Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad

HEART OF DARKNESS

I

The Nellie, a cruising yawl, swung to her anchor without a flutter of the sails, and was at rest. The flood had made, the wind was nearly calm, and being bound down the river, the only thing for it was to come to and wait for the turn of the tide.

The sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway. In the offing the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint, and in the luminous space the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red clusters of canvas sharply peaked, with gleams of varnished sprits. A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness. The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still
The Director of Companies was our captain and our host. We four affectionately watched his back as he stood in the bows looking to seaward. On the whole river there was nothing that looked half so nautical. He resembled a pilot, which to a seaman is trustworthiness personified. It was difficult to realize his work was not out there in the luminous estuary, but behind him, within the brooding gloom.

Between us there was, as I have already said somewhere, the bond of the sea. Besides holding our hearts together through long periods of separation, it had the effect of making us tolerant of each other's yarns--and even convictions. The Lawyer--the best of old fellows--had, because of his many years and many virtues, the only cushion on deck, and was lying on the only rug.

The Accountant had brought out already a box of dominoes, and was toying architecturally with the bones. Marlow sat cross-legged right aft, leaning against the mizzen-mast. He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and, with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled an idol. The Director, satisfied the anchor had good hold, made his way aft and sat down amongst us. We seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth.
exchanged a few words lazily. Afterwards there was silence on board the yacht. For some reason or other we did not begin that game of dominoes. We felt meditative, and fit for nothing but placid staring. The day was ending in a serenity of still and exquisite brilliance. The water shone pacifically; the sky, without a speck, was a benign immensity of unstained light; the very mist on the Essex marshes was like a gauzy and radiant fabric, hung from the wooded rises inland, and draping the low shores in diaphanous folds. Only the gloom to the west, brooding over the upper reaches, became more somber every minute, as if angered by the approach of the sun.

And at last, in its curved and imperceptible fall, the sun sank low, and from glowing white changed to a dull red without rays and without heat, as if about to go out suddenly, stricken to death by the touch of that gloom brooding over a crowd of men.

Forthwith a change came over the waters, and the serenity became less brilliant but more profound. The old river in its broad reach rested unruffled at the decline of day, after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its banks, spread out in the tranquil dignity of a waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth. We looked at the venerable stream not in the vivid flush
of a short day that comes and departs for ever, but in
the august light of abiding memories. And indeed
nothing is easier for a man who has, as the phrase goes,
"followed the sea" with reverence and affection, than
to evoke the great spirit of the past upon the lower
reaches of the Thames. The tidal current runs to and
fro in its unceasing service, crowded with memories of
men and ships it had borne to the rest of home or to the
battles of the sea. It had known and served all the
men of whom the nation is proud, from Sir Francis
Drake to Sir John Franklin, knights all, titled and un-
titled--the great knights-errant of the sea. It had
borne all the ships whose names are like jewels flashing
in the night of time, from the Golden Hind returning
with her round flanks full of treasure, to be visited by
the Queen's Highness and thus pass out of the gigantic
tale, to the Erebus and Terror, bound on other conquests
--and that never returned. It had known the ships and
the men. They had sailed from Deptford, from Green-
wich, from Erith--the adventurers and the settlers;
kings' ships and the ships of men on 'Change; captains,
admirals, the dark "interlopers" of the Eastern trade,
and the commissioned "generals" of East India fleets.
 Hunters for gold or pursuers of fame, they all had gone
out on that stream, bearing the sword, and often the
torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers
of a spark from the sacred fire. What greatness had
not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of
an unknown earth! . . . The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires.

The sun set; the dusk fell on the stream, and lights began to appear along the shore. The Chapman lighthouse, a three-legged thing erect on a mud-flat, shone strongly. Lights of ships moved in the fairway—a great stir of lights going up and going down. And farther west on the upper reaches the place of the monstrous town was still marked ominously on the sky, a brooding gloom in sunshine, a lurid glare under the stars.

"And this also," said Marlow suddenly, "has been one of the dark places of the earth."

He was the only man of us who still "followed the sea." The worst that could be said of him was that he did not represent his class. He was a seaman, but he was a wanderer, too, while most seamen lead, if one may so express it, a sedentary life. Their minds are of the stay-at-home order, and their home is always with them--the ship; and so is their country--the sea. One ship is very much like another, and the sea is always the same. In the immutability of their surroundings the foreign shores, the foreign faces, the changing immensity of life,
glide past, veiled not by a sense of mystery but by a
slightly disdainful ignorance; for there is nothing mys-
terious to a seaman unless it be the sea itself, which is
the mistress of his existence and as inscrutable as Destiny.

For the rest, after his hours of work, a casual stroll or
a casual spree on shore suffices to unfold for him the
secret of a whole continent, and generally he finds the
secret not worth knowing. The yarns of seamen have a
direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within
the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical
(if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted), and to
him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a
kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it
out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of
one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible
by the spectral illumination of moonshine.

His remark did not seem at all surprising. It was
just like Marlow. It was accepted in silence. No one
took the trouble to grunt even; and presently he said,
very slow--

"I was thinking of very old times, when the Romans
first came here, nineteen hundred years ago--the other
day. . . . Light came out of this river since--you
say Knights? Yes; but it is like a running blaze on a
plain, like a flash of lightning in the clouds. We live
in the flicker--may it last as long as the old earth keeps rolling! But darkness was here yesterday. Imagine the feelings of a commander of a fine--what d'ye call 'em?--trireme in the Mediterranean, ordered suddenly to the north; run overland across the Gauls in a hurry; put in charge of one of these craft the legionaries.--a wonderful lot of handy men they must have been too--used to build, apparently by the hundred, in a month or two, if we may believe what we read. Imagine him here--the very end of the world, a sea the color of lead, a sky the color of smoke, a kind of ship about as rigid as a concertina--and going up this river with stores, or orders, or what you like. Sandbanks, marshes, forests, savages,--precious little to eat fit for a civilized man, nothing but Thames water to drink. No Falernian wine here, no going ashore. Here and there a military camp lost in a wilderness, like a needle in a bundle of hay--cold, fog, tempests, disease, exile, and death,--death skulking in the air, in the water, in the bush. They must have been dying like flies here. Oh yes--he did it. Did it very well, too, no doubt, and without thinking much about it either, except afterwards to brag of what he had gone through in his time, perhaps. They were men enough to face the darkness. And perhaps he was cheered by keeping his eye on a chance of promotion to the fleet at Ravenna by-and-by, if he had good friends in Rome and survived the awful climate. Or think of a decent young citizen in a toga--perhaps too much
dice, you know--coming out here in the train of some prefect, or tax-gatherer, or trader even, to mend his fortunes. Land in a swamp, march through the woods, and in some inland post feel the savagery, the utter savagery, had closed round him,--all that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forest, in the jungles, in the hearts of wild men. There's no initiation either into such mysteries. He has to live in the midst of the incomprehensible, which is also detestable. And it has a fascination, too, that goes to work upon him. The fascination of the abomination--you know. Imagine the growing regrets, the longing to escape, the powerless disgust, the surrender, the hate."

He paused.

"Mind," he began again, lifting one arm from the elbow, the palm of the hand outwards, so that, with his legs folded before him, he had the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus-flower--"Mind, none of us would feel exactly like this. What saves us is efficiency--the devotion to efficiency. But these chaps were not much account, really. They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force--nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is
just an accident arising from the weakness of others.
They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what
was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggra-
vated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind
--as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness. The
conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking
it away from those who have a different complexion or
slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing
when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the
idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental
pretense but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea
--something you can set up, and bow down before, and
offer a sacrifice to. . . ."

He broke off. Flames glided in the river, small green
flames, red flames, white flames, pursuing, overtaking,
joining, crossing each other--then separating slowly or
hastily. The traffic of the great city went on in the
deepening night upon the sleepless river. We looked
on, waiting patiently--there was nothing else to do till
the end of the flood; but it was only after a long silence,
when he said, in a hesitating voice, "I suppose you fel-
lows remember I did once turn fresh-water sailor for a
bit," that we knew we were fated, before the ebb began
to run, to hear about one of Marlow's inconclusive ex-
periences.
"I don't want to bother you much with what hap-
pened to me personally," he began, showing in this re-
mark the weakness of many tellers of tales who seem
so often unaware of what their audience would best like
to hear; "yet to understand the effect of it on me you
ought to know how I got out there, what I saw, how I
went up that river to the place where I first met the
poor chap. It was the farthest point of navigation and
the culminating point of my experience. It seemed some-
how to throw a kind of light on everything about me--
and into my thoughts. It was somber enough too--and
pitiful--not extraordinary in any way--not very clear
either. No, not very clear. And yet it seemed to throw
a kind of light.

"I had then, as you remember, just returned to Lon-
don after a lot of Indian Ocean, Pacific, China Seas--
a regular dose of the East--six years or so, and I was
loafing about, hindering you fellows in your work and
invading your homes, just as though I had got a
heavenly mission to civilize you. It was very fine for
a time, but after a bit I did get tired of resting. Then
I began to look for a ship--I should think the hardest
work on earth. But the ships wouldn't even look at me.
And I got tired of that game too.
"Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, When I grow up I will go there. The North Pole was one of these places, I remember. Well, I haven't been there yet, and shall not try now. The glamour's off. Other places were scattered about the Equator, and in every sort of latitude all over the two hemispheres. I have been in some of them, and . . . well, we won't talk about that. But there was one yet--the biggest, the most blank, so to speak--that I had a hankering after.

"True, by this time it was not a blank space any more. It had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery--a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness. But there was in it one river especially, a mighty big river, that you could see on the map, resembling an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country, and its tail lost in the depths of the land. And as I looked at the map of it in a shop-window, it fascinated me as a snake would
a bird—a silly little bird. Then I remembered there was
a big concern, a Company for trade on that river. Dash
it all! I thought to myself, they can't trade without
using some kind of craft on that lot of fresh water—
steamboats! Why shouldn't I try to get charge of
one. I went on along Fleet Street, but could not shake
off the idea. The snake had charmed me.

"You understand it was a Continental concern, that
Trading society; but I have a lot of relations living
on the Continent, because it's cheap and not so nasty
as it looks, they say.

"I am sorry to own I began to worry them. This was
already a fresh departure for me. I was not used to
get things that way, you know. I always went my own
road and on my own legs where I had a mind to go. I
wouldn't have believed it of myself; but, then—you see
--I felt somehow I must get there by hook or by crook.
So I worried them. The men said 'My dear fellow,' and
did nothing. Then--would you believe it?--I tried the
women. I, Charlie Marlow, set the women to work--to
get a job. Heavens! Well, you see, the notion drove
me. I had an aunt, a dear enthusiastic soul. She wrote:
'It will be delightful. I am ready to do anything, any-
thing for you. It is a glorious idea. I know the wife
of a very high personage in the Administration, and
also a man who has lots of influence with,’ &c., &c. She was determined to make no end of fuss to get me appointed skipper of a river steamboat, if such was my fancy.

"I got my appointment--of course; and I got it very quick. It appears the Company had received news that one of their captains had been killed in a scuffle with the natives. This was my chance, and it made me the more anxious to go. It was only months and months afterwards, when I made the attempt to recover what was left of the body, that I heard the original quarrel arose from a misunderstanding about some hens. Yes, two black hens. Fresleven--that was the fellow's name, a Dane--thought himself wronged somehow in the bargain, so he went ashore and started to hammer the chief of the village with a stick. Oh, it didn't surprise me in the least to hear this, and at the same time to be told that Fresleven was the gentlest, quietest creature that ever walked on two legs. No doubt he was; but he had been a couple of years already out there engaged in the noble cause, you know, and he probably felt the need at last of asserting his self-respect in some way. Therefore he whacked the old nigger mercilessly, while a big crowd of his people watched him, thunderstruck, till some man,--I was told the chief's son,--in desperation at hearing the old chap yell, made a tentative jab
with a spear at the white man--and of course it went
quite easy between the shoulder-blades. Then the whole
population cleared into the forest, expecting all kinds
of calamities to happen, while, on the other hand, the
steamer Fresleven commanded left also in a bad panic,
in charge of the engineer, I believe. Afterwards nobody
seemed to trouble much about Fresleven's remains, till
I got out and stepped into his shoes. I couldn't let
it rest, though; but when an opportunity offered at last
to meet my predecessor, the grass growing through his
ribs was tall enough to hide his bones. They were all
there. The supernatural being had not been touched
after he fell. And the village was deserted, the huts
gaped black, rotting, all askew within the fallen en-
closures. A calamity had come to it, sure enough. The
people had vanished. Mad terror had scattered them,
men, women, and children, through the bush, and they
had never returned. What became of the hens I don't
know either. I should think the cause of progress got
them, anyhow. However, through this glorious affair I
got my appointment, before I had fairly begun to hope
for it.

"I flew around like mad to get ready, and before forty-
eight hours I was crossing the Channel to show myself
to my employers, and sign the contract. In a very few
hours I arrived in a city that always makes me think of
a whited sepulcher. Prejudice no doubt. I had no
difficulty in finding the Company's offices. It was the
biggest thing in the town, and everybody I met was
full of it. They were going to run an over-sea empire,
and make no end of coin by trade.

"A narrow and deserted street in deep shadow, high
houses, innumerable windows with venetian blinds, a dead
silence, grass sprouting between the stones, imposing
carriage archways right and left, immense double doors
standing ponderously ajar. I slipped through one of
these cracks, went up a swept and ungarnished staircase,
as arid as a desert, and opened the first door I came to.
Two women, one fat and the other slim, sat on straw-
bottomed chairs, knitting black wool. The slim one got
up and walked straight at me--still knitting with down-
cast eyes--and only just as I began to think of getting
out of her way, as you would for a somnambulist, stood
still, and looked up. Her dress was as plain as an um-
rella-cover, and she turned round without a word and
preceded me into a waiting-room. I gave my name, and
looked about. Deal table in the middle, plain chairs all
round the walls, on one end a large shining map, marked
with all the colors of a rainbow. There was a vast
amount of red--good to see at any time, because one
knows that some real work is done in there, a deuce of a
lot of blue, a little green, smears of orange, and, on the
East Coast, a purple patch, to show where the jolly pioneers of progress drink the jolly lager-beer. However, I wasn't going into any of these. I was going into the yellow. Dead in the center. And the river was there--fascinating--deadly--like a snake. Ough!

A door opened, a white-haired secretarial head, but wearing a compassionate expression, appeared, and a skinny forefinger beckoned me into the sanctuary. Its light was dim, and a heavy writing-desk squatted in the middle. From behind that structure came out an impression of pale plumpness in a frock-coat. The great man himself. He was five feet six, I should judge, and had his grip on the handle-end of ever so many millions. He shook hands, I fancy, murmured vaguely, was satisfied with my French. Bon voyage.

"In about forty-five seconds I found myself again in the waiting-room with the compassionate secretary, who, full of desolation and sympathy, made me sign some document. I believe I undertook amongst other things not to disclose any trade secrets. Well, I am not going to.

"I began to feel slightly uneasy. You know I am not used to such ceremonies, and there was something ominous in the atmosphere. It was just as though I had been let into some conspiracy--I don't know--some-
thing not quite right; and I was glad to get out. In
the outer room the two women knitted black wool fever-
ishly. People were arriving, and the younger one was
walking back and forth introducing them. The old
one sat on her chair. Her flat cloth slippers were
propped up on a foot-warmer, and a cat reposed on
her lap. She wore a starched white affair on her head,
had a wart on one cheek, and silver-rimmed spectacles
hung on the tip of her nose. She glanced at me above
the glasses. The swift and indifferent placidity of that
look troubled me. Two youths with foolish and cheery
countenances were being piloted over, and she threw at
them the same quick glance of unconcerned wisdom. She
seemed to know all about them and about me too. An
eerie feeling came over me. She seemed uncanny and
fateful. Often far away there I thought of these two,
guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as
for a warm pall, one introducing, introducing continu-
ously to the unknown, the other scrutinizing the cheery
and foolish faces with unconcerned old eyes. Ave! Old
knitter of black wool. Morituri te salutant. Not many
of those she looked at ever saw her again--not half,
by a long way.

"There was yet a visit to the doctor. 'A simple for-
mality,' assured me the secretary, with an air of taking
an immense part in all my sorrows. Accordingly a
young chap wearing his hat over the left eyebrow, some
clerk I suppose,—there must have been clerks in the busi-
ness, though the house was as still as a house in a city
of the dead,—came from somewhere up-stairs, and led
me forth. He was shabby and careless, with ink-stains
on the sleeves of his jacket, and his cravat was large and
billowy, under a chin shaped like the toe of an old boot.
It was a little too early for the doctor, so I proposed
a drink, and thereupon he developed a vein of joviality.
As we sat over our vermouths he glorified the Company's
business, and by-and-by I expressed casually my sur-
prise at him not going out there. He became very cool
and collected all at once. 'I am not such a fool as I
look, quoth Plato to his disciples,' he said sententiously,
emptied his glass with great resolution, and we rose.

"The old doctor felt my pulse, evidently thinking of
something else the while. 'Good, good for there,' he
mumbled, and then with a certain eagerness asked me
whether I would let him measure my head. Rather sur-
prised, I said Yes, when he produced a thing like calipers
and got the dimensions back and front and every way,
taking notes carefully. He was an unshaven little man
in a threadbare coat like a gaberdine, with his feet in
slippers, and I thought him a harmless fool. 'I always
ask leave, in the interests of science, to measure the
crania of those going out there,' he said. 'And when
they come back too?' I asked. 'Oh, I never see them;'
he remarked; 'and, moreover, the changes take place in-
side, you know.' He smiled, as if at some quiet joke.
'So you are going out there. Famous. Interesting too.'
He gave me a searching glance, and made another note.
'Ever any madness in your family?' he asked, in a
matter-of-fact tone. I felt very annoyed. 'Is that
question in the interests of science too?' 'It would be,'
he said, without taking notice of my irritation, 'interest-
ing for science to watch the mental changes of individ-
uals, on the spot, but . . .' 'Are you an alienist?' I
interrupted. 'Every doctor should be--a little,' an-
swered that original, imperturbably. 'I have a little
theory which you Messieurs who go out there must help
me to prove. This is my share in the advantages my
country shall reap from the possession of such a mag-
nificent dependency. The mere wealth I leave to others.
Pardon my questions, but you are the first Englishman
coming under my observation. . . .' I hastened to
assure him I was not in the least typical. 'If I were,'
said I, 'I wouldn't be talking like this with you.' 'What
you say is rather profound, and probably erroneous,' he
said, with a laugh. 'Avoid irritation more than expos-
ure to the sun. Adieu. How do you English say, eh?
Good-by. Ah! Good-by. Adieu. In the tropics one
must before everything keep calm.' . . . He lifted a
warning forefinger. . . . 'Du calme, du calme.
Adieu.'
"One thing more remained to do--say good-by to
my excellent aunt. I found her triumphant. I had a
cup of tea--the last decent cup of tea for many days
--and in a room that most soothingly looked just as you
would expect a lady's drawing-room to look, we had a
long quiet chat by the fireside. In the course of these
confidences it became quite plain to me I had been repre-
sented to the wife of the high dignitary, and goodness
knows to how many more people besides, as an excep-
tional and gifted creature--a piece of good fortune for
the Company--a man you don't get hold of every day.
Good heavens! and I was going to take charge of a
two-penny-halfpenny river-steamboat with a penny
whistle attached! It appeared, however, I was also one
of the Workers, with a capital--you know. Something
like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort
of apostle. There had been a lot of such rot let loose
in print and talk just about that time, and the excellent
woman, living right in the rush of all that humbug, got
carried off her feet. She talked about 'weaning those
ignorant millions from their horrid ways,' till, upon my
word, she made me quite uncomfortable. I ventured to
hint that the Company was run for profit.

"'You forget, dear Charlie, that the laborer is worthy
of his hire,' she said, brightly. It's queer how out of
touch with truth women are. They live in a world of
their own, and there had never been anything like it,
and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and
if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before
the first sunset. Some confounded fact we men have
been living contentedly with ever since the day of cre-
ativation would start up and knock the whole thing over.

"After this I got embraced, told to wear flannel, be
sure to write often, and so on--and I left. In the street
--I don't know why--a queer feeling came to me that I
was an impostor. Odd thing that I, who used to clear
out for any part of the world at twenty-four hours'
notice, with less thought than most men give to the cross-
ing of a street, had a moment--I won't say of hesitation,
but of startled pause, before this commonplace affair.
The best way I can explain it to you is by saying that,
for a second or two, I felt as though, instead of going
to the center of a continent, I were about to set off for
the center of the earth.

"I left in a French steamer, and she called in every
blamed port they have out there, for, as far as I could
see, the sole purpose of landing soldiers and custom-
house officers. I watched the coast. Watching a coast
as it slips by the ship is like thinking about an enigma.
There it is before you--smiling, frowning, inviting,
grand, mean, insipid, or savage, and always mute with an air of whispering, Come and find out. This one was almost featureless, as if still in the making, with an aspect of monotonous grimness. The edge of a colossal jungle, so dark-green as to be almost black, fringed with white surf, ran straight, like a ruled line, far, far away along a blue sea whose glitter was blurred by a creeping mist. The sun was fierce, the land seemed to glisten and drip with steam. Here and there grayish-whitish specks showed up, clustered inside the white surf, with a flag flying above them perhaps. Settlements some centuries old, and still no bigger than pin-heads on the untouched expanse of their background. We pounded along, stopped, landed soldiers; went on, landed custom-house clerks to levy toll in what looked like a God-for-saken wilderness, with a tin shed and a flag-pole lost in it; landed more soldiers—to take care of the custom-house clerks, presumably. Some, I heard, got drowned in the surf; but whether they did or not, nobody seemed particularly to care. They were just flung out there, and on we went. Every day the coast looked the same, as though we had not moved; but we passed various places—trading places—with names like Gran’ Bassam Little Popo, names that seemed to belong to some sordid farce acted in front of a sinister backcloth. The idleness of a passenger, my isolation amongst all these men with whom I had no point of contact, the oily and languid sea, the uniform somberness of the coast, seemed
to keep me away from the truth of things, within the
toil of a mournful and senseless delusion. The voice of
the surf heard now and then was a positive pleasure,
like the speech of a brother. It was something natural,
that had its reason, that had a meaning. Now and then
a boat from the shore gave one a momentary contact
with reality. It was paddled by black fellows. You
could see from afar the white of their eyeballs glisten-
ing. They shouted, sang; their bodies streamed with
perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks--these
chaps; but they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality, an in-
tense energy of movement, that was as natural and true
as the surf along their coast. They wanted no excuse
for being there. They were a great comfort to look at.
For a time I would feel I belonged still to a world of
straightforward facts; but the feeling would not last
long. Something would turn up to scare it away. Once,
I remember, we came upon a man-of-war anchored off
the coast. There wasn't even a shed there, and she
was shelling the bush. It appears the French had one
of their wars going on thereabouts. Her ensign dropped
limp like a rag; the muzzles of the long eight-inch guns
stuck out all over the low hull; the greasy, slimy swell
swung her up lazily and let her down, swaying her thin
masts. In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water,
there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent.
Pop, would go one of the eight-inch guns; a small flame
would dart and vanish, a little white smoke would dis-
appearance, a tiny projectile would give a feeble screech—and nothing happened. Nothing could happen. There was a touch of insanity in the proceeding, a sense of lugubrious drollery in the sight; and it was not dissipated by somebody on board assuring me earnestly there was a camp of natives—he called them enemies!--hidden out of sight somewhere.

"We gave her her letters (I heard the men in that lonely ship were dying of fever at the rate of three a day) and went on. We called at some more places with farcical names, where the merry dance of death and trade goes on in a still and earthy atmosphere as of an overheated catacomb; all along the formless coast bordered by dangerous surf, as if Nature herself had tried to ward off intruders; in and out of rivers, streams of death in life, whose banks were rotting into mud, whose waters, thickened into slime, invaded the contorted mangroves, that seemed to writhe at us in the extremity of an impotent despair. Nowhere did we stop long enough to get a particularized impression, but the general sense of vague and oppressive wonder grew upon me. It was like a weary pilgrimage amongst hints for nightmares.

"It was upward of thirty days before I saw the mouth of the big river. We anchored off the seat of the gov-
ernment. But my work would not begin till some two
hundred miles farther on. So as soon as I could I made
a start for a place thirty miles higher up.

"I had my passage on a little sea-going steamer. Her
captain was a Swede, and knowing me for a seaman,
invited me on the bridge. He was a young man, lean,
fair, and morose, with lanky hair and a shuffling gait.
As we left the miserable little wharf, he tossed his head
contemptuously at the shore. 'Been living there?' he
asked. I said, 'Yes.' 'Fine lot these government chaps
--are they not?' he went on, speaking English with
great precision and considerable bitterness. 'It is funny
what some people will do for a few francs a month. I
wonder what becomes of that kind when it goes up coun-
try?' I said to him I expected to see that soon. 'So-o-o!' he exclaimed. He shuffled athwart, keeping one eye
ahead vigilantly. 'Don't be too sure,' he continued.
'The other day I took up a man who hanged himself
on the road. He was a Swede, too.' 'Hanged himself!
Why, in God's name?' I cried. He kept on looking out
watchfully. 'Who knows? The sun too much for him,
or the country perhaps.'

"At last we opened a reach. A rocky cliff appeared,
mounds of turned-up earth by the shore, houses on a
hill, others, with iron roofs, amongst a waste of excava-
tions, or hanging to the declivity. A continuous noise of the rapids above hovered over this scene of inhabited devastation. A lot of people, mostly black and naked, moved about like ants. A jetty projected into the river. A blinding sunlight drowned all this at times in a sudden recrudescence of glare. 'There's your Company's station,' said the Swede, pointing to three wooden barrack-like structures on the rocky slope. 'I will send your things up. Four boxes did you say? So. Farewell.'

"I came upon a boiler wallowing in the grass, then found a path leading up the hill. It turned aside for the bowlders, and also for an undersized railway-truck lying there on its back with its wheels in the air. One was off. The thing looked as dead as the carcass of some animal. I came upon more pieces of decaying machinery, a stack of rusty rails. To the left a clump of trees made a shady spot, where dark things seemed to stir feebly. I blinked, the path was steep. A horn tooted to the right, and I saw the black people run. A heavy and dull detonation shook the ground, a puff of smoke came out of the cliff, and that was all. No change appeared on the face of the rock. They were building a railway. The cliff was not in the way or anything; but this objectless blasting was all the work going on.

"A slight clinking behind me made me turn my head."
Six black men advanced in a file, toiling up the path.
They walked erect and slow, balancing small baskets
full of earth on their heads, and the clink kept time with
their footsteps. Black rags were wound round their
loins, and the short ends behind wagged to and fro like
tails. I could see every rib, the joints of their limbs
were like knots in a rope; each had an iron collar on
his neck, and all were connected together with a chain
whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking.
Another report from the cliff made me think suddenly
of that ship of war I had seen firing into a continent.
It was the same kind of ominous voice; but these men
could by no stretch of imagination be called enemies.
They were called criminals, and the outraged law, like
the bursting shells, had come to them, an insoluble mys-
tery from over the sea. All their meager breasts panted
together, the violently dilated nostrils quivered, the eyes
stared stonily uphill. They passed me within six inches,
without a glance, with that complete, deathlike indif-
ference of unhappy savages. Behind this raw matter
one of the reclaimed, the product of the new forces at
work, strolled despondently, carrying a rifle by its
middle. He had a uniform jacket with one button off,
and seeing a white man on the path, hoisted his weapon
to his shoulder with alacrity. This was simple prudence,
white men being so much alike at a distance that he could
not tell who I might be. He was speedily reassured, and
with a large, white, rascally grin, and a glance at his
charge, seemed to take me into partnership in his exalted trust. After all, I also was a part of the great cause of these high and just proceedings.

"Instead of going up, I turned and descended to the left. My idea was to let that chain-gang get out of sight before I climbed the hill. You know I am not particularly tender; I've had to strike and to fend off. I've had to resist and to attack sometimes—that's only one way of resisting—without counting the exact cost, according to the demands of such sort of life as I had blundered into. I've seen the devil of violence, and the devil of greed, and the devil of hot desire; but, by all the stars! these were strong, lusty, red-eyed devils, that swayed and drove men—men, I tell you. But as I stood on this hillside, I foresaw that in the blinding sunshine of that land I would become acquainted with a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly. How insidious he could be, too, I was only to find out several months later and a thousand miles farther. For a moment I stood appalled, as though by a warning. Finally I descended the hill, obliquely, towards the trees I had seen.

"I avoided a vast artificial hole somebody had been digging on the slope, the purpose of which I found it impossible to divine. It wasn't a quarry or a sandpit,
anyhow. It was just a hole. It might have been connected with the philanthropic desire of giving the criminals something to do. I don't know. Then I nearly fell into a very narrow ravine, almost no more than a scar in the hillside. I discovered that a lot of imported drainage-pipes for the settlement had been tumbled in there. There wasn't one that was not broken. It was a wanton smash-up. At last I got under the trees. My purpose was to stroll into the shade for a moment; but no sooner within than it seemed to me I had stepped into a gloomy circle of some Inferno. The rapids were near, and an uninterrupted, uniform, headlong, rushing noise filled the mournful stillness of the grove, where not a breath stirred, not a leaf moved, with a mysterious sound—as though the tearing pace of the launched earth had suddenly become audible.

"Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees, leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair. Another mine on the cliff went off, followed by a slight shudder of the soil under my feet. The work was going on. The work! And this was the place where some of the helpers had withdrawn to die.

"They were dying slowly—it was very clear. They
were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were
nothing earthly now,--nothing but black shadows of
disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish
gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all
the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial sur-
roundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, be-
came inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and
rest. These moribund shapes were free as air--and
nearly as thin. I began to distinguish the gleam of eyes
under the trees. Then, glancing down, I saw a face
near my hand. The black bones reclined at full length
with one shoulder against the tree, and slowly the eye-
lids rose and the sunken eyes looked up at me, enormous
and vacant, a kind of blind, white flicker in the depths
of the orbs, which died out slowly. The man seemed
young--almost a boy--but you know with them it's hard
to tell. I found nothing else to do but to offer him one
of my good Swede's ship's biscuits I had in my pocket.
The fingers closed slowly on it and held--there was no
other movement and no other glance. He had tied a bit
of white worsted round his neck--Why? Where did he
get it? Was it a badge--an ornament--a charm--a
propitiatory act? Was there any idea at all connected
with it? It looked startling round his black neck, this
bit of white thread from beyond the seas.

"Near the same tree two more bundles of acute angles
sat with their legs drawn up. One, with his chin
propped on his knees, stared at nothing, in an intoler-
able and appalling manner: his brother phantom rested
its forehead, as if overcome with a great weariness; and
all about others were scattered in every pose of contorted
collapse, as in some picture of a massacre or a pestilence.
While I stood horror-struck, one of these creatures rose
to his hands and knees, and went off on all-fours towards
the river to drink. He lapped out of his hand, then sat
up in the sunlight, crossing his shins in front of him,
and after a time let his woolly head fall on his breast-
bone.

"I didn't want any more loitering in the shade, and
I made haste towards the station. When near the build-
ings I met a white man, in such an unexpected elegance
of get-up that in the first moment I took him for a sort
of vision. I saw a high starched collar, white cuffs, a
light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clear necktie, and
varnished boots. No hat. Hair parted, brushed, oiled,
under a green-lined parasol held in a big white hand.
He was amazing, and had a penholder behind his ear.

"I shook hands with this miracle, and I learned he was
the Company's chief accountant, and that all the book-
keeping was done at this station. He had come out for
a moment, he said, 'to get a breath of fresh air.' The
expression sounded wonderfully odd, with its suggestion of sedentary desk-life. I wouldn't have mentioned the fellow to you at all, only it was from his lips that I first heard the name of the man who is so indissolubly connected with the memories of that time. Moreover, I respected the fellow. Yes; I respected his collars, his vast cuffs, his brushed hair. His appearance was certainly that of a hairdresser's dummy; but in the great demoralization of the land he kept up his appearance. That's backbone. His starched collars and got-up shirt-fronts were achievements of character. He had been out nearly three years; and, later on, I could not help asking him how he managed to sport such linen. He had just the faintest blush, and said modestly, 'I've been teaching one of the native women about the station. It was difficult. She had a distaste for the work.' This man had verily accomplished something. And he was devoted to his books, which were in apple-pie order.

"Everything else in the station was in a muddle,—

heads, things, buildings. Strings of dusty niggers with splay feet arrived and departed; a stream of manufactured goods, rubbishy cottons, beads, and brass-wire set into the depths of darkness, and in return came a precious trickle of ivory.

"I had to wait in the station for ten days--an eternity."
I lived in a hut in the yard, but to be out of the chaos
I would sometimes get into the accountant's office. It
was built of horizontal planks, and so badly put together
that, as he bent over his high desk, he was barred from
neck to heels with narrow strips of sunlight. There was
no need to open the big shutter to see. It was hot
there too; big flies buzzed fiendishly, and did not sting,
but stabbed. I sat generally on the floor, while, of
faultless appearance (and even slightly scented), perch-
ing on a high stool, he wrote, he wrote. Sometimes he
stood up for exercise. When a truckle-bed with a sick
man (some invalided agent from up-country) was put in
there, he exhibited a gentle annoyance. 'The groans of
this sick person,' he said, distract my attention. And
without that it is extremely difficult to guard against
clerical errors in this climate.'

"One day he remarked, without lifting his head, "In
the interior you will no doubt meet Mr. Kurtz.' On my
asking who Mr. Kurtz was, he said he was a first-class
agent; and seeing my disappointment at this informa-
tion, he added slowly, laying down his pen, 'He is a very
remarkable person.' Further questions elicited from him
that Mr. Kurtz was at present in charge of a trading
post, a very important one, in the true ivory-country,
at 'the very bottom of there. Sends in as much ivory
as all the others put together. . . .' He began to
write again. The sick man was too ill to groan. The flies buzzed in a great peace.

"Suddenly there was a growing murmur of voices and a great tramping of feet. A caravan had come in. A violent babble of uncouth sounds burst out on the other side of the planks. All the carriers were speaking together, and in the midst of the uproar the lamentable voice of the chief agent was heard 'giving it up' tearfully for the twentieth time that day. . . . He rose slowly. 'What a frightful row,' he said. He crossed the room gently to look at the sick man, and returning, said to me, 'He does not hear.' 'What! Dead?' I asked, startled. 'No, not yet,' he answered, with great composure. Then, alluding with a toss of the head to the tumult in the station-yard, 'When one has got to make correct entries, one comes to hate those savages--hate them to the death.' He remained thoughtful for a moment. 'When you see Mr. Kurtz,' he went on, 'tell him from me that everything here'--he glanced at the desk--'is very satisfactory. I don't like to write to him--with those messengers of ours you never know who may get hold of your letter--at that Central Station.' He stared at me for a moment with his mild, bulging eyes. 'Oh, he will go far, very far,' he began again. 'He will be a somebody in the Administration before long. They, above--the Council in Europe, you know
"He turned to his work. The noise outside had ceased, and presently in going out I stopped at the door. In the steady buzz of flies the homeward-bound agent was lying flushed and insensible; the other, bent over his books, was making correct entries of perfectly correct transactions; and fifty feet below the doorstep I could see the still tree-tops of the grove of death.

"Next day I left that station at last, with a caravan of sixty men, for a two-hundred-mile tramp.

"No use telling you much about that. Paths, paths, everywhere; a stamped-in network of paths spreading over the empty land, through long grass, through burnt grass, through thickets, down and up chilly ravines, up and down stony hills ablaze with heat; and a solitude, a solitude, nobody, not a hut. The population had cleared out a long time ago. Well, if a lot of mysterious niggers armed with all kinds of fearful weapons suddenly took to traveling on the road between Deal and Gravesend, catching the yokels right and left to carry heavy loads for them, I fancy every farm and cottage thereabouts would get empty very soon. Only here the dwellings were gone too. Still I passed through several
abandoned villages. There's something pathetically childish in the ruins of grass walls. Day after day, with the stamp and shuffle of sixty pair of bare feet behind me, each pair under a 60-lb. load. Camp, cook, sleep, strike camp, march. Now and then a carrier dead in harness, at rest in the long grass near the path, with an empty water-gourd and his long staff lying by his side. A great silence around and above. Perhaps on some quiet night the tremor of far-off drums, sinking, swelling, a tremor vast, faint; a sound weird, appealing, suggestive, and wild--and perhaps with as profound a meaning as the sound of bells in a Christian country.

Once a white man in an unbuttoned uniform, camping on the path with an armed escort of lank Zanzibaris, very hospitable and festive--not to say drunk. Was looking after the upkeep of the road, he declared. Can't say I saw any road or any upkeep, unless the body of a middle-aged negro, with a bullet-hole in the forehead, upon which I absolutely stumbled three miles farther on, may be considered as a permanent improvement. I had a white companion too, not a bad chap, but rather too fleshy and with the exasperating habit of fainting on the hot hillsides, miles away from the least bit of shade and water. Annoying, you know, to hold your own coat like a parasol over a man's head while he is coming-to. I couldn't help asking him once what he meant by coming there at all. 'To make money, of course. What do you think?' he said, scornfully. Then he got fever, and
had to be carried in a hammock slung under a pole. As he weighed sixteen stone I had no end of rows with the carriers. They jibbed, ran away, sneaked off with their loads in the night--quite a mutiny. So, one evening, I made a speech in English with gestures, not one of which was lost to the sixty pairs of eyes before me, and the next morning I started the hammock off in front all right. An afterwards I came upon the whole concern wrecked in a bush--man, hammock, groans, blankets, horrors. The heavy pole had skinned his poor nose. He was very anxious for me to kill somebody, but there wasn't the shadow of a carrier near. I remembered the old doctor,--'It would be interesting for science to watch the mental changes of individuals, on the spot.' I felt I was becoming scientifically interesting. However, all that is to no purpose. On the fifteenth day I came in sight of the big river again, and hobbled into the Central Station. It was on a back water surrounded by scrub and forest, with a pretty border of smelly mud on one side, and on the three others inclosed by a crazy fence of rushes. A neglected gap was all the gate it had, and the first glance at the place was enough to let you see the flabby devil was running that show. White men with long staves in their hands appeared languidly from amongst the buildings, strolling up to take a look at me, and then retired out of sight somewhere. One of them, a stout, excitable chap with black mustaches, informed me with great volubility and many digressions,
as soon as I told him who I was, that my steamer was at
the bottom of the river. I was thunderstruck. What,
how, why? Oh, it was 'all right.' The 'manager him-
self' was there. All quite correct. 'Everybody had
behaved splendidly! splendidly!'--'you must,' he said
in agitation, 'go and see the general manager at once.
He is waiting!'

"I did not see the real significance of that wreck at
once. I fancy I see it now, but I am not sure--not at
all. Certainly the affair was too stupid--when I think
of it--to be altogether natural. Still. . . . But at the
moment it presented itself simply as a confounded nui-
sance. The steamer was sunk. They had started two
days before in a sudden hurry up the river with the
manager on board, in charge of some volunteer skipper,
and before they had been out three hours they tore the
bottom out of her on stones, and she sank near the south
bank. I asked myself what I was to do there, now my
boat was lost. As a matter of fact, I had plenty to do
in fishing my command out of the river. I had to set
about it the very next day. That, and the repairs when
I brought the pieces to the station, took some months.

"My first interview with the manager was curious. He
did not ask me to sit down after my twenty-mile walk
that morning. He was commonplace in complexion, in
feature, in manners, and in voice. He was of middle
size and of ordinary build. His eyes, of the usual blue,
were perhaps remarkably cold, and he certainly could
make his glance fall on one as trenchant and heavy as
an ax. But even at these times the rest of his person
seemed to disclaim the intention. Otherwise there was
only an indefinable, faint expression of his lips, some-
thing stealthy--a smile--not a smile--I remember it, but
I can't explain. It was unconscious, this smile was,
though just after he had said something it got intensified
for an instant. It came at the end of his speeches like
a seal applied on the words to make the meaning of the
commonest phrase appear absolutely inscrutable. He
was a common trader, from his youth up employed in
these parts--nothing more. He was obeyed, yet he in-
spired neither love nor fear, nor even respect. He in-
spired uneasiness. That was it! Uneasiness. Not a
definite mistrust--just uneasiness--nothing more. You
have no idea how effective such a . . . a . . . fac-
ulty can be. He had no genius for organizing, for
initiative, or for order even. That was evident in such
things as the deplorable state of the station. He had
no learning, and no intelligence. His position had come
to him--why? Perhaps because he was never ill . . .
He had served three terms of three years out there . . .
Because triumphant health in the general rout of con-
stitutions is a kind of power in itself. When he went
home on leave he rioted on a large scale--pompously.
Jack ashore—with a difference—in externals only. This one could gather from his casual talk. He originated nothing, he could keep the routine going—that's all.

But he was great. He was great by this little thing that it was impossible to tell what could control such a man. He never gave that secret away. Perhaps there was nothing within him. Such a suspicion made one pause--for out there there were no external checks. Once when various tropical diseases had laid low almost every 'agent' in the station, he was heard to say, 'Men who come out here should have no entrails.' He sealed the utterance with that smile of his, as though it had been a door opening into a darkness he had in his keeping.

You fancied you had seen things—but the seal was on.

When annoyed at meal-times by the constant quarrels of the white men about precedence, he ordered an immense round table to be made, for which a special house had to be built. This was the station's mess-room. Where he sat was the first place—the rest were nowhere. One felt this to be his unalterable conviction. He was neither civil nor uncivil. He was quiet. He allowed his 'boy'—an overfed young negro from the coast—to treat the white men, under his very eyes, with provoking insolence.

"He began to speak as soon as he saw me. I had been very long on the road. He could not wait. Had to start without me. The up-river stations had to be
relieved. There had been so many delays already that he did not know who was dead and who was alive, and how they got on--and so on, and so on. He paid no attention to my explanations, and, playing with a stick of sealing-wax, repeated several times that the situation was 'very grave, very grave.' There were rumors that a very important station was in jeopardy, and its chief, Mr. Kurtz, was ill. Hoped it was not true. Mr. Kurtz was . . . I felt weary and irritable. Hang Kurtz, I thought. I interrupted him by saying I had heard of Mr. Kurtz on the coast. 'Ah! So they talk of him down there,' he murmured to himself. Then he began again, assuring me Mr. Kurtz was the best agent he had, an exceptional man, of the greatest importance to the Company; therefore I could understand his anxiety. He was, he said, 'very, very uneasy.' Certainly he fidget on his chair a good deal, exclaimed, 'Ah, Mr. Kurtz!' broke the stick of sealing-wax and seemed dumb-founded by the accident. Next thing he wanted to know 'how long it would take to' . . . I interrupted him again. Being hungry, you know, and kept on my feet too, I was getting savage. 'How could I tell,' I said. 'I hadn't even seen the wreck yet--some months, no doubt.' All this talk seemed to me so futile. 'Some months,' he said. 'Well, let us say three months before we can make a start. Yes. That ought to do the affair.' I flung out of his hut (he lived all alone in a clay hut with a sort of veranda) muttering to myself my opinion
of him. He was a chattering idiot. Afterwards I took
it back when it was borne in upon me startlingly with
what extreme nicety he had estimated the time requisite
for the 'affair.'

"I went to work the next day, turning, so to speak,
my back on that station. In that way only it seemed
to me I could keep my hold on the redeeming facts of
life. Still, one must look about sometimes; and then I
saw this station, these men strolling aimlessly about in
the sunshine of the yard. I asked myself sometimes what
it all meant. They wandered here and there with their
absurd long staves in their hands, like a lot of faithless
pilgrims bewitched inside a rotten fence. The word
'ivory' rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You
would think they were praying to it. A taint of imbecile
rapacity blew through it all, like a whiff from some
corpse. By Jove! I've never seen anything so unreal
in my life. And outside, the silent wilderness surround-
ing this cleared speck on the earth struck me as some-
thing great and invincible, like evil or truth, waiting
patiently for the passing away of this fantastic in-
vasion.

"Oh, these months! Well, never mind. Various things
happened. One evening a grass shed full of calico, cotton
prints, beads, and I don't know what else, burst into a
blaze so suddenly that you would have thought the earth had opened to let an avenging fire consume all that trash. I was smoking my pipe quietly by my dismantled steamer, and saw them all cutting capers in the light, with their arms lifted high, when the stout man with mustaches came tearing down to the river, a tin pail in his hand, assured me that everybody was 'behaving splendidly, splendidly, dipped about a quart of water and tore back again. I noticed there was a hole in the bottom of his pail.

"I strolled up. There was no hurry. You see the thing had gone off like a box of matches. It had been hopeless from the very first. The flame had leaped high, driven everybody back, lighted up everything--and collapsed. The shed was already a heap of embers glowing fiercely. A nigger was being beaten near by. They said he had caused the fire in some way; be that as it may, he was screeching most horribly. I saw him, later on, for several days, sitting in a bit of shade looking very sick and trying to recover himself: afterwards he arose and went out--and the wilderness without a sound took him into its bosom again. As I approached the glow from the dark I found myself at the back of two men, talking. I heard the name of Kurtz pronounced, then the words, 'take advantage of this unfortunate accident.' One of the men was the manager. I wished
him a good evening. 'Did you ever see anything like it--eh? It is incredible,' he said, and walked off. The other man remained. He was a first-class agent, young, gentlemanly, a bit reserved, with a forked little beard and a hooked nose. He was stand-offish with the other agents, and they on their side said he was the manager's spy upon them. As to me, I had hardly ever spoken to him before. We got into talk, and by-and-by we strolled away from the hissing ruins. Then he asked me to his room, which was in the main building of the station. He struck a match, and I perceived that this young aristocrat had not only a silver-mounted dressing-case but also a whole candle all to himself. Just at that time the manager was the only man supposed to have any right to candles. Native mats covered the clay walls; a collection of spears, assegais, shields, knives was hung up in trophies. The business intrusted to this fellow was the making of bricks--so I had been informed; but there wasn't a fragment of a brick anywhere in the station, and he had been there more than a year--waiting. It seems he could not make bricks without something, I don't know what--straw maybe. Anyways, it could not be found there, and as it was not likely to be sent from Europe, it did not appear clear to me what he was waiting for. An act of special creation perhaps. However, they were all waiting--all the sixteen or twenty pilgrims of them--for something; and upon my word it did not seem an uncongenial occupation, from the way they took
it, though the only thing that ever came to them was
disease--as far as I could see. They beguiled the time
by backbiting and intriguing against each other in a
foolish kind of way. There was an air of plotting about
that station, but nothing came of it, of course. It was
as unreal as everything else--as the philanthropic pre-
tense of the whole concern, as their talk, as their gov-
ernment, as their show of work. The only real feeling
was a desire to get appointed to a trading-post where
ivory was to be had, so that they could earn percentages.
They intrigued and slandered and hated each other only
on that account,--but as to effectually lifting a little
finger--oh, no. By heavens! there is something after
all in the world allowing one man to steal a horse while
another must not look at a halter. Steal a horse straight
out. Very well. He has done it. Perhaps he can ride.
But there is a way of looking at a halter that would
provoke the most charitable of saints into a kick.

"I had no idea why he wanted to be sociable, but as
we chatted in there it suddenly occurred to me the fel-
low was trying to get at something--in fact, pumping
me. He alluded constantly to Europe, to the people I
was supposed to know there--putting leading questions
as to my acquaintances in the sepulchral city, and so on.
His little eyes glittered like mica discs--with curiosity,
--though he tried to keep up a bit of superciliousness.
At first I was astonished, but very soon I became awfully curious to see what he would find out from me. I couldn't possibly imagine what I had in me to make it worth his while. It was very pretty to see how he baffled himself, for in truth my body was full of chills, and my head had nothing in it but that wretched steamboat business. It was evident he took me for a perfectly shameless prevaricator. At last he got angry, and to conceal a movement of furious annoyance, he yawned. I rose. Then I noticed a small sketch in oils, on a panel, representing a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The background was somber--almost black. The movement of the woman was stately, and the effect of the torchlight on the face was sinister.

"It arrested me, and he stood by civilly, holding a half-pint champagne bottle (medical comforts) with the candle stuck in it. To my question he said Mr. Kurtz had painted this--in this very station more than a year ago--while waiting for means to go to his trading-post.

'Tell me, pray,' said I, 'who is this Mr. Kurtz?'

"'The chief of the Inner Station,' he answered in a short tone, looking away. 'Much obliged,' I said, laughing. 'And you are the brickmaker of the Central Sta-
tion. Everyone knows that.' He was silent for a while.

'He is a prodigy,' he said at last. 'He is an emissary of
pity, and science, and progress, and devil knows what
else. We want,' he began to declaim suddenly, 'for
the guidance of the cause intrusted to us by Europe, so
to speak, higher intelligence, wide sympathies, a single-
ness of purpose.' 'Who says that?' I asked. 'Lots of
them,' he replied. 'Some even write that; and so HE
comes here, a special being, as you ought to know.' 'Why
ought I to know?' I interrupted, really surprised. He
paid no attention. 'Yes. To-day he is chief of the
best station, next year he will be assistant-manager, two
years more and . . . but I dare say you know what he
will be in two years' time. You are of the new gang--
the gang of virtue. The same people who sent him
specially also recommended you. Oh, don't say no. I've
my own eyes to trust.' Light dawned upon me. My
dear aunt's influential acquaintances were producing an
unexpected effect upon that young man. I nearly burst
into a laugh. 'Do you read the Company's confidential
correspondence?' I asked. He hadn't a word to say. It
was great fun. 'When Mr. Kurtz,' I continued severely,
'is General Manager, you won't have the opportunity.'

"He blew the candle out suddenly, and we went out-
side. The moon had risen. Black figures strolled about
listlessly, pouring water on the glow, whence proceeded
a sound of hissing; steam ascended in the moonlight, the beaten nigger groaned somewhere. 'What a row the brute makes!' said the indefatigable man with the mustaches, appearing near us. 'Serve him right. Transgression--punishment--bang! Pitiless, pitiless. That's the only way. This will prevent all conflagrations for the future. I was just telling the manager . . .' He noticed my companion, and became crestfallen all at once. 'Not in bed yet,' he said, with a kind of servile heartiness; 'it's so natural. Ha! Danger-agitation.' He vanished. I went on to the river-side, and the other followed me. I heard a scathing murmur at my ear, 'Heap of muffs--go to.' The pilgrims could be seen in knots gesticulating, discussing. Several had still their staves in their hands. I verily believe they took these sticks to bed with them. Beyond the fence the forest stood up spectrally in the moonlight, and through the dim stir, through the faint sounds of that lamentable courtyard, the silence of the land went home to one's very heart,--its mystery, its greatness, the amazing reality of its concealed life. The hurt nigger moaned feebly somewhere near by, and then fetched a deep sigh that made me mend my pace away from there. I felt a hand introducing itself under my arm. 'My dear sir,' said the fellow, 'I don't want to be misunderstood, and especially by you, who will see Mr. Kurtz long before I can have that pleasure. I wouldn't like him to get a false idea of my disposition. . . .'
"I let him run on, this papier-mache Mephistopheles, and it seemed to me that if I tried I could poke my forefinger through him, and would find nothing inside but a little loose dirt, maybe. He, don't you see, had been planning to be assistant-manager by-and-by under the present man, and I could see that the coming of that Kurtz had upset them both not a little. He talked precipitately, and I did not try to stop him. I had my shoulders against the wreck of my steamer, hauled up on the slope like a carcass of some big river animal. The smell of mud, of primeval mud, by Jove! was in my nostrils, the high stillness of primeval forest was before my eyes; there were shiny patches on the black creek. The moon had spread over everything a thin layer of silver—over the rank grass, over the mud, upon the wall of matted vegetation standing higher than the wall of a temple, over the great river I could see through a somber gap glittering, glittering, as it flowed broadly by without a murmur. All this was great, expectant, mute, while the man jabbered about himself. I wondered whether the stillness on the face of the immensity looking at us two were meant as an appeal or as a menace. What were we who had strayed in here? Could we handle that dumb thing, or would it handle us? I felt how big, how confoundedly big, was that thing that couldn't talk, and perhaps was deaf as well. What was
in there? I could see a little ivory coming out from
there, and I had heard Mr. Kurtz was in there. I had
heard enough about it too--God knows! Yet somehow
it didn't bring any image with it--no more than if I
had been told an angel or a fiend was in there. I be-
lieved it in the same way one of you might believe there
are inhabitants in the planet Mars. I knew once a Scotch
sailmaker who was certain, dead sure, there were people
in Mars. If you asked him for some idea how they
looked and behaved, he would get shy and mutter some-
thing about 'walking on all-fours.' If you as much
as smiled, he would--though a man of sixty--offer to
fight you. I would not have gone so far as to fight
for Kurtz, but I went for him near enough to a lie. You
know I hate, detest, and can't bear a lie, not because
I am straighter than the rest of us, but simply because
it appalls me. There is a taint of death, a flavor of
mortality in lies,--which is exactly what I hate and
detest in the world--what I want to forget. It makes
me miserable and sick, like biting something rotten would
do. Temperament, I suppose. Well, I went near enough
to it by letting the young fool there believe anything
he liked to imagine as to my influence in Europe. I
became in an instant as much of a pretense as the rest
of the bewitched pilgrims. This simply because I had
a notion it somehow would be of help to that Kurtz whom
at the time I did not see--you understand. He was just
a word for me. I did not see the man in the name any
more than you do. Do you see him? Do you
see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me
I am trying to tell you a dream--making a vain at-
tempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the
dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, sur-
prise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt,
that notion of being captured by the incredible which is
of the very essence of dreams. . . ."

He was silent for a while.

". . . No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey
the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence,
--that which makes its truth, its meaning--its subtle and
penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we
dream--alone. . . ."

He paused again as if reflecting, then added--

"Of course in this you fellows see more than I could
then. You see me, whom you know. . . ."

It had become so pitch dark that we listeners could
hardly see one another. For a long time already he,
sitting apart, had been no more to us than a voice. There
was not a word from anybody. The others might have
been asleep, but I was awake. I listened, I listened on
the watch for the sentence, for the word, that would give
me the clew to the faint uneasiness inspired by this narra-
tive that seemed to shape itself without human lips in
the heavy night-air of the river.

"... Yes--I let him run on," Marlow began again,
"and think what he pleased about the powers that were
behind me. I did! And there was nothing behind me!
There was nothing but that wretched, old, mangled
steamboat I was leaning against, while he talked fluently
about 'the necessity for every man to get on.' 'And
when one comes out here, you conceive, it is not to gaze
at the moon.' Mr. Kurtz was a 'universal genius,' but
even a genius would find it easier to work with 'adequate
tools--intelligent men.' He did not make bricks--why,
there was a physical impossibility in the way--as I was
well aware; and if he did secretarial work for the man-
ger, it was because 'no sensible man rejects wantonly
the confidence of his superiors.' Did I see it? I saw it.
What more did I want? What I really wanted was
rivets, by heaven! Rivets. To get on with the work--to
stop the hole. Rivets I wanted. There were cases of
them down at the coast--cases--piled up--burst--split!
You kicked a loose rivet at every second step in that
station yard on the hillside. Rivets had rolled into the
grove of death. You could fill your pockets with rivets for the trouble of stooping down—and there wasn’t one rivet to be found where it was wanted. We had plates that would do, but nothing to fasten them with. And every week the messenger, a lone negro, letter-bag on shoulder and staff in hand, left our station for the coast. And several times a week a coast caravan came in with trade goods,—ghastly glazed calico that made you shudder only to look at it, glass beads value about a penny a quart, confounded spotted cotton handkerchiefs. And no rivets. Three carriers could have brought all that was wanted to set that steamboat afloat.

"He was becoming confidential now, but I fancy my unresponsive attitude must have exasperated him at last, for he judged it necessary to inform me he feared neither God nor devil, let alone any mere man. I said I could see that very well, but what I wanted was a certain quantity of rivets—and rivets were what really Mr. Kurtz wanted, if he had only known it. Now letters went to the coast every week. . . . ‘My dear sir,’ he cried, ‘I write from dictation.’ I demanded rivets. There was a way—for an intelligent man. He changed his manner; became very cold, and suddenly began to talk about a hippopotamus; wondered whether sleeping on board the steamer (I stuck to my salvage night and day) I wasn’t disturbed. There was an old hippo that
had the bad habit of getting out on the bank and roaming at night over the station grounds. The pilgrims used to turn out in a body and empty every rifle they could lay hands on at him. Some even had sat up o’ nights for him. All this energy was wasted, though. 'That animal has a charmed life,' he said; 'but you can say this only of brutes in this country. No man--you apprehend me?--no man here bears a charmed life.' He stood there for a moment in the moonlight with his delicate hooked nose set a little askew, and his mica eyes glittering without a wink, then, with a curt Good night, he strode off. I could see he was disturbed and considerably puzzled, which made me feel more hopeful than I had been for days. It was a great comfort to turn from that chap to my influential friend, the battered, twisted, ruined, tin-pot steamboat. I clambered on board. She rang under my feet like an empty Huntley & Palmer biscuit-tin kicked along a gutter; she was nothing so solid in make, and rather less pretty in shape, but I had expended enough hard work on her to make me love her. No influential friend would have served me better. She had given me a chance to come out a bit--to find out what I could do. No, I don't like work. I had rather laze about and think of all the fine things that can be done. I don't like work--no man does--but I like what is in the work,--the chance to find yourself. Your own reality--for yourself, not for others--what no other man can ever know. They can only
see the mere show, and never can tell what it really means.

"I was not surprised to see somebody sitting aft, on the deck, with his legs dangling over the mud. You see I rather chummed with the few mechanics there were in that station, whom the other pilgrims naturally despised --on account of their imperfect manners, I suppose. This was the foreman--a boiler-maker by trade--a good worker. He was a lank, bony, yellow-faced man, with big intense eyes. His aspect was worried, and his head was as bald as the palm of my hand; but his hair in falling seemed to have stuck to his chin, and had prospered in the new locality, for his beard hung down to his waist. He was a widower with six young children (he had left them in charge of a sister of his to come out there), and the passion of his life was pigeon-flying. He was an enthusiast and a connoisseur. He would rave about pigeons. After work hours he used sometimes to come over from his hut for a talk about his children and his pigeons; at work, when he had to crawl in the mud under the bottom of the steamboat, he would tie up that beard of his in a kind of white serviette he brought for the purpose. It had loops to go over his ears. In the evening he could be seen squatted on the bank rinsing that wrapper in the creek with great care, then spreading it solemnly on a bush to dry.
"I slapped him on the back and shouted 'We shall have rivets!' He scrambled to his feet exclaiming 'No! Rivets!' as though he couldn't believe his ears. Then in a low voice, 'You . . . eh?' I don't know why we behaved like lunatics. I put my finger to the side of my nose and nodded mysteriously. 'Good for you!' he cried, snapped his fingers above his head, lifting one foot. I tried a jig. We capered on the iron deck. A frightful clatter came out of that hulk, and the virgin forest on the other bank of the creek sent it back in a thundering roll upon the sleeping station. It must have made some of the pilgrims sit up in their hovels. A dark figure obscured the lighted doorway of the manager's hut, vanished, then, a second or so after, the doorway itself vanished too. We stopped, and the silence driven away by the stamping of our feet flowed back again from the recesses of the land. The great wall of vegetation, an exuberant and entangled mass of trunks, branches, leaves, boughs, festoons, motionless in the moonlight, was like a rioting invasion of soundless life, a rolling wave of plants, piled up, crested, ready to topple over the creek, to sweep every little man of us out of his little existence. And it moved not. A deadened burst of mighty splashes and snorts reached us from afar, as though an ichthyosaurus had been taking a bath of glitter in the great river. 'After all,' said the
boiler-maker in a reasonable tone, 'why shouldn't we get the rivets?' Why not, indeed! I did not know of any reason why we shouldn't. 'They'll come in three weeks;' I said confidently.

"But they didn't. Instead of rivets there came an invasion, an infliction, a visitation. It came in sections during the next three weeks, each section headed by a donkey carrying a white man in new clothes and tan shoes, bowing from that elevation right and left to the impressed pilgrims. A quarrelsome band of footsore sulky niggers trod on the heels of the donkeys; a lot of tents, camp-stools, tin boxes, white cases, brown bales would be shot down in the courtyard, and the air of mystery would deepen a little over the muddle of the station. Five such installments came, with their absurd air of disorderly flight with the loot of innumerable outfit shops and provision stores, that, one would think, they were lugging, after a raid, into the wilderness for equitable division. It was an inextricable mess of things decent in themselves but that human folly made look like the spoils of thieving.

"this devoted band called itself the Eldorado Exploring Expedition, and I believe they were sworn to secrecy. Their talk, however, was the talk of sordid buccaneers: it was reckless without hardihood, greedy
without audacity, and cruel without courage; there was not an atom of foresight or of serious intention in the whole batch of them, and they did not seem aware these things are wanted for the work of the world. To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe. Who paid the expenses of the noble enterprise I don't know; but the uncle of our manager was leader of that lot.

"In exterior he resembled a butcher in a poor neighborhhood, and his eyes had a look of sleepy cunning. He carried his fat paunch with ostentation on his short legs, and during the time his gang infested the station spoke to no one but his nephew. You could see these two roaming about all day long with their heads close together in an everlasting confab.

"I had given up worrying myself about the rivets. One's capacity for that kind of folly is more limited than you would suppose. I said Hang!--and let things slide. I had plenty of time for meditation, and now and then I would give some thought to Kurtz. I wasn't very interested in him. No. Still, I was curious to see whether this man, who had come out equipped with moral ideas of some sort, would climb to the top after all, and how he would set about his work when there."
"One evening as I was lying flat on the deck of my steamboat, I heard voices approaching—and there were the nephew and the uncle strolling along the bank. I laid my head on my arm again, and had nearly lost myself in a doze, when somebody said in my ear, as it were: 'I am as harmless as a little child, but I don't like to be dictated to. Am I the manager—or am I not? I was ordered to send him there. It's incredible.' . . .

I became aware that the two were standing on the shore alongside the forepart of the steamboat, just below my head. I did not move; it did not occur to me to move: I was sleepy. 'It IS unpleasant,' grunted the uncle. 'He has asked the Administration to be sent there,' said the other, 'with the idea of showing what he could do; and I was instructed accordingly. Look at the influence that man must have. Is it not frightful?' They both agreed it was frightful, then made several bizarre remarks: 'Make rain and fine weather—one man—the Council—by the nose'—bits of absurd sentences that got the better of my drowsiness, so that I had pretty near the whole of my wits about me when the uncle said, 'The climate may do away with this difficulty for you. Is he alone there?' 'Yes,' answered the manager; 'he sent his assistant down the river with a note to me in these
terms: "Clear this poor devil out of the country, and
don't bother sending more of that sort. I had rather
be alone than have the kind of men you can dispose of
with me." It was more than a year ago. Can you
imagine such impudence! 'Anything since then?'
asked the other, hoarsely. 'Ivory,' jerked the nephew;
'lots of it--prime sort--lots--most annoying, from
him.' 'And with that?' questioned the heavy rumble.
'Invoice,' was the reply fired out, so to speak. Then
silence. They had been talking about Kurtz.

"I was broad awake by this time, but, lying perfectly
at ease, remained still, having no inducement to change
my position. 'How did that ivory come all this way?'
growled the elder man, who seemed very vexed. The
other explained that it had come with a fleet of canoes in
charge of an English half-caste clerk Kurtz had with
him; that Kurtz had apparently intended to return him-
self, the station being by that time bare of goods and
stores, but after coming three hundred miles, had sud-
denly decided to go back, which he started to do alone
in a small dug-out with four paddlers, leaving the half-
caste to continue down the river with the ivory. The two
fellows there seemed astounded at anybody attempting
such a thing. They were at a loss for an adequate mo-
tive. As to me, I seemed to see Kurtz for the first time.
It was a distinct glimpse: the dug-out, four paddling
savages, and the lone white man turning his back suddenly on the headquarters, on relief, on thoughts of home—perhaps; setting his face towards the depths of the wilderness, towards his empty and desolate station.

I did not know the motive. Perhaps he was just simply a fine fellow who stuck to his work for its own sake. His name, you understand, had not been pronounced once. He was 'that man.' The half-caste, who, as far as I could see, had conducted a difficult trip with great prudence and pluck, was invariably alluded to as 'that scoundrel.' The 'scoundrel' had reported that the 'man' had been very ill—had recovered imperfectly.

. . . The two below me moved away then a few paces, and strolled back and forth at some little distance. I heard: 'Military post--doctor--two hundred miles--quite alone now—unavoidable delays—nine months—no news—strange rumors.' They approached again, just as the manager was saying, 'No one, as far as I know, unless a species of wandering trader—a pestilential fellow, snapping ivory from the natives.' Who was it they were talking about now? I gathered in snatches that this was some man supposed to be in Kurtz's district, and of whom the manager did not approve. 'We will not be free from unfair competition till one of these fellows is hanged for an example,' he said. 'Certainly,' grunted the other; 'get him hanged! Why not? Anything—anything can be done in this country. That's what I say; nobody here, you understand, HERE, can endanger
your position. And why? You stand the climate—you outlast them all. The danger is in Europe; but there before I left I took care to—' They moved off and whispered, then their voices rose again. 'The extraordinary series of delays is not my fault. I did my possible.' The fat man sighed, 'Very sad.' 'And the pestiferous absurdity of his talk,' continued the other; 'he bothered me enough when he was here. "Each station should be like a beacon on the road towards better things, a center for trade of course, but also for humanizing, improving, instructing." Conceive you—that ass! And he wants to be manager! No, it's—' Here he got choked by excessive indignation, and I lifted my head the least bit. I was surprised to see how near they were—right under me. I could have spat upon their hats. They were looking on the ground, absorbed in thought. The manager was switching his leg with a slender twig: his sagacious relative lifted his head. 'You have been well since you came out this time?' he asked. The other gave a start. 'Who? I? Oh! Like a charm—like a charm. But the rest—oh, my goodness! All sick. They die so quick, too, that I haven't the time to send them out of the country—it's incredible!' 'H'm. Just so,' grunted the uncle. 'Ah! my boy, trust to this—I say, trust to this.' I saw him extend his short flipper of an arm for a gesture that took in the forest, the creek, the mud, the river,—seemed to beckon with a dishonoring flourish before the sunlit face of the land a
treacherous appeal to the lurking death, to the hidden
evil, to the profound darkness of its heart. It was so
startling that I leaped to my feet and looked back at
the edge of the forest, as though I had expected an
answer of some sort to that black display of confidence.
You know the foolish notions that come to one some-
times. The high stillness confronted these two figures
with its ominous patience, waiting for the passing away
of a fantastic invasion.

"They swore aloud together--out of sheer fright, I
believe--then pretending not to know anything of my
existence, turned back to the station. The sun was low;
and leaning forward side by side, they seemed to be
tugging painfully uphill their two ridiculous shadows
of unequal length, that trailed behind them slowly over
the tall grass without bending a single blade.

"In a few days the Eldorado Expedition went into the
patient wilderness, that closed upon it as the sea closes
over a diver. Long afterwards the news came that all
the donkeys were dead. I know nothing as to the fate of
the less valuable animals. They, no doubt, like the rest
of us, found what they deserved. I did not inquire. I
was then rather excited at the prospect of meeting Kurtz
very soon. When I say very soon I mean it compara-
tively. It was just two months from the day we left
the creek when we came to the bank below Kurtz's station.

"Going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine. The long stretches of the waterway ran on, deserted, into the gloom of overshadowed distances. On silvery sandbanks hippos and alligators sunned themselves side by side. The broadening waters flowed through a mob of wooded islands; you lost your way on that river as you would in a desert, and butted all day long against shoals, trying to find the channel, till you thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had known once--some place--far away--in another existence perhaps. There were moments when one's past came back to one, as it will sometimes when you have not a moment to spare to yourself; but it came in the shape of an unrestful and noisy dream, remembered with wonder amongst the overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants, and water, and silence. And this stillness of life did not in the least resemble a peace. It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention. It looked at you with a vengeful aspect. I got
used to it afterwards; I did not see it any more; I had
no time. I had to keep guessing at the channel; I had
to discern, mostly by inspiration, the signs of hidden
banks; I watched for sunken stones; I was learning to
clap my teeth smartly before my heart flew out, when
I shaved by a fluke some infernal sly old snag that would
have ripped the life out of the tin-pot steamboat and
drowned all the pilgrims; I had to keep a look-out for
the signs of dead wood we could cut up in the night for
next day's steaming. When you have to attend to
things of that sort, to the mere incidents of the sur-
face, the reality--the reality, I tell you--fades. The
inner truth is hidden--luckily, luckily. But I felt it
all the same; I felt often its mysterious stillness watching
me at my monkey tricks, just as it watches you fellows
performing on your respective tight-ropes for--what is
it? half-a-crown a tumble--"

"Try to be civil, Marlow," growled a voice, and I
knew there was at least one listener awake besides my-
self.

"I beg your pardon. I forgot the heartache which
makes up the rest of the price. And indeed what does
the price matter, if the trick be well done? You do
your tricks very well. And I didn't do badly either,
since I managed not to sink that steamboat on my first
trip. It's a wonder to me yet. Imagine a blindfolded
man set to drive a van over a bad road. I sweated and
shivered over that business considerably, I can tell you.
After all, for a seaman, to scrape the bottom of the thing
that's supposed to float all the time under his care is
the unpardonable sin. No one may know of it, but you
never forget the thump--eh? A blow on the very heart.
You remember it, you dream of it, you wake up at night
and think of it--years after--and go hot and cold all
over. I don't pretend to say that steamboat floated all
the time. More than once she had to wade for a bit,
with twenty cannibals splashing around and pushing.
We had enlisted some of these chaps on the way for a
crew. Fine fellows--cannibals--in their place. They
were men one could work with, and I am grateful to
them. And, after all, they did not each other before
my face: they had brought along a provision of hippo-
meat which went rotten, and made the mystery of the
wilderness stink in my nostrils. Phoo! I can sniff it
now. I had the manager on board and three or four
pilgrims with their staves--all complete. Sometimes we
came upon a station close by the bank, clinging to the
skirts of the unknown, and the white men rushing out
of a tumble-down hovel, with great gestures of joy and
surprise and welcome, seemed very strange.--had the ap-
pearance of being held there captive by a spell. The word
ivory would ring in the air for a while--and on we went
again into the silence, along empty reaches, round the
still bends, between the high walls of our winding way,
reverberating in hollow claps the ponderous beat of the
stern-wheel. Trees, trees, millions of trees, massive,
immense, running up high; and at their foot, hugging
the bank against the stream, crept the little begrimed
steamboat, like a sluggish beetle crawling on the floor
of a lofty portico. It made you feel very small, very
lost, and yet it was not altogether depressing that feel-
ing. After all, if you were small, the grimy beetle
crawled on--which was just what you wanted it to do.
Where the pilgrims imagined it crawled to I don't know.
To some place where they expected to get something, I
bet! For me it crawled toward Kurtz--exclusively; but
when the steam-pipes started leaking we crawled very
slow. The reaches opened before us and closed behind,
as if the forest had stepped leisurely across the water
to bar the way for our return. We penetrated deeper
and deeper into the heart of darkness. It was very quiet
there. At night sometimes the roll of drums behind the
curtain of trees would run up the river and remain
sustained faintly, as if hovering in the air high over our
heads, till the first break of day. Whether it meant war,
peace, or prayer we could not tell. The dawns were
heralded by the descent of a chill stillness; the wood-
cutters slept, their fires burned low; the snapping of
a twig would make you start. We were wanderers on
a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect
of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves
the first of men taking possession of an accursed in-
heritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish
and of excessive toil. But suddenly, as we struggled
round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls,
of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black
limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of
bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy
and motionless foliage. The steamer toiled along slowly
on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. The
prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, wel-
coming us--who could tell? We were cut off from the
comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like
phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men
would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse.
We could not understand, because we were too far and
could not remember, because we were traveling in the
night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving
hardly a sign--and no memories.

"The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to
look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but
there--there you could look at a thing monstrous and
free. It was unearthly, and the men were-- No, they
were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst
of it--this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It
would come slowly to one. They howled, and leaped, and
spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was
just the thought of their humanity--like yours--the
thought of your remote kinship with this wild and pas-
sionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but
if you were man enough you would admit to yourself
that there was in you just the faintest trace of a re-
sponse to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim
suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you--
you so remote from the night of first ages--could com-
prehend. And why not? The mind of man is capable
of anything--because everything is in it, all the past
as well as all the future. What was there after all?
Joy, fear, sorrow, devotion, valor, rage--who can tell?
--but truth--truth stripped of its cloak of time. Let
the fool gape and shudder--the man knows, and can
look on without a wink. But he must at least be as
much of a man as these on the shore. He must meet
that truth with his own true stuff--with his own inborn
strength. Principles? Principles won't do. Acquisi-
tions, clothes, pretty rags--rags that would fly off at
the first good shake. No; you want a deliberate belief.
An appeal to me in this fiendish row--is there? Very
well; I hear; I admit, but I have a voice too, and for
good or evil mine is the speech that cannot be silenced.
Of course, a fool, what with sheer fright and fine senti-
ments, is always safe. Who's that grunting? You
wonder I didn't go ashore for a howl and a dance? Well,
no--I didn't. Fine sentiments, you say? Fine senti-
ments, be hanged! I had no time. I had to mess about
with white-lead and strips of woollen blanket helping
to put bandages on those leaky steam-pipes--I tell you.
I had to watch the steering, and circumvent those snags,
and get the tin-pot along by hook or by crook. There
was surface-truth enough in these things to save a wiser
man. And between whiles I had to look after the savage
who was fireman. He was an improved specimen; he
could fire up a vertical boiler. He was there below me,
and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as
seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat,
walking on his hind-legs. A few months of training had
done for that really fine chap. He squinted at the
steam-gauge and at the water-gauge with an evident
effort of intrepidity--and he had filed teeth too, the
poor devil, and the wool of his pate shaved into queer
patterns, and three ornamental scars on each of his
cheeks. He ought to have been clapping his hands and
stamping his feet on the bank, instead of which he was
hard at work, a thrall to strange witchcraft, full of
improving knowledge. He was useful because he had
been instructed; and what he knew was this--that should
the water in that transparent thing disappear, the evil
spirit inside the boiler would get angry through the
greatness of his thirst, and take a terrible vengeance.
So he sweated and fired up and watched the glass fear-
fully (with an impromptu charm, made of rags, tied to
his arm, and a piece of polished bone, as big as a watch,
stuck flatways through his lower lip), while the wooded
banks slipped past us slowly, the short noise was left behind, the interminable miles of silence--and we crept on, towards Kurtz. But the snags were thick, the water was treacherous and shallow, the boiler seemed indeed to have a sulky devil in it, and thus neither that fireman nor I had any time to peer into our creepy thoughts.

"Some fifty miles below the Inner Station we came upon a hut of reeds, an inclined and melancholy pole, with the unrecognizable tatters of what had been a flag of some sort flying from it, and a neatly stacked woodpile. This was unexpected. We came to the bank, and on the stack of firewood found a flat piece of board with some faded pencil-writing on it. When deciphered it said: 'Wood for you. Hurry up. Approach cautiously.' There was a signature, but it was illegible--not Kurtz--a much longer word. Hurry up. Where? Up the river? 'Approach cautiously.' We had not done so. But the warning could not have been meant for the place where it could be only found after approach. Something was wrong above. But what--and how much? That was the question. We commented adversely upon the imbecility of that telegraphic style. The bush around said nothing, and would not let us look very far, either. A torn curtain of red twill hung in the doorway of the hut, and flapped sadly in our faces. The dwelling was dismantled; but we could see a white man had lived
there not very long ago. There remained a rude table
--a plank on two posts; a heap of rubbish reposed in a
dark corner, and by the door I picked up a book. It
had lost its covers, and the pages had been thumbed into
a state of extremely dirty softness; but the back had been
lovingly stitched afresh with white cotton thread, which
looked clean yet. It was an extraordinary find. Its title
was, 'An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship,' by a
man Tower, Towson--some such name--Master in his
Majesty's Navy. The matter looked dreary reading
enough, with illustrative diagrams and repulsive tables of
figures, and the copy was sixty years old. I handled this
amazing antiquity with the greatest possible tenderness,
lest it should dissolve in my hands. Within, Towson or
Towser was inquiring earnestly into the breaking strain
of ships' chains and tackle, and other such matters. Not
a very enthralling book; but at the first glance you
could see there a singleness of intention, an honest con-
cern for the right way of going to work, which made
these humble pages, thought out so many years ago,
luminous with another than a professional light. The
simple old sailor, with his talk of chains and purchases,
made me forget the jungle and the pilgrims in a delicious
sensation of having come upon something unmistakably
real. Such a book being there was wonderful enough;
but still more astounding were the notes penciled in the
margin, and plainly referring to the text. I couldn't
believe my eyes! They were in cipher! Yes, it looked
like cipher. Fancy a man lugging with him a book of that description into this nowhere and studying it--and making notes--in cipher at that! It was an extravagant mystery.

"I had been dimly aware for some time of a worrying noise, and when I lifted my eyes I saw the wood-pile was gone, and the manager, aided by all the pilgrims, was shouting at me from the river-side. I slipped the book into my pocket. I assure you to leave off reading was like tearing myself away from the shelter of an old and solid friendship.

"I started the lame engine ahead. 'It must be this miserable trader--this intruder,' exclaimed the manager, looking back malevolently at the place we had left. 'He must be English,' I said. 'It will not save him from getting into trouble if he is not careful,' muttered the manager darkly. I observed with assumed innocence that no man was safe from trouble in this world.

"The current was more rapid now, the steamer seemed at her last gasp, the stern-wheel flopped languidly, and I caught myself listening on tiptoe for the next beat of the float, for in sober truth I expected the wretched thing to give up every moment. It was like watching the last
flickers of a life. But still we crawled. Sometimes I
would pick out a tree a little way ahead to measure our
progress towards Kurtz by, but I lost it invariably be-
fore we got abreast. To keep the eyes so long on one
thing was too much for human patience. The manager
displayed a beautiful resignation. I fretted and fumed
and took to arguing with myself whether or no I would
talk openly with Kurtz; but before I could come to any
conclusion it occurred to me that my speech or my silence,
indeed any action of mine, would be a mere futility.
What did it matter what anyone knew or ignored? What
did it matter who was manager? One gets sometimes
such a flash of insight. The essentials of this affair lay
deep under the surface, beyond my reach, and beyond
my power of meddling.

"Towards the evening of the second day we judged
ourselves about eight miles from Kurtz's station. I
wanted to push on; but the manager looked grave, and
told me the navigation up there was so dangerous that it
would be advisable, the sun being very low already, to
wait where we were till next morning. Moreover, he
pointed out that if the warning to approach cautiously
were to be followed, we must approach in daylight--
not at dusk, or in the dark. This was sensible enough.
Eight miles meant nearly three hours' steaming for us,
and I could also see suspicious ripples at the upper end
of the reach. Nevertheless, I was annoyed beyond ex-
pression at the delay, and most unreasonably too, since
one night more could not matter much after so many
months. As we had plenty of wood, and caution was
the word, I brought up in the middle of the stream.
The reach was narrow, straight, with high sides like a
railway cutting. The dusk came gliding into it long
before the sun had set. The current ran smooth and
swift, but a dumb immobility sat on the banks. The
living trees, lashed together by the creepers and every
living bush of the undergrowth, might have been changed
into stone, even to the slenderest twig, to the lightest
leaf. It was not sleep—it seemed unnatural, like a
state of trance. Not the faintest sound of any kind
could be heard. You looked on amazed, and began to
suspect yourself of being deaf—then the night came
suddenly, and struck you blind as well. About three
in the morning some large fish leaped, and the loud
splash made me jump as though a gun had been fired.
When the sun rose there was a white fog, very warm
and clammy, and more blinding than the night. It did
not shift or drive; it was just there, standing all round
you like something solid. At eight or nine, perhaps, it
lifted as a shutter lifts. We had a glimpse of the tower-
ing multitude of trees, of the immense matted jungle,
with the blazing little ball of the sun hanging over it--
all perfectly still—and then the white shutter came down
again, smoothly, as if sliding in greased grooves.
ordered the chain, which we had begun to heave in, to be paid out again. Before it stopped running with a muffled rattle, a cry, a very loud cry, as of infinite desolation, soared slowly in the opaque air. It ceased. A complaining clamor, modulated in savage discords, filled our ears. The sheer unexpectedness of it made my hair stir under my cap. I don't know how it struck the others: to me it seemed as though the mist itself had screamed, so suddenly, and apparently from all sides at once, did this tumultuous and mournful uproar arise. It culminated in a hurried outbreak of almost intolerably excessive shrieking, which stopped short, leaving us stiffened in a variety of silly attitudes, and obstinately listening to the nearly as appalling and excessive silence. 'Good God! What is the meaning--?' stammered at my elbow one of the pilgrims,--a little fat man, with sandy hair and red whiskers, who wore side-spring boots, and pink pyjamas tucked into his socks. Two others remained open-mouthed a whole minute, then dashed into the little cabin, to rush out incontinently and stand darting scared glances, with Winchesters at 'ready' in their hands. What we could see was just the steamer we were on, her outlines blurred as though she had been on the point of dissolving, and a misty strip of water, perhaps two feet broad, around her--and that was all. The rest of the world was nowhere, as far as our eyes and ears were concerned. Just nowhere. Gone, disappeared; swept off without leaving
a whisper or a shadow behind.

"I went forward, and ordered the chain to be hauled in short, so as to be ready to trip the anchor and move the steamboat at once if necessary. 'Will they attack?' whispered an awed voice. 'We will all be butchered in this fog,' murmured another. The faces twitched with the strain, the hands trembled slightly, the eyes forgot to wink. It was very curious to see the contrast of expressions of the white men and of the black fellows of our crew, who were as much strangers to that part of the river as we, though their homes were only eight hundred miles away. The whites, of course greatly discomposed, had besides a curious look of being painfully shocked by such an outrageous row. The others had an alert, naturally interested expression; but their faces were essentially quiet, even those of the one or two who grinned as they hauled at the chain. Several exchanged short, grunting phrases, which seemed to settle the matter to their satisfaction. Their headman, a young, broad-chested black, severely draped in dark-blue fringed cloths, with fierce nostrils and his hair all done up artfully in oily ringlets, stood near me. 'Aha!' I said, just for good fellowship's sake. 'Catch 'im,' he snapped, with a bloodshot widening of his eyes and a flash of sharp teeth--'catch 'im. Give 'im to us.' 'To you, eh?' I asked; 'what would you do with them?' 'Eat
'im!' he said curtly, and, leaning his elbow on the rail, looked out into the fog in a dignified and profoundly pensive attitude. I would no doubt have been properly horrified, had it not occurred to me that he and his chaps must be very hungry: that they must have been growing increasingly hungry for at least this month past. They had been engaged for six months (I don't think a single one of them had any clear idea of time, as we at the end of countless ages have. They still belonged to the beginnings of time--had no inherited experience to teach them as it were), and of course, as long as there was a piece of paper written over in accordance with some farcical law or other made down the river, it didn't enter anybody's head to trouble how they would live. Certainly they had brought with them some rotten hippo-meat, which couldn't have lasted very long, anyway, even if the pilgrims hadn't, in the midst of a shocking hullabaloo, thrown a considerable quantity of it overboard. It looked like a high-handed proceeding; but it was really a case of legitimate self-defense. You can't breathe dead hippo waking, sleeping, and eating, and at the same time keep your precarious grip on existence. Besides that, they had given them every week three pieces of brass wire, each about nine inches long; and the theory was they were to buy their provisions with that currency in river-side villages. You can see how THAT worked. There were either no villages, or the people were hostile, or the director, who like the
rest of us fed out of tins, with an occasional old he-goat
thrown in, didn't want to stop the steamer for some more
or less recondite reason. So, unless they swallowed the
wire itself, or made loops of it to snare the fishes with,
I don't see what good their extravagant salary could be
to them. I must say it was paid with a regularity worthy
of a large and honorable trading company. For the
rest, the only thing to eat--though it didn't look eat-
able in the least--I saw in their possession was a few
lumps of some stuff like half-cooked dough, of a dirty
lavender color, they kept wrapped in leaves, and now and
then swallowed a piece of, but so small that it seemed
done more for the looks of the thing than for any seri-
ous purpose of sustenance. Why in the name of all the
gnawing devils of hunger they didn't go for us--they
were thirty to five--and have a good tuck in for once,
amazes me now when I think of it. They were big
powerful men, with not much capacity to weigh the con-
sequences, with courage, with strength, even yet, though
their skins were no longer glossy and their muscles no
longer hard. And I saw that something restraining, one
of those human secrets that baffle probability, had come
into play there. I looked at them with a swift quicken-
ing of interest--not because it occurred to me I might
be eaten by them before very long, though I own to you
that just then I perceived--in a new light, as it were--
how unwholesome the pilgrims looked, and I hoped, yes,
I positively hoped, that my aspect was not so--what shall
I say?--so--unappetizing: a touch of fantastic vanity which fitted well with the dream-sensation that pervaded all my days at that time. Perhaps I had a little fever too. One can't live with one's finger everlastingly on one's pulse. I had often 'a little fever,' or a little touch of other things--the playful paw-strokes of the wilderness, the preliminary trifling before the more serious onslaught which came in due course. Yes; I looked at them as you would on any human being, with a curiosity of their impulses, motives, capacities, weaknesses, when brought to the test of an inexorable physical necessity. Restraint! What possible restraint? Was it superstition, disgust, patience, fear--or some kind of primitive honor? No fear can stand up to hunger, no patience can wear it out, disgust simply does not exist where hunger is; and as to superstition, beliefs, and what you may call principles, they are less than chaff in a breeze. Don't you know the devilry of lingering starvation, its exasperating torment, its black thoughts, its somber and brooding ferocity? Well, I do. It takes a man all his inborn strength to fight hunger properly. It's really easier to face bereavement, dishonor, and the perdition of one's soul--than this kind of prolonged hunger. Sad, but true. And these chaps too had no earthly reason for any kind of scruple. Restraint! I would just as soon have expected restraint from a hyena prowling amongst the corpses of a battlefield. But there was the fact facing me--the fact dazzling, to be seen, like the
foam on the depths of the sea, like a ripple on an unfathomable enigma, a mystery greater—when I thought of it—than the curious, inexplicable note of desperate grief in this savage clamor that had swept by us on the river-bank, behind the blind whiteness of the fog.

"Two pilgrims were quarreling in hurried whispers as to which bank. 'Left.' 'No, no; how can you?' Right, right, of course.' 'It is very serious,' said the manager's voice behind me; 'I would be desolated if anything should happen to Mr. Kurtz before we came up.' I looked at him, and had not the slightest doubt he was sincere. He was just the kind of man who would wish to preserve appearances. That was his restraint. But when he muttered something about going on at once, I did not even take the trouble to answer him. I knew, and he knew, that it was impossible. Were we to let go our hold of the bottom, we would be absolutely in the air—in space. We wouldn't be able to tell where we were going to—whether up or down stream, or across—till we fetched against one bank or the other,--and then we wouldn't know at first which it was. Of course I made no move. I had no mind for a smash-up. You couldn't imagine a more deadly place for a shipwreck. Whether drowned at once or not, we were sure to perish speedily in one way or another. 'I authorize you to take all the risks,' he said, after a short silence. 'I refuse
to take any,' I said shortly; which was just the answer he expected, though its tone might have surprised him.

'Well, I must defer to your judgment. You are captain,' he said, with marked civility. I turned my shoulder to him in sign of my appreciation, and looked into the fog. How long would it last? It was the most hopeless look-out. The approach to this Kurtz grubbing for ivory in the wretched bush was beset by as many dangers as though he had been an enchanted princess sleeping in a fabulous castle. 'Will they attack, do you think?' asked the manager, in a confidential tone.

"I did not think they would attack, for several obvious reasons. The thick fog was one. If they left the bank in their canoes they would get lost in it, as we would be if we attempted to move. Still, I had also judged the jungle of both banks quite impenetrable--and yet eyes were in it, eyes that had seen us. The river-side bushes were certainly very thick; but the undergrowth behind was evidently penetrable. However, during the short lift I had seen no canoes anywhere in the reach--certainly not abreast of the steamer. But what made the idea of attack inconceivable to me was the nature of the noise--of the cries we had heard. They had not the fierce character boding of immediate hostile intention. Unexpected, wild, and violent as they had been, they had given me an irresistible impression of sorrow. The
glimpse of the steamboat had for some reason filled those savages with unrestrained grief. The danger, if any, I expounded, was from our proximity to a great human passion let loose. Even extreme grief may ultimately vent itself in violence--but more generally takes the form of apathy.

"You should have seen the pilgrims stare! They had no heart to grin, or even to revile me; but I believe they thought me gone mad--with fright, maybe. I delivered a regular lecture. My dear boys, it was no good bothering. Keep a look-out? Well, you may guess I watched the fog for the signs of lifting as a cat watches a mouse; but for anything else our eyes were of no more use to us than if we had been buried miles deep in a heap of cotton-wool. It felt like it too--choking, warm, stifling. Besides, all I said, though it sounded extravagant, was absolutely true to fact. What we afterwards alluded to as an attack was really an attempt at repulse. The action was very far from being aggressive--it was not even defensive, in the usual sense: it was undertaken under the stress of desperation, and in its essence was purely protective.

"It developed itself, I should say, two hours after the fog lifted, and its commencement was at a spot, roughly speaking, about a mile and a half below Kurtz's station."
We had just floundered and flopped round a bend, when I saw an islet, a mere grassy hummock of bright green, in the middle of the stream. It was the only thing of the kind; but as we opened the reach more, I perceived it was the head of a long sandbank, or rather of a chain of shallow patches stretching down the middle of the river. They were discolored, just awash, and the whole lot was seen just under the water, exactly as a man's backbone is seen running down the middle of his back under the skin. Now, as far as I did see, I could go to the right or to the left of this. I didn't know either channel, of course. The banks looked pretty well alike, the depth appeared the same; but as I had been informed the station was on the west side, I naturally headed for the western passage.

"No sooner had we fairly entered it than I became aware it was much narrower than I had supposed. To the left of us there was the long uninterrupted shoal, and to the right a high, steep bank heavily overgrown with bushes. Above the bush the trees stood in serried ranks. The twigs overhung the current thickly, and from distance to distance a large limb of some tree projected rigidly over the stream. It was then well on in the afternoon, the face of the forest was gloomy, and a broad strip of shadow had already fallen on the water. In this shadow we steamed up--very slowly, as you may
Imagine. I sheered her well inshore—the water being
deepest near the bank, as the sounding-pole informed me.

"One of my hungry and forbearing friends was sound-
ing in the bows just below me. This steamboat was
exactly like a decked scow. On the deck there were two
little teak-wood houses, with doors and windows. The
boiler was in the fore-end, and the machinery right
astern. Over the whole there was a light roof, supported
on stanchions. The funnel projected through that roof,
and in front of the funnel a small cabin built of light
planks served for a pilot-house. It contained a couch,
two camp-stools, a loaded Martini-Henry leaning in one
corner, a tiny table, and the steering-wheel. It had a
wide door in front and a broad shutter at each side. All
these were always thrown open, of course. I spent my
days perched up there on the extreme fore-end of that
roof, before the door. At night I slept, or tried to, on
the couch. An athletic black belonging to some coast
tribe, and educated by my poor predecessor, was the
helmsman. He sported a pair of brass earrings, wore a
blue cloth wrapper from the waist to the ankles, and
thought all the world of himself. He was the most
unstable kind of fool I had ever seen. He steered with
no end of a swagger while you were by; but if he lost
sight of you, he became instantly the prey of an abject
funk, and would let that cripple of a steamboat get the
upper hand of him in a minute.

"I was looking down at the sounding-pole, and feeling much annoyed to see at each try a little more of it stick out of that river, when I saw my poleman give up the business suddenly, and stretch himself flat on the deck, without even taking the trouble to haul his pole in. He kept hold on it though, and it trailed in the water. At the same time the fireman, whom I could also see below me, sat down abruptly before his furnace and ducked his head. I was amazed. Then I had to look at the river mighty quick, because there was a snag in the fairway. Sticks, little sticks, were flying about--thick: they were whizzing before my nose, dropping below me, striking behind me against my pilot-house. All this time the river, the shore, the woods, were very quiet--perfectly quiet. I could only hear the heavy splashing thump of the stern-wheel and the patter of these things. We cleared the snag clumsily. Arrows, by Jove! We were being shot at! I stepped in quickly to close the shutter on the land side. That fool-helmsman, his hands on the spokes, was lifting his knees high, stamping his feet, champing his mouth, like a reined-in horse. Confound him! And we were staggering within ten feet of the bank. I had to lean right out to swing the heavy shutter, and I saw a face amongst the leaves on the level with my own, looking at me very fierce and steady;
and then suddenly, as though a veil had been removed from my eyes, I made out, deep in the tangled gloom, naked breasts, arms, legs, glaring eyes,—the bush was swarming with human limbs in movement, glistening, of bronze color. The twigs shook, swayed, and rustled, the arrows flew out of them, and then the shutter came to.

'Steer her straight,' I said to the helmsman. He held his head rigid, face forward; but his eyes rolled, he kept on lifting and setting down his feet gently, his mouth foamed a little. 'Keep quiet!' I said in a fury. I might just as well have ordered a tree not to sway in the wind. I darted out. Below me there was a great scuffle of feet on the iron deck; confused exclamations; a voice screamed, 'Can you turn back?' I caught shape of a V-shaped ripple on the water ahead. What? Another snag! A fusillade burst out under my feet. The pilgrims had opened with their Winchesters, and were simply squirting lead into that bush. A deuce of a lot of smoke came up and drove slowly forward. I swore at it. Now I couldn't see the ripple or the snag either. I stood in the doorway, peering, and the arrows came in swarms. They might have been poisoned, but they looked as though they wouldn't kill a cat. The bush began to howl. Our wood-cutters raised a warlike whoop; the report of a rifle just at my back deafened me. I glanced over my shoulder, and the pilot-house was yet full of noise and smoke when I made a dash at the wheel. The fool-nigger had dropped everything,
to throw the shutter open and let off that Martini-Henry.
He stood before the wide opening, glaring, and I yelled
at him to come back, while I straightened the sudden
twist out of that steamboat. There was no room to
turn even if I had wanted to, the snag was somewhere
very near ahead in that confounded smoke, there
was no time to lose, so I just crowded her into the
bank—right into the bank, where I knew the water
was deep.

“We tore slowly along the overhanging bushes in a
whirl of broken twigs and flying leaves. The fusillade
below stopped short, as I had foreseen it would when
the squirts got empty. I threw my head back to a glint-
ing whizz that traversed the pilot-house, in at one shutter-
hole and out at the other. Looking past that mad helms-
man, who was shaking the empty rifle and yelling at
the shore, I saw vague forms of men running bent double,
leaping, gliding, distinct, incomplete, evanescent. Some-
thing big appeared in the air before the shutter, the
rifle went overboard, and the man stepped back swiftly,
looked at me over his shoulder in an extraordinary, pro-
found, familiar manner, and fell upon my feet. The
side of his head hit the wheel twice, and the end of what
appeared a long cane clattered round and knocked over
a little camp-stool. It looked as though after wrench-
ing that thing from somebody ashore he had lost his
balance in the effort. The thin smoke had blown away, we were clear of the snag, and looking ahead I could see that in another hundred yards or so I would be free to sheer off, away from the bank; but my feet felt so very warm and wet that I had to look down. The man had rolled on his back and stared straight up at me; both his hands clutched that cane. It was the shaft of a spear that, either thrown or lunged through the opening, had caught him in the side just below the ribs; the blade had gone in out of sight, after making a frightful gash; my shoes were full; a pool of blood lay very still, gleaming dark-red under the wheel; his eyes shone with an amazing luster. The fusillade burst out again. He looked at me anxiously, gripping the spear like something precious, with an air of being afraid I would try to take it away from him. I had to make an effort to free my eyes from his gaze and attend to the steering. With one hand I felt above my head for the line of the steam-whistled, and jerked out screech after screech hurriedly. The tumult of angry and warlike yells was checked instantly, and then from the depths of the woods went out such a tremulous and prolonged wail of mournful fear and utter despair as may be imagined to follow the flight of the last hope from the earth. There was a great commotion in the bush; the shower of arrows stopped, a few dropping shots rang out sharply--then silence, in which the languid beat of the stern-wheel came plainly to my ears. I put the helm hard a-star-
board at the moment when the pilgrim in pink pyjamas, very hot and agitated, appeared in the doorway. 'The manager sends me--' he began in an official tone, and stopped short. 'Good God!' he said, glaring at the wounded man.

"We two whites stood over him, and his lustrous and inquiring glance enveloped us both. I declare it looked as though he would presently put to us some question in an understandable language; but he died without uttering a sound, without moving a limb, without twitching a muscle. Only in the very last moment, as though in response to some sign we could not see, to some whisper we could not hear, he frowned heavily, and that frown gave to his black death-mask an inconceivably somber, brooding, and menacing expression. The luster of inquiring glance faded swiftly into vacant glassiness. 'Can you steer?' I asked the agent eagerly. He looked very dubious; but I made a grab at his arm, and he understood at once I meant him to steer whether or no. To tell you the truth, I was morbidly anxious to change my shoes and socks. 'He is dead,' murmured the fellow, immensely impressed. 'No doubt about it,' said I, tugging like mad at the shoe-laces. 'And, by the way, I suppose Mr. Kurtz is dead as well by this time.'

"For the moment that was the dominant thought."
There was a sense of extreme disappointment, as though I had found out I had been striving after something altogether without a substance. I couldn't have been more disgusted if I had traveled all this way for the sole purpose of talking with Mr. Kurtz. Talking with.

... I flung one shoe overboard, and became aware that that was exactly what I had been looking forward to--a talk with Kurtz. I made the strange discovery that I had never imagined him as doing, you know, but as discoursing. I didn't say to myself, 'Now I will never see him,' or 'Now I will never shake him by the hand,' but, 'Now I will never hear him.' The man presented himself as a voice. Not of course that I did not connect him with some sort of action. Hadn't I been told in all the tones of jealousy and admiration that he had collected, bartered, swindled, or stolen more ivory than all the other agents together. That was not the point. The point was in his being a gifted creature, and that of all his gifts the one that stood out pre-eminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words--the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness.

"The other shoe went flying unto the devil-god of that
river. I thought, By Jove! it's all over. We are too late; he has vanished—the gift has vanished, by means of some spear, arrow, or club. I will never hear that chap speak after all—and my sorrow had a startling extravagance of emotion, even such as I had noticed in the howling sorrow of these savages in the bush. I couldn't have felt more of lonely desolation somehow, had I been robbed of a belief or had missed my destiny in life. . . . Why do you sigh in this beastly way, somebody? Absurd? Well, absurd. Good Lord! mustn't a man ever-- Here, give me some tobacco." . . .

There was a pause of profound stillness, then a match flared, and Marlow's lean face appeared, worn, hollow, with downward folds and dropped eyelids, with an aspect of concentrated attention; and as he took vigorous draws at his pipe, it seemed to retreat and advance out of the night in the regular flicker of the tiny flame. The match went out.

"Absurd!" he cried. "This is the worst of trying to tell. . . . Here you all are, each moored with two good addresses, like a hulk with two anchors, a butcher round one corner, a policeman round another, excellent appetites, and temperature normal—you hear—normal from year's end to year's end. And you say, Absurd!
Absurd be--exploded! Absurd! My dear boys, what
can you expect from a man who out of sheer nervous-
ness had just flung overboard a pair of new shoes.
Now I think of it, it is amazing I did not shed tears.
I am, upon the whole, proud of my fortitude. I was
cut to the quick at the idea of having lost the inestimable
privilege of listening to the gifted Kurtz. Of course
I was wrong. The privilege was waiting for me. Oh
yes, I heard more than enough. And I was right, too.
A voice. He was very little more than a voice. And
I heard--him--it--this voice--other voices--all of them
were so little more than voices--and the memory of that
time itself lingers around me, impalpable, like a dying
vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid,
savage, or simply mean, without any kind of sense.
Voices, voices--even the girl herself--now--"

He was silent for a long time.

"I laid the ghost of his gifts at last with a lie," he
began suddenly. "Girl! What? Did I mention a
girl? Oh, she is out of it--completely. They--the
women I mean--are out of it--should be out of it. We
must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their
own, lest ours gets worse. Oh, she had to be out of it.
You should have heard the disinterred body of Mr.
Kurtz saying, 'My Intended.' You would have per-
ceived directly then how completely she was out of it.

And the lofty frontal bone of Mr. Kurtz! They say
the hair goes on growing sometimes, but this--ah--
 specimen, was impressively bald. The wilderness had
patted him on the head, and, behold, it was like a ball
--an ivory ball; it had caressed him, and--lo!--he had
withered; it had taken him, loved him, embraced him,
got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his
soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some
devilish initiation. He was its spoiled and pampered
favorite. Ivory? I should think so. Heaps of it,
stacks of it. The old mud shanty was bursting with it.
You would think there was not a single tusk left either
above or below the ground in the whole country. 'Mostly
fossil,' the manager had remarked disparagingly. It
was no more fossil than I am; but they call it fossil
when it is dug up. It appears these niggers do bury
the tusks sometimes--but evidently they couldn't bury
this parcel deep enough to save the gifted Mr. Kurtz
from his fate. We filled the steamboat with it, and had
to pile a lot on the deck. Thus he could see and enjoy
as long as he could see, because the appreciation of
this favor had remained with him to the last. You should
have heard him say, 'My ivory.' Oh yes, I heard him.
'My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my--'
everything belonged to him. It made me hold my breath
in expectation of hearing the wilderness burst into a
prodigious peal of laughter that would shake the fixed
stars in their places. Everything belonged to him--but
that was a trifle. The thing was to know what he be-
longed to, how many powers of darkness claimed him
for their own. That was the reflection that made you
creepy all over. It was impossible--it was not good for
one either--trying to imagine. He had taken a high
seat amongst the devils of the land--I mean literally.
You can't understand. How could you?--with solid
pavement under your feet, surrounded by kind neigh-
bors ready to cheer you or to fall on you, stepping
delicately between the butcher and the policeman, in the
holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums
--how can you imagine what particular region of the
first ages a man's untrammeled feet may take him into
by the way of solitude--utter solitude without a police-
man--by the way of silence, utter silence, where no
warning voice of a kind neighbor can be heard whisper-
ing of public opinion? These little things make all the
great difference. When they are gone you must fall
back upon your own innate strength, upon your own
capacity for faithfulness. Of course you may be too
much of a fool to go wrong--too dull even to know you
are being assaulted by the powers of darkness. I take
it, no fool ever made a bargain for his soul with the
devil: the fool is too much of a fool, or the devil too
much of a devil--I don't know which. Or you may be
such a thunderingly exalted creature as to be altogether
defa
and blind to anything but heavenly sights and
sounds. Then the earth for you is only a standing place
--and whether to be like this is your loss or your gain I
won't pretend to say. But most of us are neither one
nor the other. The earth for us is a place to live in,
where we must put up with sights, with sounds, with
smells too, by Jove!--breathe dead hippo, so to speak,
and not be contaminated. And there, don't you see?
your strength comes in, the faith in your ability for the
digging of unostentatious holes to bury the stuff in--
your power of devotion, not to yourself, but to an
obscure, back-breaking business. And that's difficult
enough. Mind, I am not trying to excuse or even ex-
plain--I am trying to account to myself for--for--Mr.
Kurtz--for the shade of Mr. Kurtz. This initiated
wraith from the back of Nowhere honored me with its
amazing confidence before it vanished altogether. This
was because it could speak English to me. The original
Kurtz had been educated partly in England, and--as
he was good enough to say himself--his sympathies were
in the right place. His mother was half-English, his
father was half-French. All Europe contributed to the
making of Kurtz; and by-and-by I learned that, most
appropriately, the International Society for the Sup-
pression of Savage Customs had intrusted him with the
making of a report, for its future guidance. And he
had written it too. I've seen it. I've read it. It was
eloquent, vibrating with eloquence, but too high-strung,
I think. Seventeen pages of close writing he had found
time for! But this must have been before his--let us say--nerves, went wrong, and caused him to preside at certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites, which--as far as I reluctantly gathered from what I heard at various times--were offered up to him--do you understand?--to Mr. Kurtz himself. But it was a beautiful piece of writing. The opening paragraph, however, in the light of later information, strikes me now as ominous. He began with the argument that we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, 'must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings--we approach them with the might as of a deity,' and so on, and so on. 'By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded,' &c., &c. From that point he soared and took me with him. The peroration was magnificent, though difficult to remember, you know. It gave me the notion of an exotic Immensity ruled by an august Benevolence. It made me tingle with enthusiasm. This was the unbounded power of eloquence--of words--of burning noble words. There were no practical hints to interrupt the magic current of phrases, unless a kind of note at the foot of the last page, scrawled evidently much later, in an unsteady hand, may be regarded as the exposition of a method. It was very simple, and at the end of that moving appeal to every altruistic sentiment it blazed at you, luminous and terrifying, like a flash of lightning in a serene sky:
'Exterminate all the brutes!' The curious part was
that he had apparently forgotten all about that valu-
able postscriptum, because, later on, when he in a sense
came to himself, he repeatedly entreated me to take
good care of 'my pamphlet' (he called it), as it was
sure to have in the future a good influence upon his
career. I had full information about all these things,
and, besides, as it turned out, I was to have the care of
his memory. I've done enough for it to give me the
indisputable right to lay it, if I choose, for an everlasting
rest in the dust-bin of progress, amongst all the
sweepings and, figuratively speaking, all the dead cats
of civilization. But then, you see, I can't choose. He
won't be forgotten. Whatever he was, he was not com-
mon. He had the power to charm or frighten rudimen-
tary souls into an aggravated witch-dance in his
honor; he could also fill the small souls of the pilgrims
with bitter misgivings: he had one devoted friend at
least, and he had conquered one soul in the world that
was neither rudimentary nor tainted with self-seeking.
No; I can't forget him, though I am not prepared to
affirm the fellow was exactly worth the life we lost in
getting to him. I missed my late helmsman awfully.--
I missed him even while his body was still lying in the
pilot-house. Perhaps you will think it passing strange
this regret for a savage who was no more account than
a grain of sand in a black Sahara. Well, don't you see,
he had done something, he had steered; for months I
had him at my back--a help--an instrument. It was a kind of partnership. He steered for me--I had to look after him, I worried about his deficiencies, and thus a subtle bond had been created, of which I only became aware when it was suddenly broken. And the intimate profundity of that look he gave me when he received his hurt remains to this day in my memory--like a claim of distant kinship affirmed in a supreme moment.

"Poor fool! If he had only left that shutter alone. He had no restraint, no restraint--just like Kurtz--a tree swayed by the wind. As soon as I had put on a dry pair of slippers, I dragged him out, after first jerking the spear out of his side, which operation I confess I performed with my eyes shut tight. His heels leaped together over the little door-step; his shoulders were pressed to my breast; I hugged him from behind desperately. Oh! he was heavy, heavy; heavier than any man on earth, I should imagine. Then without more ado I tipped him overboard. The current snatched him as though he had been a wisp of grass, and I saw the body roll over twice before I lost sight of it for ever.

All the pilgrims and the manager were then congregated on the awning-deck about the pilot-house, chattering at each other like a flock of excited magpies, and there was a scandalized murmur at my heartless promptitude. What they wanted to keep that body hanging about for
I can't guess. Embalm it, maybe. But I had also heard another, and a very ominous, murmur on the deck below.

My friends the wood-cutters were likewise scandalized, and with a better show of reason--though I admit that the reason itself was quite inadmissible. Oh, quite! I had made up my mind that if my late helmsman was to be eaten, the fishes alone should have him. He had been a very second-rate helmsman while alive, but now he was dead he might have become a first-class temptation, and possibly cause some startling trouble. Besides, I was anxious to take the wheel, the man in pink pyjamas showing himself a hopeless duffer at the business.

"This I did directly the simple funeral was over. We were going half-speed, keeping right in the middle of the stream, and I listened to the talk about me. They had given up Kurtz, they had given up the station; Kurtz was dead, and the station had been burnt--and so on--and so on. The red-haired pilgrim was beside himself with the thought that at least this poor Kurtz had been properly revenged. 'Say! We must have made a glorious slaughter of them in the bush. Eh? What do you think? Say?' He positively danced, the bloodthirsty little gingery beggar. And he had nearly fainted when he saw the wounded man! I could not help saying, 'You made a glorious lot of smoke, anyhow.' I had seen, from the way the tops of the bushes
rustled and flew, that almost all the shots had gone too high. You can't hit anything unless you take aim and fire from the shoulder; but these chaps fired from the hip with their eyes shut. The retreat, I maintained--and I was right--was caused by the screeching of the steam-whistle. Upon this they forgot Kurtz, and began to howl at me with indignant protests.

"The manager stood by the wheel murmuring confidentially about the necessity of getting well away down the river before dark at all events, when I saw in the distance a clearing on the river-side and the outlines of some sort of building. 'What's this?' I asked. He clapped his hands in wonder. 'The station!' he cried. I edged in at once, still going half-speed.

"Through my glasses I saw the slope of a hill interspersed with rare trees and perfectly free from undergrowth. A long decaying building on the summit was half buried in the high grass; the large holes in the peaked roof gaped black from afar; the jungle and the woods made a background. There was no inclosure or fence of any kind; but there had been one apparently, for near the house half-a-dozen slim posts remained in a row, roughly trimmed, and with their upper ends ornamented with round carved balls. The rails, or whatever there had been between, had disappeared. Of
course the forest surrounded all that. The river-bank was clear, and on the water-side I saw a white man under a hat like a cart-wheel beckoning persistently with his whole arm. Examining the edge of the forest above and below, I was almost certain I could see movements—human forms gliding here and there. I steamed past prudently, then stopped the engines and let her drift down. The man on the shore began to shout, urging us to land. 'We have been attacked,' screamed the manager. 'I know—I know. It's all right,' yelled back the other, as cheerful as you please. 'Come along. It's all right. I am glad.'

"His aspect reminded me of something I had seen—something funny I had seen somewhere. As I maneuvered to get alongside, I was asking myself, 'What does this fellow look like?' Suddenly I got it. He looked like a harlequin. His clothes had been made of some stuff that was brown holland probably, but it was covered with patches all over, with bright patches, blue, red, and yellow,—patches on the back, patches on front, patches on elbows, on knees; colored binding round his jacket, scarlet edging at the bottom of his trousers; and the sunshine made him look extremely gay and wonderfully neat withal, because you could see how beautifully all this patching had been done. A beardless, boyish face, very fair, no features to speak of, nose peeling, little blue
eyes, smiles and frowns chasing each other over that open countenance like sunshine and shadow on a wind-swept plain. 'Look out, captain!' he cried; 'there's a snag lodged in here last night.' What! Another snag? I confess I swore shamefully. I had nearly holed my cripple, to finish off that charming trip. The harlequin on the bank turned his little pug nose up to me. 'You English?' he asked, all smiles. 'Are you?' I shouted from the wheel. The smiles vanished, and he shook his head as if sorry for my disappointment. Then he brightened up. 'Never mind!' he cried encouragingly. 'Are we in time?' I asked. 'He is up there,' he replied, with a toss of the head up the hill, and becoming gloomy all of a sudden. His face was like the autumn sky, overcast one moment and bright the next.

"When the manager, escorted by the pilgrims, all of them armed to the teeth, had gone to the house, this chap came on board. 'I say, I don't like this. These natives are in the bush,' I said. He assured me earnestly it was all right. 'They are simple people,' he added; 'well, I am glad you came. It took me all my time to keep them off.' 'But you said it was all right,' I cried. 'Oh, they meant no harm,' he said; and as I stared he corrected himself, 'Not exactly.' Then vivaciously, 'My faith, your pilot-house wants a clean up!' In the
next breath he advised me to keep enough steam on the boiler to blow the whistle in case of any trouble. 'One good screech will do more for you than all your rifles. They are simple people,' he repeated. He rattled away at such a rate he quite overwhelmed me. He seemed to be trying to make up for lots of silence, and actually hinted, laughing, that such was the case. 'Don't you talk with Mr. Kurtz?' I said. 'You don't talk with that man--you listen to him,' he exclaimed with severe exaltation. 'But now--' He waved his arm, and in the twinkling of an eye was in the uttermost depths of despondency. In a moment he came up again with a jump, possessed himself of both my hands, shook them continuously, while he gabbled: 'Brother sailor . . . honor . . . pleasure . . . delight . . . introduce myself . . . Russian . . . son of an arch-priest . . . Government of Tambov . . . What? Tobacco! English tobacco; the excellent English tobacco! Now, that's brotherly. Smoke? Where's a sailor that does not smoke?'

"The pipe soothed him, and gradually I made out he had run away from school, had gone to sea in a Russian ship; ran away again; served some time in English ships; was now reconciled with the arch-priest. He made a point of that. 'But when one is young one must see things, gather experience, ideas; enlarge the mind.'
'Here!' I interrupted. 'You can never tell! Here I have met Mr. Kurtz,' he said, youthfully solemn and reproachful. I held my tongue after that. It appears he had persuaded a Dutch trading-house on the coast to fit him out with stores and goods, and had started for the interior with a light heart, and no more idea of what would happen to him than a baby. He had been wandering about that river for nearly two years alone, cut off from everybody and everything. 'I am not so young as I look. I am twenty-five,' he said. 'At first old Van Shuyten would tell me to go to the devil,' he narrated with keen enjoyment; 'but I stuck to him, and talked and talked, till at last he got afraid I would talk the hind-leg off his favorite dog, so he gave me some cheap things and a few guns, and told me he hoped he would never see my face again. Good old Dutchman, Van Shuyten. I've sent him one small lot of ivory a year ago, so that he can't call me a little thief when I get back. I hope he got it. And for the rest I don't care. I had some wood stacked for you. That was my old house. Did you see?'

"I gave him Towson's book. He made as though he would kiss me, but restrained himself. 'The only book I had left, and I thought I had lost it,' he said, looking at it ecstatically. 'So many accidents happen to a man going about alone, you know. Canoes get upset some-
times--and sometimes you've got to clear out so quick when the people get angry.' He thumbed the pages.

'You made notes in Russian?' I asked. He nodded.

'I thought they were written in cipher,' I said. He laughed, then became serious. 'I had lots of trouble to keep these people off,' he said. 'Did they want to kill you?' I asked. 'Oh no!' he cried, and checked himself. 'Why did they attack us?' I pursued. He hesitated, then said shamefacedly, 'They don't want him to go.' 'Don't they?' I said, curiously. He nodded a nod full of mystery and wisdom. 'I tell you,' he cried, 'this man has enlarged my mind.' He opened his arms wide, staring at me with his little blue eyes that were perfectly round."

III

"I looked at him, lost in astonishment. There he was before me, in motley, as though he had absconded from a troupe of mimes, enthusiastic, fabulous. His very existence was improbable, inexplicable, and altogether bewildering. He was an insoluble problem. It was inconceivable how he had existed, how he had succeeded in getting so far, how he had managed to remain --why he did not instantly disappear. 'I went a little farther,' he said, 'then still a little farther--till I had gone so far that I don't know how I'll ever get back. Never mind. Plenty time. I can manage. You take
Kurtz away quick--quick--I tell you.' The glamour of youth enveloped his particolored rags, his destitution, his loneliness, the essential desolation of his futile wanderings. For months--for years--his life hadn't been worth a day's purchase; and there he was gallantly, thoughtlessly alive, to all appearance indestructible solely by the virtue of his few years and of his unreflecting audacity. I was seduced into something like admiration--like envy. Glamour urged him on, glamour kept him unscathed. He surely wanted nothing from the wilderness but space to breathe in and to push on through. His need was to exist, and to move onwards at the greatest possible risk, and with a maximum of privation. If the absolutely pure, uncalculating, unpractical spirit of adventure had ever ruled a human being, it ruled this be-patched youth. I almost envied him the possession of this modest and clear flame. It seemed to have consumed all thought of self so completely, that, even while he was talking to you, you forgot that it was he--the man before your eyes--who had gone through these things. I did not envy him his devotion to Kurtz, though. He had not meditated over it. It came to him, and he accepted it with a sort of eager fatalism. I must say that to me it appeared about the most dangerous thing in every way he had come upon so far.

"They had come together unavoidably, like two ships
becalmed near each other, and lay rubbing sides at last.
I suppose Kurtz wanted an audience, because on a cer-
tain occasion, when encamped in the forest, they had
talked all night, or more probably Kurtz had talked.

'We talked of everything,' he said, quite transported
at the recollection. 'I forgot there was such a thing
as sleep. The night did not seem to last an hour. Every-
thing! Everything! . . . Of love too.' 'Ah, he
talked to you of love!' I said, much amused. 'It isn't
what you think,' he cried, almost passionately. 'It was
in general. He made me see things--things.'

"He threw his arms up. We were on deck at the time,
and the headman of my wood-cutters, lounging near by,
turned upon him his heavy and glittering eyes. I looked
around, and I don't know why, but I assure you that
never, never before, did this land, this river, this jungle,
the very arch of this blazing sky, appear to me so hope-
less and so dark, so impenetrable to human thought, so
pitiless to human weakness. 'And, ever since, you have
been with him, of course?' I said.

"On the contrary. It appears their intercourse had
been very much broken by various causes. He had, as
he informed me proudly, managed to nurse Kurtz
through two illnesses (he alluded to it as you would to
some risky feat), but as a rule Kurtz wandered alone,
far in the depths of the forest. 'Very often coming to
this station, I had to wait days and days before he would
turn up,' he said. 'Ah, it was worth waiting for!--
sometimes.' 'What was he doing? exploring or what?'
I asked. 'Oh yes, of course;' he had discovered lots of
villages, a lake too--he did not know exactly in what
direction; it was dangerous to inquire too much--but
mostly his expeditions had been for ivory. 'But he had
no goods to trade with by that time,' I objected. 'There's
a good lot of cartridges left even yet,' he answered, look-
ing away. 'To speak plainly, he raided the country,'
I said. He nodded. 'Not alone, surely!' He muttered
something about the villages round that lake. 'Kurtz
got the tribe to follow him, did he?' I suggested. He
fidgeted a little. 'They adored him,' he said. The tone
of these words was so extraordinary that I looked at
him searchingly. It was curious to see his mingled eager-
ness and reluctance to speak of Kurtz. The man filled
his life, occupied his thoughts, swayed his emotions.
'What can you expect?' he burst out; 'he came to them
with thunder and lightning, you know--and they had
never seen anything like it--and very terrible. He could
be very terrible. You can't judge Mr. Kurtz as you
would an ordinary man. No, no, no! Now--just to
give you an idea--I don't mind telling you, he wanted
to shoot me too one day--but I don't judge him.'
'Shoot you!' I cried. 'What for?' 'Well, I had a
small lot of ivory the chief of that village near my house
gave me. You see I used to shoot game for them. Well, he wanted it, and wouldn't hear reason. He declared he would shoot me unless I gave him the ivory and then cleared out of the country, because he could do so, and had a fancy for it, and there was nothing on earth to prevent him killing whom he jolly well pleased. And it was true too. I gave him the ivory. What did I care! But I didn't clear out. No, no. I couldn't leave him. I had to be careful, of course, till we got friendly again for a time. He had his second illness then. Afterwards I had to keep out of the way; but I didn't mind. He was living for the most part in those villages on the lake. When he came down to the river, sometimes he would take to me, and sometimes it was better for me to be careful. This man suffered too much. He hated all this, and somehow he couldn't get away. When I had a chance I begged him to try and leave while there was time; I offered to go back with him. And he would say yes, and then he would remain; go off on another ivory hunt; disappear for weeks; forget himself amongst these people--forget himself--you know.' 'Why! he's mad,' I said. He protested indignantly. Mr. Kurtz couldn't be mad. If I had heard him talk, only two days ago, I wouldn't dare hint at such a thing. . . . I had taken up my binoculars while we talked and was looking at the shore, sweeping the limit of the forest at each side and at the back of the house. The consciousness of there being people in that bush, so silent,
so quiet--as silent and quiet as the ruined house on the
hill--made me uneasy. There was no sign on the face
of nature of this amazing tale that was not so much
told as suggested to me in desolate exclamations, com-
pleted by shrugs, in interrupted phrases, in hints ending
in deep sighs. The woods were unmoved, like a mask--
heavy, like the closed door of a prison--they looked with
their air of hidden knowledge, of patient expectation,
of unapproachable silence. The Russian was explaining
to me that it was only lately that Mr. Kurtz had come
down to the river, bringing along with him all the fight-
ing men of that lake tribe. He had been absent for
several months--getting himself adored, I suppose--and
had come down unexpectedly, with the intention to all
appearance of making a raid either across the river or
down stream. Evidently the appetite for more ivory
had got the better of the--what shall I say?--less ma-
terial aspirations. However he had got much worse
suddenly. 'I heard he was lying helpless, and so I came
up--took my chance,' said the Russian. 'Oh, he is
bad, very bad.' I directed my glass to the house. There
were no signs of life, but there was the ruined roof,
the long mud wall peeping above the grass, with three
little square window-holes, no two of the same size; all
this brought within reach of my hand, as it were. And
then I made a brusque movement, and one of the remain-
ing posts of that vanished fence leaped up in the field
of my glass. You remember I told you I had been
struck at the distance by certain attempts at ornamentation, rather remarkable in the ruinous aspect of the place.

Now I had suddenly a nearer view, and its first result was to make me throw my head back as if before a blow.

Then I went carefully from post to post with my glass, and I saw my mistake. These round knobs were not ornamental but symbolic; they were expressive and puzzling, striking and disturbing—food for thought and also for the vultures if there had been any looking down from the sky; but at all events for such ants as were industrious enough to ascend the pole. They would have been even more impressive, those heads on the stakes, if their faces had not been turned to the house.

Only one, the first I had made out, was facing my way.

I was not so shocked as you may think. The start back I had given was really nothing but a movement of surprise. I had expected to see a knob of wood there, you know. I returned deliberately to the first I had seen—and there it was, black, dried, sunken, with closed eyelids,—a head that seemed to sleep at the top of that pole, and, with the shrunken dry lips showing a narrow white line of the teeth, was smiling too, smiling continuously at some endless and jocose dream of that eternal slumber.

"I am not disclosing any trade secrets. In fact the manager said afterwards that Mr. Kurtz’s methods had ruined the district. I have no opinion on that point,
but I want you clearly to understand that there was nothing exactly profitable in these heads being there. They only showed that Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts, that there was something wanting in him--some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence. Whether he knew of this deficiency himself I can’t say. I think the knowledge came to him at last--only at the very last. But the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude--and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core. . . . I put down the glass, and the head that had appeared near enough to be spoken to seemed at once to have leaped away from me into inaccessible distance.

"The admirer of Mr. Kurtz was a bit crestfallen. In a hurried, indistinct voice he began to assure me he had not dared to take these--say, symbols--down. He was not afraid of the natives; they would not stir till Mr. Kurtz gave the word. His ascendency was extraordinary. The camps of these people surrounded the place, and the chiefs came every day to see him. They
would crawl. . . . 'I don't want to know anything of 
the ceremonies used when approaching Mr. Kurtz,' I 
shouted. Curious, this feeling that came over me that 
such details would be more intolerable than those heads 
drying on the stakes under Mr. Kurtz's windows. After 
all, that was only a savage sight, while I seemed at one 
bound to have been transported into some lightless 
region of subtle horrors, where pure, uncomplicated 
savagery was a positive relief, being something that had 
a right to exist--obviously--in the sunshine. The 
young man looked at me with surprise. I suppose it 
did not occur to him Mr. Kurtz was no idol of mine. 

He forgot I hadn't heard any of these splendid mono-
logues on, what was it? on love, justice, conduct of life
--or what not. If it had come to crawling before Mr. 
Kurtz, he crawled as much as the veriest savage of them 
all. I had no idea of the conditions, he said: these heads 
were the heads of rebels. I shocked him excessively by 
laughing. Rebels! What would be the next definition
I was to hear? There had been enemies, criminals, work-
ers--and these were rebels. Those rebellious heads looked 
very subdued to me on their sticks. 'You don't know how 
such a life tries a man like Kurtz,' cried Kurtz's last 
disciple. 'Well, and you?' I said. 'I! I! I am a
simple man. I have no great thoughts. I want nothing 
from anybody. How can you compare me to . . . ?'

His feelings were too much for speech, and suddenly he 
broke down. 'I don't understand,' he groaned. 'I've
been doing my best to keep him alive, and that's enough.
I had no hand in all this. I have no abilities. There
hasn't been a drop of medicine or a mouthful of invalid
food for months here. He was shamefully abandoned.
A man like this, with such ideas. Shamefully!
Shamefully! I--I--haven't slept for the last ten
nights. . . .

"His voice lost itself in the calm of the evening. The
long shadows of the forest had slipped down hill while
we talked, had gone far beyond the ruined hovel, be-
yond the symbolic row of stakes. All this was in the
gloom, while we down there were yet in the sunshine,
and the stretch of the river abreast of the clearing
glittered in a still and dazzling splendor, with a murky
and over-shadowed bend above and below. Not a living
soul was seen on the shore. The bushes did not rustle.

"Suddenly round the corner of the house a group of
men appeared, as though they had come up from the
ground. They waded waist-deep in the grass, in a
compact body, bearing an improvised stretcher in their
midst. Instantly, in the emptiness of the landscape, a
cry arose whose shrillness pierced the still air like a sharp
arrow flying straight to the very heart of the land; and,
as if by enchantment, streams of human beings--of
naked human beings--with spears in their hands, with
bows, with shields, with wild glances and savage movements, were poured into the clearing by the dark-faced and pensive forest. The bushes shook, the grass swayed for a time, and then everything stood still in attentive immobility.

"Now, if he does not say the right thing to them we are all done for," said the Russian at my elbow. The knot of men with the stretcher had stopped too, half-way to the steamer, as if petrified. I saw the man on the stretcher sit up, lank and with an uplifted arm, above the shoulders of the bearers. 'Let us hope that the man who can talk so well of love in general will find some particular reason to spare us this time,' I said. I resented bitterly the absurd danger of our situation, as if to be at the mercy of that atrocious phantom had been a dishonoring necessity. I could not hear a sound, but through my glasses I saw the thin arm extended commandingly, the lower jaw moving, the eyes of that apparition shining darkly far in its bony head that nodded with grotesque jerks. Kurtz--Kurtz--that means short in German--don't it? Well, the name was as true as everything else in his life--and death. He looked at least seven feet long. His covering had fallen off, and his body emerged from it pitiful and appalling as from a winding-sheet. I could see the cage of his ribs all astir, the bones of his arm waving. It was as
though an animated image of death carved out of old ivory had been shaking its hand with menaces at a motionless crowd of men made of dark and glittering bronze. I saw him open his mouth wide—it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him. A deep voice reached me faintly. He must have been shouting. He fell back suddenly. The stretcher shook as the bearers staggered forward again, and almost at the same time I noticed that the crowd of savages was vanishing without any perceptible movement of retreat, as if the forest that had ejected these beings so suddenly had drawn them in again as the breath is drawn in a long aspiration.

"Some of the pilgrims behind the stretcher carried his arms—two shot-guns, a heavy rifle, and a light revolver-carbine—the thunderbolts of that pitiful Jupiter. The manager bent over him murmuring as he walked beside his head. They laid him down in one of the little cabins—just a room for a bed-place and a camp-stool or two, you know. We had brought his belated correspondence, and a lot of torn envelopes and open letters littered his bed. His hand roamed feebly amongst these papers. I was struck by the fire of his eyes and the composed languor of his expression. It was not so much the exhaustion of disease. He did not seem in pain. This
shadow looked satiated and calm, as though for the moment it had had its fill of all the emotions.

"He rustled one of the letters, and looking straight in my face said, 'I am glad.' Somebody had been writing to him about me. These special recommendations were turning up again. The volume of tone he emitted without effort, almost without the trouble of moving his lips, amazed me. A voice! a voice! It was grave, profound, vibrating, while the man did not seem capable of a whisper. However, he had enough strength in him--factitious no doubt--to very nearly make an end of us, as you shall hear directly.

"The manager appeared silently in the doorway; I stepped out at once and he drew the curtain after me. The Russian, eyed curiously by the pilgrims, was staring at the shore. I followed the direction of his glance.

"Dark human shapes could be made out in the distance, flitting indistinctly against the gloomy border of the forest, and near the river two bronze figures, leaning on tall spears, stood in the sunlight under fantastic head-dresses of spotted skins, warlike and still in statuesque repose. And from right to left along the lighted shore moved a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman.
"She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the earth proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high; her hair was done in the shape of a helmet; she had brass leggings to the knee, brass wire gauntlets to the elbow, a crimson spot on her tawny cheek, innumerable necklaces of glass beads on her neck; bizarre things, charms, gifts of witch-men, that hung about her, glittered and trembled at every step. She must have had the value of several elephant tusks upon her. She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress. And in the hush that had fallen suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land, the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul.

"She came abreast of the steamer, stood still, and faced us. Her long shadow fell to the water's edge. Her face had a tragic and fierce aspect of wild sorrow and of dumb pain mingled with the fear of some struggling, half-shaped resolve. She stood looking at us without a stir and like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose. A whole minute passed,
and then she made a step forward. There was a low jingle, a glint of yellow metal, a sway of fringed draperies, and she stopped as if her heart had failed her. The young fellow by my side growled. The pilgrims murmured at my back. She looked at us all as if her life had depended upon the unswerving steadiness of her glance. Suddenly she opened her bared arms and threw them up rigid above her head, as though in an uncontrollable desire to touch the sky, and at the same time the swift shadows darted out on the earth, swept around on the river, gathering the steamer into a shadowy embrace. A formidable silence hung over the scene.

"She turned away slowly, walked on, following the bank, and passed into the bushes to the left. Once only her eyes gleamed back at us in the dusk of the thickets before she disappeared.

"'If she had offered to come aboard I really think I would have tried to shoot her,' said the man of patches, nervously. 'I had been risking my life every day for the last fortnight to keep her out of the house. She got in one day and kicked up a row about those miserable rags I picked up in the storeroom to mend my clothes with. I wasn't decent. At least it must have been that, for she talked like a fury to Kurtz for an hour, pointing at me now and then. I don't understand the dia-
lect of this tribe. Luckily for me, I fancy Kurtz felt too ill that day to care, or there would have been mischief. I don't understand... No--it's too much for me. Ah, well, it's all over now.'

"At this moment I heard Kurtz’s deep voice behind the curtain, 'Save me!--save the ivory, you mean. Don't tell me. Save ME! Why, I've had to save you. You are interrupting my plans now. Sick! Sick! Not so sick as you would like to believe. Never mind. I'll carry my ideas out yet--I will return. I'll show you what can be done. You with your little peddling notions--you are interfering with me. I will return. I...'

"The manager came out. He did me the honor to take me under the arm and lead me aside. 'He is very low, very low,' he said. He considered it necessary to sigh, but neglected to be consistently sorrowful. 'We have done all we could for him--haven't we? But there is no disguising the fact, Mr. Kurtz has done more harm than good to the Company. He did not see the time was not ripe for vigorous action. Cautiously, cautiously--that's my principle. We must be cautious yet. The district is closed to us for a time. Deplorable! Upon the whole, the trade will suffer. I don't deny there is a remarkable quantity of ivory--mostly fossil. We must
save it, at all events— but look how precarious the position is—and why? Because the method is unsound.'

'Do you,' said I, looking at the shore, 'call it "unsound method"?' 'Without doubt,' he exclaimed, hotly.

'Don't you?' . . . 'No method at all,' I murmured after a while. 'Exactly,' he exulted. 'I anticipated this. Shows a complete want of judgment. It is my duty to point it out in the proper quarter.' 'Oh,' said I, 'that fellow—what's his name?—the brickmaker, will make a readable report for you.' He appeared confounded for a moment. It seemed to me I had never breathed an atmosphere so vile, and I turned mentally to Kurtz for relief—positively for relief. 'Nevertheless I think Mr. Kurtz is a remarkable man,' I said with emphasis. He started, dropped on me a cold heavy glance, said very quietly, 'He WAS,' and turned his back on me. My hour of favor was over; I found myself lumped along with Kurtz as a partisan of methods for which the time was not ripe: I was unsound! Ah! but it was something to have at least a choice of nightmares.

"I had turned to the wilderness really, not to Mr. Kurtz, who, I was ready to admit, was as good as buried.

And for a moment it seemed to me as if I also were buried in a vast grave full of unspeakable secrets. I felt an intolerable weight oppressing my breast, the smell of the damp earth, the unseen presence of victorious
corruption, the darkness of an impenetrable night. . . .
The Russian tapped me on the shoulder. I heard him mumbling and stammering something about 'brother seaman--couldn't conceal--knowledge of matters that would affect Mr. Kurtz's reputation.' I waited. For him evidently Mr. Kurtz was not in his grave; I suspect that for him Mr. Kurtz was one of the immortals.
'Well!' said I at last, 'speak out. As it happens, I am Mr. Kurtz's friend--in a way.'

"He stated with a good deal of formality that had we not been 'of the same profession,' he would have kept the matter to himself without regard to consequences. 'He suspected there was an active ill-will towards him on the part of these white men that--'

'You are right,' I said, remembering a certain conversation I had overheard. 'The manager thinks you ought to be hanged.' He showed a concern at this intelligence which amused me at first. 'I had better get out of the way quietly,' he said, earnestly. 'I can do no more for Kurtz now, and they would soon find some excuse. What's to stop them? There's a military post three hundred miles from here.' 'Well, upon my word,' said I, 'perhaps you had better go if you have any friends amongst the savages near by.' 'Plenty,' he said. 'They are simple people--and I want nothing, you know.'

He stood biting his lips, then: 'I don't want any harm to
happen to these whites here, but of course I was thinking of Mr. Kurtz's reputation--but you are a brother seaman and--' 'All right,' said I, after a time. 'Mr. Kurtz's reputation is safe with me.' I did not know how truly I spoke.

"He informed me, lowering his voice, that it was Kurtz who had ordered the attack to be made on the steamer. 'He hated sometimes the idea of being taken away--and then again. . . . But I don't understand these matters. I am a simple man. He thought it would scare you away--that you would give it up, thinking him dead. I could not stop him. Oh, I had an awful time of it this last month.' 'Very well,' I said. 'He is all right now.' 'Ye-e-es,' he muttered, not very convinced apparently. 'Thanks,' said I; 'I shall keep my eyes open.' 'But quiet--eh?' he urged, anxiously. 'It would be awful for his reputation if anybody here--'

I promised a complete discretion with great gravity. 'I have a canoe and three black fellows waiting not very far. I am off. Could you give me a few Martini-Henry cartridges?' I could, and did, with proper secrecy. He helped himself, with a wink at me, to a handful of my tobacco. 'Between sailors--you know--good English tobacco.' At the door of the pilot-house he turned round --'I say, haven't you a pair of shoes you could spare?' He raised one leg. 'Look.' The soles were tied with
knotted strings sandal-wise under his bare feet. I rooted out an old pair, at which he looked with admiration before tucking it under his left arm. One of his pockets (bright red) was bulging with cartridges, from the other (dark blue) peeped 'Towson's Inquiry,' &c., &c. He seemed to think himself excellently well equipped for a renewed encounter with the wilderness. 'Ah! I'll never, never meet such a man again. You ought to have heard him recite poetry--his own too it was, he told me. Poetry!' He rolled his eyes at the recollection of these delights. 'Oh, he enlarged my mind!' 'Good-by,' said I. He shook hands and vanished in the night. Sometimes I ask myself whether I had ever really seen him--whether it was possible to meet such a phenomenon! . . .

"When I woke up shortly after midnight his warning came to my mind with its hint of danger that seemed, in the starred darkness, real enough to make me get up for the purpose of having a look round. On the hill a big fire burned, illuminating fitfully a crooked corner of the station-house. One of the agents with a picket of a few of our blacks, armed for the purpose, was keeping guard over the ivory; but deep within the forest, red gleams that wavered, that seemed to sink and rise from the ground amongst confused columnar shapes of intense blackness, showed the exact position of the
camp where Mr. Kurtz's adorers were keeping their uneasy vigil. The monotonous beating of a big drum filled the air with muffled shocks and a lingering vibration. A steady droning sound of many men chanting each to himself some weird incantation came out from the black, flat wall of the woods as the humming of bees comes out of a hive, and had a strange narcotic effect upon my half-awake senses. I believe I dozed off leaning over the rail, till an abrupt burst of yells, an overwhelming outbreak of a pent-up and mysterious frenzy, woke me up in a bewildered wonder. It was cut short all at once, and the low droning went on with an effect of audible and soothing silence. I glanced casually into the little cabin. A light was burning within, but Mr. Kurtz was not there.

"I think I would have raised an outcry if I had believed my eyes. But I didn't believe them at first—the thing seemed so impossible. The fact is I was completely unnerved by a sheer blank fright, pure abstract terror, unconnected with any distinct shape of physical danger. What made this emotion so overpowering was—how shall I define it?—the moral shock I received, as if something altogether monstrous, intolerable to thought and odious to the soul, had been thrust upon me unexpectedly. This lasted of course the merest fraction of a second, and then the usual sense of commonplace, deadly danger, the
possibility of a sudden onslaught and massacre, or some-
thing of the kind, which I saw impending, was positively
welcome and composing. It pacified me, in fact, so
much, that I did not raise an alarm.

"There was an agent buttoned up inside an ulster
and sleeping on a chair on deck within three feet of
e. The yells had not awakened him; he snored very
slightly; I left him to his slumbers and leaped ashore.
I did not betray Mr. Kurtz--it was ordered I should
never betray him--it was written I should be loyal to
the nightmare of my choice. I was anxious to deal
with this shadow by myself alone,--and to this day I
don't know why I was so jealous of sharing with any-
one the peculiar blackness of that experience.

"As soon as I got on the bank I saw a trail--a broad
trail through the grass. I remember the exultation with
which I said to myself, 'He can't walk--he is crawling
on all-fours--I've got him.' The grass was wet with
dew. I strode rapidly with clenched fists. I fancy I
had some vague notion of falling upon him and giving
him a drubbing. I don't know. I had some imbecile
thoughts. The knitting old woman with the cat ob-
truded herself upon my memory as a most improper
person to be sitting at the other end of such an affair.
I saw a row of pilgrims squirting lead in the air out
of Winchesters held to the hip. I thought I would
never get back to the steamer, and imagined myself
living alone and unarmed in the woods to an advanced
age. Such silly things--you know. And I remember
I confounded the beat of the drum with the beating of
my heart, and was pleased at its calm regularity.

"I kept to the track though--then stopped to listen.
The night was very clear: a dark blue space, sparkling
with dew and starlight, in which black things stood
very still. I thought I could see a kind of motion ahead
of me. I was strangely cocksure of everything that
night. I actually left the track and ran in a wide semi-
circle (I verily believe chuckling to myself) so as to
get in front of that stir, of that motion I had seen--
if indeed I had seen anything. I was circumventing
Kurtz as though it had been a boyish game.

"I came upon him, and, if he had not heard me coming,
I would have fallen over him too, but he got up in
time. He rose, unsteady, long, pale, indistinct, like a
vapor exhaled by the earth, and swayed slightly, misty
and silent before me; while at my back the fires loomed
between the trees, and the murmur of many voices issued
from the forest. I had cut him off cleverly; but when
actually confronting him I seemed to come to my senses,
I saw the danger in its right proportion. It was by
no means over yet. Suppose he began to shout? Though he could hardly stand, there was still plenty of vigor in his voice. 'Go away--hide yourself,' he said, in that profound tone. It was very awful. I glanced back.

We were within thirty yards from the nearest fire. A black figure stood up, strode on long black legs, waving long black arms, across the glow. It had horns--ante-lope horns, I think--on its head. Some sorcerer, some witch-man, no doubt: it looked fiend-like enough. ‘Do you know what you are doing?’ I whispered. ‘Perfectly,’ he answered, raising his voice for that single word: it sounded to me far off and yet loud, like a hail through a speaking-trumpet. If he makes a row we are lost, I thought to myself. This clearly was not a case for fisticuffs, even apart from the very natural aversion I had to beat that Shadow--this wandering and tormented thing. ‘You will be lost,’ I said--‘utterly lost.’ One gets sometimes such a flash of inspiration, you know. I did say the right thing, though indeed he could not have been more irretrievably lost than he was at this very moment, when the foundations of our intimacy were being laid--to endure--to endure--even to the end--even beyond.

"'I had immense plans,' he muttered irresolutely. ‘Yes,’ said I; ‘but if you try to shout I'll smash your head with--' there was not a stick or a stone near. 'I
will throttle you for good,' I corrected myself. 'I was
on the threshold of great things,' he pleaded, in a voice
of longing, with a wistfulness of tone that made my
blood run cold. 'And now for this stupid scoundrel--'

'Your success in Europe is assured in any case,' I af-
affirmed, steadily. I did not want to have the throttling
of him, you understand--and indeed it would have been
very little use for any practical purpose. I tried to
break the spell--the heavy, mute spell of the wilder-
ness--that seemed to draw him to its pitiless breast by
the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the
memory of gratified and monstrous passions. This alone,
I was convinced, had driven him out to the edge of the
forest, to the bush, towards the gleam of fires, the throb
of drums, the drone of weird incantations; this alone
had beguiled his unlawful soul beyond the bounds of
permitted aspirations. And, don't you see, the terror
of the position was not in being knocked on the head
--though I had a very lively sense of that danger too
--but in this, that I had to deal with a being to whom
I could not appeal in the name of anything high or low.
I had, even like the niggers, to invoke him--himself--
his own exalted and incredible degradation. There was
nothing either above or below him, and I knew it. He
had kicked himself loose of the earth. Confound the
man! he had kicked the very earth to pieces. He was
alone, and I before him did not know whether I stood
on the ground or floated in the air. I've been telling
you what we said--repeating the phrases we pronounced,
--but what's the good? They were common everyday
words.--the familiar, vague sounds exchanged on every
waking day of life. But what of that? They had be-
hind them, to my mind, the terrific suggestiveness of
words heard in dreams, of phrases spoken in night-
mares. Soul! If anybody had ever struggled with a
soul, I am the man. And I wasn't arguing with a luna-
tic either. Believe me or not, his intelligence was per-
fectly clear--concentrated, it is true, upon himself with
horrible intensity, yet clear; and therein was my only
chance--barring, of course, the killing him there and
then, which wasn't so good, on account of unavoidable
noise. But his soul was mad. Being alone in the wilder-
ness, it had looked within itself, and, by heavens! I tell
you, it had gone mad. I had--for my sins, I suppose--
to go through the ordeal of looking into it myself. No
elocuence could have been so withering to one's belief
in mankind as his final burst of sincerity. He struggled
with himself, too. I saw it.--I heard it. I saw the in-
conceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no
faith, and no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself. I
kept my head pretty well; but when I had him at last
stretched on the couch, I wiped my forehead, while my
legs shook under me as though I had carried half a
ton on my back down that hill. And yet I had only
supported him, his bony arm clasped round my neck
--and he was not much heavier than a child.
"When next day we left at noon, the crowd, of whose presence behind the curtain of trees I had been acutely conscious all the time, flowed out of the woods again, filled the clearing, covered the slope with a mass of naked, breathing, quivering, bronze bodies. I steamed up a bit, then swung down-stream, and two thousand eyes followed the evolutions of the splashing, thumping, fierce river-demon beating the water with its terrible tail and breathing black smoke into the air. In front of the first rank, along the river, three men, plastered with bright red earth from head to foot, strutted to and fro restlessly. When we came abreast again, they faced the river, stamped their feet, nodded their horned heads, swayed their scarlet bodies; they shook towards the fierce river-demon a bunch of black feathers, a mangy skin with a pendent tail--something that looked like a dried gourd; they shouted periodically together strings of amazing words that resembled no sounds of human language; and the deep murmurs of the crowd, interrupted suddenly, were like the response of some satanic litany.

"We had carried Kurtz into the pilot-house: there was more air there. Lying on the couch, he stared through the open shutter. There was an eddy in the mass of human bodies, and the woman with helmeted head and
tawny cheeks rushed out to the very brink of the stream.
She put out her hands, shouted something, and all that
ewild mob took up the shout in a roaring chorus of
articulated, rapid, breathless utterance.

"'Do you understand this?' I asked.

"He kept on looking out past me with fiery, longing
eyes, with a mingled expression of wistfulness and hate.
He made no answer, but I saw a smile, a smile of indefinable meaning, appear on his colorless lips that a moment after twitched convulsively. 'Do I not?' he said slowly, gasping, as if the words had been torn out of him by a supernatural power.

"I pulled the string of the whistle, and I did this
because I saw the pilgrims on deck getting out their
rifles with an air of anticipating a jolly lark. At the
sudden screech there was a movement of abject terror
through that wedged mass of bodies. 'Don't! don't!
you frighten them away,' cried someone on deck disconsolately. I pulled the string time after time. They broke and ran, they leaped, they crouched, they swerved,
they dodged the flying terror of the sound. The three red chaps had fallen flat, face down on the shore, as though they had been shot dead. Only the barbarous
and superb woman did not so much as flinch, and
stretched tragically her bare arms after us over the
somber and glittering river.

"And then that imbecile crowd down on the deck
started their little fun, and I could see nothing more
for smoke.

"The brown current ran swiftly out of the heart of
darkness, bearing us down towards the sea with twice
the speed of our upward progress; and Kurtz's life was
running swiftly too, ebbing, ebbing out of his heart
into the sea of inexorable time. The manager was very
placid, he had no vital anxieties now, he took us both
in with a comprehensive and satisfied glance: the 'affair'
had come off as well as could be wished. I saw the time
approaching when I would be left alone of the party of
'unsound method.' The pilgrims looked upon me with
disfavor. I was, so to speak, numbered with the dead.
It is strange how I accepted this unforeseen partner-
ship, this choice of nightmares forced upon me in the
tenebrous land invaded by these mean and greedy phan-
toms.

"Kurtz discoursed. A voice! a voice! It rang deep
to the very last. It survived his strength to hide in
the magnificent folds of eloquence the barren darkness
of his heart. Oh, he struggled! he struggled! The
wastes of his weary brain were haunted by shadowy
images now--images of wealth and fame revolving
obsequiously round his unextinguishable gift of noble
and lofty expression. My Intended, my station, my
career, my ideas--these were the subjects for the occa-
sional utterances of elevated sentiments. The shade of
the original Kurtz frequented the bedside of the hollow
sham, whose fate it was to be buried presently in the
mold of primeval earth. But both the diabolic love and
the unearthly hate of the mysteries it had penetrated
fought for the possession of that soul satiated with
primitive emotions, avid of lying fame, of sham dis-
tinction, of all the appearances of success and power.

"Sometimes he was contemptibly childish. He desired
to have kings meet him at railway-stations on his return
from some ghastly Nowhere, where he intended to ac-
complish great things. 'You show them you have in
you something that is really profitable, and then there
will be no limits to the recognition of your ability,' he
would say. 'Of course you must take care of the mo-
tives--right motives--always.' The long reaches that
were like one and the same reach, monotonous bends that
were exactly alike, slipped past the steamer with their
multitude of secular trees looking patiently after this
grimy fragment of another world, the forerunner of
change, of conquest, of trade, of massacres, of blessings.

I looked ahead--piloting. 'Close the shutter,' said
Kurtz suddenly one day; 'I can't bear to look at this.'
I did so. There was a silence. 'Oh, but I will wring
your heart yet!' he cried at the invisible wilderness.

"We broke down--as I had expected--and had to lie
up for repairs at the head of an island. This delay
was the first thing that shook Kurtz's confidence. One
morning he gave me a packet of papers and a photo-
graph,--the lot tied together with a shoe-string. 'Keep
this for me,' he said. 'This noxious fool' (meaning
the manager) 'is capable of prying into my boxes when
I am not looking.' In the afternoon I saw him. He
was lying on his back with closed eyes, and I withdrew
quietly, but I heard him mutter, 'Live rightly, die,
die . . .' I listened. There was nothing more. Was
he rehearsing some speech in his sleep, or was it a frag-
ment of a phrase from some newspaper article? He had
been writing for the papers and meant to do so again,
'for the furthering of my ideas. It's a duty.'

"His was an impenetrable darkness. I looked at him
as you peer down at a man who is lying at the bottom
of a precipice where the sun never shines. But I had
not much time to give him, because I was helping the
engine-driver to take to pieces the leaky cylinders, to straighten a bent connecting-rod, and in other such matters. I lived in an infernal mess of rust, filings, nuts, bolts, spanners, hammers, ratchet-drills--things I abominate, because I don't get on with them. I tended the little forge we fortunately had aboard; I toiled wearily in a wretched scrap-heap--unless I had the shakes too bad to stand.

"One evening coming in with a candle I was startled to hear him say a little tremulously, 'I am lying here in the dark waiting for death.' The light was within a foot of his eyes. I forced myself to murmur, 'Oh, nonsense!' and stood over him as if transfixed.

"Anything approaching the change that came over his features I have never seen before, and hope never to see again. Oh, I wasn't touched. I was fascinated. It was as though a veil had been rent. I saw on that ivory face the expression of somber pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror--of an intense and hopeless despair. Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision,--he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath--
"The horror! The horror!"

"I blew the candle out and left the cabin. The pilgrims were dining in the mess-room, and I took my place opposite the manager, who lifted his eyes to give me a questioning glance, which I successfully ignored. He leaned back, serene, with that peculiar smile of his sealing the unexpressed depths of his meanness. A continuous shower of small flies streamed upon the lamp, upon the cloth, upon our hands and faces. Suddenly the manager's boy put his insolent black head in the doorway, and said in a tone of scathing contempt--

"Mistah Kurtz--he dead."

"All the pilgrims rushed out to see. I remained, and went on with my dinner. I believe I was considered brutally callous. However, I did not eat much. There was a lamp in there--light, don't you know--and outside it was so beastly, beastly dark. I went no more near the remarkable man who had pronounced a judgment upon the adventures of his soul on this earth. The voice was gone. What else had been there? But I am of course aware that next day the pilgrims buried something in a muddy hole."
"And then they very nearly buried me.

"However, as you see, I did not go to join Kurtz there and then. I did not. I remained to dream the nightmare out to the end, and to show my loyalty to Kurtz once more. Destiny. My destiny! Droll thing life is—that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose. The most you can hope from it is some knowledge of yourself—that comes too late—a crop of unextinguishable regrets. I have wrestled with death. It is the most unexciting contest you can imagine. It takes place in an impalpable grayness, with nothing underfoot, with nothing around, without spectators, without clamor, without glory, without the great desire of victory, without the great fear of defeat, in a sickly atmosphere of tepid skepticism, without much belief in your own right, and still less in that of your adversary. If such is the form of ultimate wisdom, then life is a greater riddle than some of us think it to be. I was within a hair's-breadth of the last opportunity for pronouncement, and I found with humiliation that probably I would have nothing to say. This is the reason why I affirm that Kurtz was a remarkable man. He had something to say. He said it. Since I had peeped over the edge myself, I understand better the meaning of his stare, that could not see the flame of the candle, but was
wide enough to embrace the whole universe, piercing
enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the dark-
ness. He had summed up—he had judged. 'The
horror!' He was a remarkable man. After all, this
was the expression of some sort of belief; it had candor,
it had conviction, it had a vibrating note of revolt in its
whisper, it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth
--the strange commingling of desire and hate. And it
is not my own extremity I remember best—a vision of
grayness without form filled with physical pain, and a
careless contempt for the evanescence of all things—even
of this pain itself. No! It is his extremity that I seem
to have lived through. True, he had made that last
stride, he had stepped over the edge, while I had been
permitted to draw back my hesitating foot. And per-
haps in this is the whole difference; perhaps all the wis-
dom, and all truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed
into that inappreciable moment of time in which we step
over the threshold of the invisible. Perhaps! I like to
think my summing-up would not have been a word of
careless contempt. Better his cry—much better. It was
an affirmation, a moral victory paid for by innumerable
defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfac-
tions. But it was a victory! That is why I have re-
mained loyal to Kurtz to the last, and even beyond,
when a long time after I heard once more, not his own
voice, but the echo of his magnificent eloquence thrown
to me from a soul as translucently pure as a cliff of
"No, they did not bury me, though there is a period of time which I remember mistily, with a shuddering wonder, like a passage through some inconceivable world that had no hope in it and no desire. I found myself back in the sepulchral city resenting the sight of people hurrying through the streets to filch a little money from each other, to devour their infamous cookery, to gulp their unwholesome beer, to dream their insignificant and silly dreams. They trespassed upon my thoughts. They were intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating pretense, because I felt so sure they could not possibly know the things I knew. Their bearing, which was simply the bearing of commonplace individuals going about their business in the assurance of perfect safety, was offensive to me like the outrageous flaunting of folly in the face of a danger it is unable to comprehend. I had no particular desire to enlighten them, but I had some difficulty in restraining myself from laughing in their faces, so full of stupid importance. I dare say I was not very well at that time. I tottered about the streets--there were various affairs to settle--grinning bitterly at perfectly respectable persons. I admit my behavior was inexcusable, but then my temperature was seldom normal in these days. My dear aunt's endeavors to 'nurse up my strength' seemed alto-
gether beside the mark. It was not my strength that
wanted nursing, it was my imagination that wanted
soothing. I kept the bundle of papers given me by
Kurtz, not knowing exactly what to do with it. His
mother had died lately, watched over, as I was told, by
his Intended. A clean-shaved man, with an official
manner and wearing gold-rimmed spectacles, called on
me one day and made inquiries, at first circuitous, after-
wards suavely pressing, about what he was pleased to
denominate certain 'documents.' I was not surprised,
because I had had two rows with the manager on the
subject out there. I had refused to give up the smallest
scrap out of that package, and I took the same attitude
with the spectacled man. He became darkly menacing
at last, and with much heat argued that the Company
had the right to every bit of information about its 'ter-
ritories.' And, said he, 'Mr. Kurtz's knowledge of
unexplored regions must have been necessarily extensive
and peculiar--owing to his great abilities and to the
deplorable circumstances in which he had been placed:
therefore'--I assured him Mr. Kurtz's knowledge,
however extensive, did not bear upon the problems of
commerce or administration. He invoked then the name
of science. 'It would be an incalculable loss if,' &c., &c.
I offered him the report on the 'Suppression of Savage
Customs,' with the postscriptum torn off. He took it
up eagerly, but ended by sniffing at it with an air of
contempt. 'This is not what we had a right to expect,'
he remarked. 'Expect nothing else,' I said. 'There are only private letters.' He withdrew upon some threat of legal proceedings, and I saw him no more; but another fellow, calling himself Kurtz's cousin, appeared two days later, and was anxious to hear all the details about his dear relative's last moments. Incidentally he gave me to understand that Kurtz had been essentially a great musician. 'There was the making of an immense success,' said the man, who was an organist, I believe, with lank gray hair flowing over a greasy coat-collar. I had no reason to doubt his statement; and to this day I am unable to say what was Kurtz's profession, whether he ever had any--which was the greatest of his talents. I had taken him for a painter who wrote for the papers, or else for a journalist who could paint--but even the cousin (who took snuff during the interview) could not tell me what he had been--exactly. He was a universal genius--on that point I agreed with the old chap, who thereupon blew his nose noisily into a large cotton handkerchief and withdrew in senile agitation, bearing off some family letters and memoranda without importance. Ultimately a journalist anxious to know something of the fate of his 'dear colleague' turned up. This visitor informed me Kurtz's proper sphere ought to have been politics 'on the popular side.' He had furry straight eyebrows, bristly hair cropped short, an eye-glass on a broad ribbon, and, becoming expansive, confessed his opinion that Kurtz really
couldn't write a bit—’but heavens! how that man could
talk! He electrified large meetings. He had faith--
don't you see?—he had the faith. He could get himself
to believe anything—anything. He would have been
a splendid leader of an extreme party.’ "What party?"
I asked. 'Any party,’ answered the other. 'He was
an--an--extremist.' Did I not think so? I assented.
Did I know, he asked, with a sudden flash of curiosity,
'what it was that had induced him to go out there?'
'Yes,’ said I, and forthwith handed him the famous
Report for publication, if he thought fit. He glanced
through it hurriedly, mumbling all the time, judged 'it
would do,' and took himself off with this plunder.

"Thus I was left at last with a slim packet of letters
and the girl's portrait. She struck me as beautiful--
I mean she had a beautiful expression. I know that the
sunlight can be made to lie too, yet one felt that no
manipulation of light and pose could have conveyed the
delicate shade of truthfulness upon those features. She
seemed ready to listen without mental reservation, witho-
out suspicion, without a thought for herself. I con-
cluded I would go and give her back her portrait and
those letters myself. Curiosity? Yes; and also some
other feeling perhaps. All that had been Kurtz's had
passed out of my hands: his soul, his body, his station,
his plans, his ivory, his career. There remained only
his memory and his Intended--and I wanted to give that 
up too to the past, in a way,--to surrender personally 
all that remained of him with me to that oblivion which 
is the last word of our common fate. I don't defend 
myself. I had no clear perception of what it was I 
really wanted. Perhaps it was an impulse of uncon-
scious loyalty, or the fulfillment of one of these ironic 
necessities that lurk in the facts of human existence. 
I don't know. I can't tell. But I went.

"I thought his memory was like the other memories 
of the dead that accumulate in every man's life,--a vague 
impress on the brain of shadows that had fallen on it 
in their swift and final passage; but before the high and 
ponderous door, between the tall houses of a street as 
still and decorous as a well-kept alley in a cemetery, I 
had a vision of him on the stretcher, opening his mouth 
voraciously, as if to devour all the earth with all its 
mankind. He lived then before me; he lived as much 
as he had ever lived--a shadow insatiable of splendid 
appearances, of frightful realities; a shadow darker than 
the shadow of the night, and draped nobly in the folds 
of a gorgeous eloquence. The vision seemed to enter 
the house with me--the stretcher, the phantom-bearers, 
the wild crowd of obedient worshipers, the gloom of the 
forests, the glitter of the reach between the murky bends, 
the beat of the drum, regular and muffled like the beat-
ing of a heart--the heart of a conquering darkness. It was a moment of triumph for the wilderness, an invading and vengeful rush which, it seemed to me, I would have to keep back alone for the salvation of another soul. And the memory of what I had heard him say afar there, with the horned shapes stirring at my back, in the glow of fires, within the patient woods, those broken phrases came back to me, were heard again in their ominous and terrifying simplicity. I remembered his abject pleading, his abject threats, the colossal scale of his vile desires, the meanness, the torment, the tempestuous anguish of his soul. And later on I seemed to see his collected languid manner, when he said one day, 'This lot of ivory now is really mine. The Company did not pay for it. I collected it myself at a very great personal risk. I am afraid they will try to claim it as theirs though. H'm. It is a difficult case. What do you think I ought to do--resist? Eh? I want no more than justice.' . . . He wanted no more than justice--no more than justice. I rang the bell before a mahogany door on the first floor, and while I waited he seemed to stare at me out of the glassy panel--stare with that wide and immense stare embracing, condemning, loathing all the universe. I seemed to hear the whispered cry, 'The horror! The horror!'

"The dusk was falling. I had to wait in a lofty draw-
ing-room with three long windows from floor to ceiling
that were like three luminous and bedraped columns.
The bent gilt legs and backs of the furniture shone in
indistinct curves. The tall marble fireplace had a cold
and monumental whiteness. A grand piano stood mas-
sively in a corner, with dark gleams on the flat sur-
faces like a somber and polished sarcophagus. A high
door opened--closed. I rose.

"She came forward, all in black, with a pale head,
floating towards me in the dusk. She was in mourning.
It was more than a year since his death, more than a
year since the news came; she seemed as though she
would remember and mourn for ever. She took both
my hands in hers and murmured, 'I had heard you
were coming.' I noticed she was not very young--I
mean not girlish. She had a mature capacity for fidelity,
for belief, for suffering. The room seemed to have
grown darker, as if all the sad light of the cloudy
evening had taken refuge on her forehead. This fair
hair, this pale visage, this pure brow, seemed surrounded
by an ashy halo from which the dark eyes looked out at
me. Their glance was guileless, profound, confident, and
trustful. She carried her sorrowful head as though she
were proud of that sorrow, as though she would say, I
--I alone know how to mourn for him as he deserves.
But while we were still shaking hands, such a look of
awful desolation came upon her face that I perceived she was one of those creatures that are not the playthings of Time. For her he had died only yesterday. And, by Jove! the impression was so powerful that for me too he seemed to have died only yesterday--nay, this very minute. I saw her and him in the same instant of time--his death and her sorrow--I saw her sorrow in the very moment of his death. Do you understand? I saw them together--I heard them together. She had said, with a deep catch of the breath, 'I have survived;' while my strained ears seemed to hear distinctly, mingled with her tone of despairing regret, the summing-up whisper of his eternal condemnation. I asked myself what I was doing there, with a sensation of panic in my heart as though I had blundered into a place of cruel and absurd mysteries not fit for a human being to behold.

She motioned me to a chair. We sat down. I laid the packet gently on the little table, and she put her hand over it. . . . 'You knew him well,' she murmured, after a moment of mourning silence.

"'Intimacy grows quick out there,' I said. 'I knew him as well as it is possible for one man to know another.'"

"'And you admired him,' she said. 'It was impossible to know him and not to admire him. Was it?'"
"'He was a remarkable man,' I said, unsteadily. Then
before the appealing fixity of her gaze, that seemed to
watch for more words on my lips, I went on, 'It was
impossible not to--'

"'Love him,' she finished eagerly, silencing me into
an appalled dumbness. 'How true! how true! But
when you think that no one knew him so well as I! I
had all his noble confidence. I knew him best.'

"'You knew him best,' I repeated. And perhaps she
did. But with every word spoken the room was growing
darker, and only her forehead, smooth and white, re-
mained illumined by the unextinguishable light of belief
and love.

"'You were his friend,' she went on. 'His friend,'
she repeated, a little louder. 'You must have been, if
he had given you this, and sent you to me. I feel I
can speak to you--and oh! I must speak. I want you
--you who have heard his last words--to know I have
been worthy of him. . . . It is not pride. . . . Yes!
I am proud to know I understood him better than any-
one on earth--he told me so himself. And since his
mother died I have had no one--no one--to--to--'
"I listened. The darkness deepened. I was not even sure whether he had given me the right bundle. I rather suspect he wanted me to take care of another batch of his papers which, after his death, I saw the manager examining under the lamp. And the girl talked, easing her pain in the certitude of my sympathy; she talked as thirsty men drink. I had heard that her engagement with Kurtz had been disapproved by her people. He wasn't rich enough or something. And indeed I don't know whether he had not been a pauper all his life. He had given me some reason to infer that it was his impatience of comparative poverty that drove him out there.

"... Who was not his friend who had heard him speak once?' she was saying. 'He drew men towards him by what was best in them.' She looked at me with intensity. 'It is the gift of the great,' she went on, and the sound of her low voice seemed to have the accompaniment of all the other sounds, full of mystery, desolation, and sorrow, I had ever heard--the ripple of the river, the soughing of the trees swayed by the wind, the murmurs of wild crowds, the faint ring of incomprehensible words cried from afar, the whisper of a voice speaking from beyond the threshold of an eternal darkness. 'But you have heard him! You know!' she
cried.

"...Yes, I know,' I said with something like despair in my heart, but bowing my head before the faith that was in her, before that great and saving illusion that shone with an unearthly glow in the darkness, in the triumphant darkness from which I could not have defended her--from which I could not even defend myself.

"What a loss to me--to us!'--she corrected herself with beautiful generosity; then added in a murmur, 'To the world.' By the last gleams of twilight I could see the glitter of her eyes, full of tears--of tears that would not fall.

"I have been very happy--very fortunate--very proud,' she went on. 'Too fortunate. Too happy for a little while. And now I am unhappy for--for life.'

"She stood up; her fair hair seemed to catch all the remaining light in a glimmer of gold. I rose too.

"'And of all this,' she went on, mournfully, 'of all his
promise, and of all his greatness, of his generous mind, of his noble heart, nothing remains--nothing but a memory. You and I--'

"We shall always remember him,' I said, hastily.

"No!' she cried. 'It is impossible that all this should be lost--that such a life should be sacrificed to leave nothing--but sorrow. You know what vast plans he had. I knew of them too--I could not perhaps understand,--but others knew of them. Something must remain. His words, at least, have not died.'

"His words will remain,' I said.

"'And his example,' she whispered to herself. 'Men looked up to him,--his goodness shone in every act. His example--'

"'True,' I said; 'his example too. Yes, his example. I forgot that.'

"'But I do not. I cannot--I cannot believe--not yet. I cannot believe that I shall never see him again, that nobody will see him again, never, never, never.'
"She put out her arms as if after a retreating figure, stretching them black and with clasped pale hands across the fading and narrow sheen of the window. Never see him! I saw him clearly enough then. I shall see this eloquent phantom as long as I live, and I shall see her too, a tragic and familiar Shade, resembling in this gesture another one, tragic also, and bedecked with powerless charms, stretching bare brown arms over the glitter of the infernal stream, the stream of darkness. She said suddenly very low, 'He died as he lived.'

"'His end,' said I, with dull anger stirring in me, 'was in every way worthy of his life.'

"'And I was not with him,' she murmured. My anger subsided before a feeling of infinite pity.

"'Everything that could be done--' I mumbled.

"'Ah, but I believed in him more than anyone on earth--more than his own mother, more than--himself. He needed me! Me! I would have treasured every sigh, every word, every sign, every glance.'
"I felt like a chill grip on my chest. 'Don't,' I said, in a muffled voice.

"Forgive me. I--I--have mourned so long in silence --in silence. . . . You were with him--to the last?
I think of his loneliness. Nobody near to understand him as I would have understood. Perhaps no one to hear. . . .'

"To the very end,' I said, shakily. 'I heard his very last words. . . .' I stopped in a fright.

"Repeat them,' she said in a heart-broken tone. 'I want--I want--something--something--to--to live with.'

"I was on the point of crying at her, 'Don't you hear them?' The dusk was repeating them in a persistent whisper all around us, in a whisper that seemed to swell menacingly like the first whisper of a rising wind. 'The horror! the horror!'

"His last word--to live with,' she murmured. 'Don't you understand I loved him--I loved him--I loved him!'
"I pulled myself together and spoke slowly.

"The last word he pronounced was--your name."

"I heard a light sigh, and then my heart stood still,
stopped dead short by an exulting and terrible cry, by
the cry of inconceivable triumph and of unspeakable
pain. 'I knew it--I was sure!' . . . She knew. She
was sure. I heard her weeping; she had hidden her
face in her hands. It seemed to me that the house would
collapse before I could escape, that the heavens would
fall upon my head. But nothing happened. The
heavens do not fall for such a trifle. Would they have
fallen, I wonder, if I had rendered Kurtz that justice
which was his due? Hadn't he said he wanted only jus-
tice? But I couldn't. I could not tell her. It would
have been too dark--too dark altogether. . . ."

Marlow ceased, and sat apart, indistinct and silent, in
the pose of a meditating Buddha. Nobody moved for a
time. "We have lost the first of the ebb," said the Di-
rector, suddenly. I raised my head. The offing was
barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil water-
way leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed
somber under an overcast sky--seemed to lead into the
heart of an immense darkness.