new flight they take be for the good of Atlantis."

"Oh," she said, with an eye-flash, "I know what you have most at heart. But we will go back to the pyramid and talk this out at more leisure. I pray you now, my lord, conduct me back to my riding beast."

It appeared then that I was to be condoned for not offering her worship, and so putting public question on her deification. It appeared also that Yiga's interference was looked upon as untimely, and, though I could not understand the exact reasons for either of these things, I accepted them as they were, seeing that they forwarded the scheme that Zaemon had bidden me to carry out.

So when the empress lent me her fingers—warm, delicate fingers they were, though so skillful to grasp the weapons of war—I took them gravely, and led her out of the great circle, which she had polluted with her trickeries. I had expected to see our Lord the Sun take venegeance on the profanation while it was still in act; but none had come, and I knew that he would choose his own good time for retribution and appoint what instrument he thought best, without my raising a puny arm to guard his mighty honor.

So I led this lovely, sinful woman back to the huge red mammoth which stood there tamely in waiting, and the smell of the sacrifice came after us as we walked. She mounted the stair to the golden castle on the shaggy beast's back, and bade me mount also and take seat beside her. But the place of the fan-girl behind her was empty, and what we said as we rode back through the streets there was none to overhear.

She was eager to know what had befallen me after the attack on the gate, and I told the tale, laying stress on the worthiness of Nais, and uttering an opinion that with care the girl might be won back to allegiance again. Only the commands that Zaemon laid upon me, when he and I spoke together in the sacred tongue, did I withhold, as it is not lawful to repeat these matters save only in the high council of the priests itself as they sit before the Ark of Mysteries.

"You seem to have an unusual kindliness for this rebel Nais," said Phorenice.

"She showed herself to me as more clever and thoughtful than the common herd."

"Aye," she answered, with a sigh that I think was real enough in its way, "an empress loses much that meaner woman gets as her common due."

"In what particular?"

"She misses the honest wooing of her equals."

"If you set up for a goddess—" I said.

"Pah! I wish to be no goddess to you, Deucalion. That was for the common people; it gives me more power with them; it helps my schemes. All you seven higher priests know that trick of calling down the fire, and it pleases me to filch it. Can you not be generous, and admit that a woman may be as clever in finding out these natural laws as your musty elder priests?"

"Remains that you are empress."

"Nor empress either. Just think that there is a woman seated beside you on this cushion, Deucalion, and look upon her, and say what words come first to your lips. Have done with ceremonies, and have done with statecraft. Do you wish to wait on as you are till all your manhood withers? It is well not to hurry unduly in these matters; I am with you there. Yet who but a fool watches a fruit grow ripe, and then leaves it till it is past its prime?"

I looked on her glorious beauty, but as I live it left me cold. But I remembered the command that had been laid upon me, and forced a smile. "I may have been fastidious," I said, "but I do not regret waiting this long."

"Nor I. But I have played my life as a maid time enough. I am a woman, ripe and full-blooded, and the day has come when I should be more than what I have been."

[To Be Continued.]

Principal Requirement.

"How's your voice?" the superintendent inquired of the man who had applied for a position as conductor on the street car line.

"Excellent," replied the applicant. "I can call out the names of the streets so everyone will understand."

"That's quite immaterial," replied the superintendent. "Let's hear you call out 'Duck up! Everybody down in front!' That's what we want it [illegible] to make [illegible]

HE WAS AFTER MUSHROOMS.

An American Girl in Paris Takes a Ride with a Cabman Who Gives Her a Bad Scare.

Prof. Marchand, of Paris, relates in an amusing little sketch the experience of an overindependent American girl of his acquaintance. She was a student in Paris, anxious to see all the sights; and when an escort or a chaperon was not conveniently to be had, was unwise enough to go about alone, confident of her ability to take care of herself, relates Youth's Companion.

One day she decided to visit Fontainebleau, the forest and Barbizon. She engaged a shabby old carriage, the coachman of which seemed to her rather more intelligent than the average, who promised to take her to the most beautiful spots. She settled herself for enjoyment, and they rolled away.

After driving for some time in the broad avenues, she perceived that they had turned into narrow, little-used and secluded byways, which appeared to lead to the depths of the forest. She inquired where the man was taking her, but he clicked to the horse, cracked his whip and apparently did not hear. She repeated her demand, but again it was drowned in the snapping of the whip. She repeated her demand, but again it was drowned in the snapping of the whip. Then she raised her voice:

"Cocher! Stop!"

No answer; more clicking and whipping.

"Cocher! I wish to return immediately." The coachman was deaf. "Cocher! Immediately, do you hear?"

No response; the woods grew gloomier, the road lonelier, and to put a climax to her fears the driver suddenly descended from his box, left the carriage standing, and darted into the nearest glade. She grew faint with fright; doubtless he had gone to summon his pals—fellow ruffians concealed among the trees. They would presently return! She held her breath and waited.

But the man came back alone, mounted the box in silence, proceeded a half-mile farther, and then repeated the alarming and mysterious movements. This time he returned no longer gloomy and taciturn, but smiling radiantly and bearing a precious trophy in his hand. It was a mushroom!

"I have found a fine place for mushrooms," he explained, cheerfully. "My wife and I are very fond of them; we will go there and gather them to-morrow."

That was all. She returned in safety, but with an acquired distaste for mushrooms and lonely foreign pleasure trips which she has never overcome.

HOUSEHOLD INFORMATION.

Some Small Items of Domestic Lore for the Young Housewife's Scrapbook.

Never allow fresh meat to remain in paper; it absorbs the juices.

Mortar and paint may be removed from window glass with hot, sharp vinegar.

You may avoid the unpleasantness to the eyes when peeling onions by sitting in a draught of air or by an open window or door while doing it. Holding the onions in cold water while peeling them will accomplish the same result.

To make paper stick to a wall that has been whitewashed, wash the wall in vinegar or saleratus water.

When an egg is partially frozen, beat the yolk separately before adding the white.

To make a husky voice strong and clear, bathe the throat, chest and back morning and evening to the waistline with cold water; follow by a brisk rubbing with a rough towel. Use the voice properly. Sound should be expelled by the abdominal muscles, says Boston Budget.

To make buckwheat griddle cakes, mix together four cupfuls of buckwheat flour with one scant cupful of cornmeal and an even tablespoonful of salt. Sift these ingredients together. To moisten them use five cupfuls of lukewarm water or three cupfuls of lukewarm water and two cupfuls of milk. The milk is used to give the rich brown color preferred by most people. To accomplish this many housewives use all water and add two tablespoonfuls of molasses. The milk, however, makes the cakes more delicate. Dissolve a compressed yeast cake in a half cupful of lukewarm water; add it to the other liquid. Then add the liquid gradually to the dry ingredients, beating hard meanwhile. Pour the batter into a pail that comes for the purpose, and let it rise over night. In the morning, just before baking the cakes, stir a level teaspoonful of soda into a quarter of a cupful of lukewarm water and beat it into the batter until it foams. Then fry a test cake on a hot griddle, and if it is too thick, add more water or milk to the batter. At least a pint of the batter should be left for the next baking, to use in place of the yeast. To renew the batter, add the ingredients in the same proportion as the first time.

Proper Way to Introduce People.

In making an introduction the man is always taken to the lady to be presented, and the formula is: "Miss A, may I present Mr. B?" Where two women or two men are presented the elder is addressed where the difference is marked. A girl presents her friends to her mother, but the mother says: "Allow me to present my daughter, Mrs. Blank." A woman should rise when another woman is presented to her, unless she is much younger than herself. If a man is presented she retains her seat and bows and smiles cordially. Men always shake hands when introduced to each other. Women do so when desiring to show especial friendliness.—Ladies' Home Journal.

Canapes Bartholomew.

Slice sandwich bread very thin, trim off the crusts and cut off each corner of the slices. Dip each slice into melted butter and cover with grated Parmesan cheese. Lay on greased baking tin and sprinkle with finely minced ham, leaving a slight margin around the edge. Sprinkle more Parmesan over the ham and dust with cayenne or paprika and set in a hot oven for five minutes; then serve.—Washington Star.

Much in Little.

Biggs—"Multum in Parvo." That's a queer motto for a shoemaker.

Diggs—Quite appropriate, though. His specialty is ladies' shoes.—Chicago Daily News.

Soporific.

Bramble—I used to be troubled with insomnia, but I cured myself.

Thorne—How?

"I joined a chess club."—Judge.

McDigger—"I find it's a good rule never to hit a man when he's down." Thingumbob—"It's a better rule never to hit a man when he's got you down."—Philadelphia Press.