

VISION

By W. DOUGLAS NEWTON

Illustrated by Charles Crombie



HE liner towered above the quay-side like the great curtain-wall of a fortress. She was a brave ship, painted black and red and white, and her two huge funnels were buff. About her was the quickening music of hissing steam. Men went into her and came out of her, moving quickly up and down the gang-planks. Derrick-arms, swinging as if by magic, sent bales dropping like giant spiders, swiftly and without noise, into the huge depth of her holds. From her side sprang eternally gushing jets of water, and about her was the heady smell of the sea, the salt tang and engine oil, the faint reek of tar and the clinging odour of iron.

Xavier Bermingham looked up at the ship and felt how small he was. He felt, too, that passionate tug at the heart that comes when great ships lie near and the wide sea calls from the offing. But, more than any of these things, the memory of his dream came to him and stirred him so poignantly that he felt he must cry out.

The shipping clerk at his elbow grinned, and said with a proprietorial accent—

"Fine boat, eh? She's our crack."

"She's wonderful," said Xavier—"wonderful!" Somehow her wonder was mixed with the wonder of his dream, and he was wrung with pain and pleasure in a way altogether disturbing.

"She's bound for the Plate," said the clerk. "Lisbon, y'know, Canaries, Rio, Monte Video, and then Buenos Aires. Rattling good trip."

"Splendid trip," breathed Xavier. His scraggy figure was quivering. Why was it that the name "Rio" made his blood take fire? Was Rio in the dream? There were no names in the dream, but somehow

Rio played with the vibrating strings of the heart as a bow plays upon the gut of a violin.

"Come along," jerked the clerk. "We'll go over her. You *must* see her palm lounge. It's the best thing of its kind." The master-at-arms nodded and let them by as they reached the gang-plank. Xavier mounted it. The smell of the sea and of ships caught him as he came to the deck. The wonderful glamour of his dream seemed to be of that smell, and to be pouring in upon him and overwhelming his senses. The ship was calling to him, and the sea. His dream seemed to clamour: "I am here. I am here. This is the way to me. Come! Come!" Xavier trembled with the passionate appeal of this urgent voice. The shipping clerk was speaking—

"Funny thing, but I can go on her if I like. Fact—they want me to go. The ship's clerk was taken ill this morning, and they're rushing about like billy-o, looking for another."

"Oh!" said Xavier, in his deep voice. "Oh!" And his dark Spanish-looking eyes said: "What luck—what splendid luck!" The shipping clerk made a tiny grimace answering that look.

"They don't take wives," he said, "and I'm married. I'd like to go, but I can't leave home. It's rough luck, but there it is. They're wild about it. Y'see, it ain't easy to get a chap at short notice." He stopped Xavier at a door. "This is where I'd pig." They looked into the cramped but cosy cabin. "Rather comfy, eh?"

Xavier looked in. The workmanlike compactness of the cabin made him shiver with desire. How it pulled him, that cabin! And how his dream rose up about him like an enrapturing and enervating perfume, weakening resistance, bidding him "Come! Come!" Already he had forgotten the ledger desk he had won his way to through seven years of steady

grinding; already he had forgotten the City, his two rooms in Camberwell, and the girl who he fancied would marry him as soon as she became tired of music-halls and Cinderella dances and afternoons on the river or at Earl's Court. He remembered his dream only, and all the quick colours of it. His dream seemed to be shined in that little poky, cosy cabin. The shipping clerk was telling him how "soft" the job was, what an easy and gay time the possession of a wife prevented him having. Xavier heard, but heard it through the veils of glamour.

A round, thick man came stamping towards them along the passage-way. The gold braid on his coat told that he was an officer, the look of determined good humour on his face proclaimed that his rank was purser. As he drew level, he smiled like a man suddenly free of worry.

"Ah," he cried, "you've changed your mind, then, Fletcher? You are going to sail with us to-day, after all?"

The clerk shook his head.

"Sorry, Mr. Burke. I'm not. I wish I could."

The purser frowned. He turned from the clerk and fixed on Xavier a glance both questioning and appraising.

"You've brought this young man along, instead," he said startlingly. "That's top-hole." He spoke to Xavier, his eyes genial after his survey. "I say, we're in an awful mess—terribly behind, ye know. Could you—"

Xavier heard the shipping clerk gasp at the purser's mistake; something within himself seemed to gasp, too. But it was a weak, feeble something, swaddled in the veils of the enormously distant past of yesterday. It was not of him; it was behind him. All that he felt *now* was the glowing passion of his dream, the aching pull of the sea and of ships; and all he heard was that something calling him, calling him with a siren's voice from across the seas. As the purser spoke and looked at him with his jolly, questioning eyes, he moved one step forward, as though separating himself for ever from his old life, and a queer, firm voice issued from his lips—

"I'll get to work at once, sir," he said. And Fletcher gasped again.

"Oh, good man!" laughed the purser. "That's the style. It's a rush, though. What about gear?"

Fletcher, in amazement, was stammering: "I say—I say, old man——" Xavier's

eyes came round to Fletcher, beating down all explanation, all argument.

"Fletcher will see my landlady and get her to send along my gear," he said calmly.

"I say—I say, old——" stammered Fletcher. "A tin box and a Gladstone bag," insisted Xavier. "I'll give you some cash to square her."

Fletcher fell back a step. "You're really going, then?" he cried.

And Xavier Bermingham answered, with a fine note in his voice, a fine light in his eyes: "I'm really going." But he was saying to something in his heart, not "I'm going," but "I'm coming! I'm coming!" He said to the purser: "I'll be a bit green to begin; this is my first berth aboard ship. But I've worked my way up through the books of a big London firm from office-boy to ledger clerk. I'll soon get the hang of things."

"Oh, rather," said the purser, who was quite pleased. "It isn't at all hard. But I say, Fletcher, could you show him the ropes? Half an hour will do it. I'm so infernally rushed."

Fletcher showed Xavier the ropes. But he started by protesting and arguing when they were alone. What about the job in London? he wanted to know.

"I'm chucking it," said Xavier. "I've always hated it, and I'll chuck it. I'll write a letter."

Fletcher went on protesting. Even as he coached Xavier in ship's clerk work he protested.

"I can't understand it," he cried. "I don't like it, old man. It's madness chucking a good, certain job for this."

"I've always hated it," answered Xavier. "And I've got to go—I've got to go!" The rich emotion of his dream had kindled knowledge within him, and he knew that he was right.

"Mad!" cried Fletcher. "Mad!" He sought in his mind for explanations. "It's the mad Irish blood in you," he affirmed decisively.

"Perhaps," said Xavier. "Perhaps something deeper. There's Spanish blood in me, too—Armada blood. You can see that in my skin, in my eyes. A lot of Irishmen are like me, especially Irishmen who came from seaboard towns. My grandfather came to England from a seaboard town. Perhaps the South's pulling me."

"Hey?" cried Fletcher. He didn't understand at all.

"If there is Spanish blood in me,"

explained Xavier, speaking slowly, as though more desirous of piecing together the meaning of his dream than of convincing Fletcher—"if there's Spanish blood in me, then it is the blood of a seaman, a rover—one of the men of the Armada, you know. Perhaps that man sailed the South Seas, knew them, felt the pull of 'em. Perhaps that man did something there——" He glanced at the shipping clerk. Fletcher was gazing at him with the gaze of a man who was listening to the talk of an amiable lunatic. Fletcher's agnostic glance killed all thought of confession. No, he could not tell his dream to a man like that. He ended lamely: "It's just my idea of it. One has to explain how one gets a pull like this. Nothing in the idea, probably."

"It's idiotic," commented Fletcher. "The whole business is idiotic." He realised at last the utter futility of reasoning. "I'll get your gear," he said. "You've got the hang of this job now. I suppose the letter to your firm will be ready when I get back?" He went away with an air of injury.

That night the liner was working down the French coast in calm weather, and in his bunk Xavier was dreaming his dream.

It was the same dream, the old dream, and he knew every phase of it, but, for all that, it was new. It was more vivid, more real; its bright colours were more translucent, more quickening. It was not that there was anything fresh to see, only he seemed to see the old details better. It was as though he had come closer and could see them with a keener eye, a finer sense of appreciation.

It was ever the same dream. He could not recall when it had first come to him, though it must have been in infancy, probably when he was two or three. As he had dreamed then he had dreamed many times since, sometimes once or twice a month, sometimes only once in a year. There had been one period when he had dreamed it almost every night for six weeks. It was when he had left his school and stood on the lip of life, no longer a boy and not yet a man, a time when all the winds of romantic desire, of the need of a larger, braver existence blew through the chambers of his soul and fought with loathing the impending doom of a City clerkship. As he wrote letters in answer to advertisements, the dream enfolded him, filling him with longing, filling him with revolt. When he went to interview prospective masters, he used to hang over London Bridge, watching the shipping with

the glamour of his familiar vision glowing within him and wringing his soul with an intolerable yearning.

When he had obtained a situation, he still dreamed, but more and more rarely as he settled down in the groove of humdrum work. Rarer and rarer grew the vision, until it left him, as he thought, for ever, but actually only for two years. He had by now risen to a semi-responsible post, and was gaining some pleasure from his work and enough money to enjoy himself after his work was done. His dream seemed dead in those years, or, at least, obliterated by pleasure. But latterly—latterly the dream had returned.

Life had become stale, work had staled, his pleasures had staled. His parents had died, and he had moved into "diggings" and all their loneliness. His "girl" even had staled. She had been, after all, merely a means to alleviate the general staleness of existence. She had helped him for an hour or two to forget his forlorn state; she was but an accessory in his search for lost emotions. He had never loved her; she had merely attracted him. Indeed, in the last six months she had been slipping away, failing to hold him, as the rest of his everyday life was ceasing to hold him. In this atmosphere of bleakness his dream had come back to him, cheering him, warming him with its richness.

It was always the same dream, and it was a strange dream for a little London clerk to have. Xavier Bermingham, in spite of his unusual names—which had come out of Ireland with his grandfather—was not a romantic figure. He was small and rather scraggy; he was built in a style that tailors find impossible to ameliorate with clothes. Apart from his dark skin and the nervous brightness of his dark eyes, he was profoundly usual and commonplace. Yet his dream was unusual enough.

Xavier Bermingham went to bed a clerk, yet, when he woke to his dream, he was in a kingdom of vision utterly different to anything a clerk could know. Here in his dream he stood in a large open space, set, as in an amphitheatre, amid trees. The trees were enormous beyond his knowledge, and they rushed up with an extraordinary smoothness to an immense height before breaking out into a canopy of foliage. Some of this foliage was green, some of it copper, some but dingy brown, but much shone like the jewelled heads of giant hat-pins, with blooms vivid beyond everyday imagination,

of heliotrope and scarlet and cream and gold. The sky beyond and above the flowers was so bright that it looked like a glittering blue enamel surface into which this jewellery of blooms had been exquisitely set. There was over all a sunlight brighter and harder than he had ever seen outside the callous limelight noon of the stage.

And the trees were only accidents of setting. The marvel of the dream lay in the open space and what went forward in that space. In the centre of the clearing, looking flat, like a thing stamped from card, against the ramparts of the trees, was a small, shining building. Xavier had come to think of this building as a temple, and that, probably, was what it was. It was built in a thick, resolute style, suggestive of the many views he had seen of Egyptian temples. On its walls were numberless methodical arrangements of bitingly tinted paintings, flat men, flat horses, flat women, flat vases, and the rest, all done in the square and angular way of Egyptian hieroglyphics, only, like the temple itself, not quite Egyptian. The square door of the temple opened into a gloom so deep that it seemed backed by a solid wall of black plush.

On the steps of the building, and on the floor of the clearing before the steps, was a group of men, and these men enacted a drama both startling and ghastly.

At first, and it was always the same, there appeared to be some sort of quarrel going on between the men on the steps and the men before the steps. There were three men on the steps, and as they were dressed in loose robes coloured and stenciled in a vivid, barbaric manner, Xavier named them priests. These priests were barring the way of the five men before the steps, and they did so with every symptom of violent anger.

Xavier could more easily place the five men who strove to force their way into the temple. They were Europeans, and, from the look of them, Southerners, possibly Spaniards. From their dress and his knowledge of the illustrations of boyhood fiction, he dubbed them pirates—pirates such as sailed the Spanish Main in the days of old, but not quite pirates in the ordinary sense. They had not the authentic cut-throat air, they did not appear blackguards; their clothes were richer, more tasteful than the gaudy clothes of picture-book pirates, and the men had an air. He did not understand what that air was, but, all the same, he knew that these men were not men of coarse fibre. Somewhere in his boyhood he had met

with the phrase "gentleman adventurer"; from that day he had instinctively called these men "gentlemen adventurers."

These five men pressed forward up the steps, quite unmoved by the angry vehemence of the priests, and the priests became more angry and more violent. The quarrel became a scramble, and in a flash it leapt to action—swords were out.

This part of his dream was as unvarying as a cinematograph film. It began with a sword flaming in the sun like a band of white light, and one of the five jerking backwards, bumping down the steps, and then remaining still in an awful and angular heap. As once another of the men slipped and went swaying down the entire flight before he recovered balance; a patch of blood-drops gathered, shining like garnets, on this man's brow. The three others fired off their big and clumsy guns at once, and great billows of smoke blew about the little fight like the reek of Hades. One of the priests went on to his face with a desperate crash.

The two remaining priests fought like cats, and the adventurers now went at them with their rapiers. The priests held their ground, slipping under the straight thrusts of the long swords and hacking in a disconcerting way at the legs of their foemen, as though more anxious to maim than to kill. In this way two of the Europeans were wounded in the legs, though very quickly both priests were down on the pavement and dead.

The Europeans stood for a moment quiet after this, like men recovering grip of themselves. Then the one unwounded man, who seemed to be the leader, turned and spoke to the man with the cut brow, who seemed to be the guide of the party. When this man had spoken a few words, all walked into the temple, or, rather, the three did so. The man with the cut on his head remained outside, sitting and touching his wound with curious fingers, and gazing at the ground in a dazed way.

Xavier's dream was a little odd and disconnected now. There were times when he was able to follow the three men into the shadows of the temple—could be with them as they searched rooms and passage-ways, and broke open doors in a keen hunt for something which he knew to be infinitely precious, enormously valuable. In some dreams he had been with them when they made their find in the great dusky room that had many doorless cupboards cut in the thick walls. In these dreams he had seen, with the men, the raying glitter of fabulous things piled



"He started to his feet, looking up, and before him stood the man, leaning against the pedestal of the altar."

in the niche cupboards, heaped in an amazing prodigality on the floor, and he had watched the men packing gold ornaments and jewels into big hide wallets that looked like square hand-bags; he knew, too, with them, that each wallet so filled was worth an enormous fortune. But these dreams, and the dreams in which he saw the shadowy return to the sunlight, were inchoate, vague. Real sense of definition did not come until the sunlight was reached.

It was in the sunlight that events became abrupt, dramatic again. It was in the sunlight that the man with the cut on his head was found lying in a distorted heap, as though writhing in pain. But he felt no pain. He was as dead as the priests with whom he lay.

The dream went swiftly now, as though hurrying to a close. There came the astonished dismay of the three men, then the abrupt deaths of the two other wounded men, their weakening and their sprawling dissolution, the unnerving horror of the remaining adventurer, as he realised that what had been thought slight wounds were death-wounds, since the swords that had dealt them had been poisoned.

The dream hurried on like a river in spate. The next thing that Xavier saw was the burying of five of the wallets. The vision seemed to have leapt a space, in the way a magic lantern clicks and then presents a new picture. The survivor had recovered his nerve. He had seen that it would be impossible to get away with more than one wallet, and he had determined to hide the remaining wallets in a place where they would not be found, should worshippers come to the temple and find it plundered. Beyond the edge of the clearing, to the right of the temple, all but covered in the tropical mesh of vines, there was a carved animal god set on a thick square pedestal. Under that pedestal the five wallets—the five fortunes contained in those wallets—were buried. Xavier saw the act of burying with a clear and vivid perception, saw the luxuriant vines arranged to cover the turned earth.

It was here that the most startling moment of his dream occurred. It was now that the man stood upright and looked at *him*.

The man stood up and looked, not in his direction, but at him. The deep eyes held his eyes, the quick mind held his mind from out the kingdom of vision. So, with all the ages between, the two exchanged a glance—a deep glance, a significant glance,

a glance full of meaning and of purpose. And, held in that deep look, the dream always ended for him. Xavier woke.

But though he woke, the look even more than the dream remained with him, holding his attention, dragging at his soul. It was the look that called to him down the ages: "Come! Come!" It was the look he had answered when he had come.

And after the dream of his first night at sea, he woke with the deep meaning of that look richer in his heart, and it seemed to him that the look was not now urging him to come, but expecting him, waiting for him.

The liner made a good passage, his work was light, and in the swinging air of voyaging and in the quick sights he saw, his soul seemed to be expanding in a way he had not known for years—or was it centuries?

Was it centuries? As he stood on the fo'c'sle, heard and loved the bumping rush of the hearty seas beneath him, or as he stood watching the curd-white and china-blue of the ship's wake in the moonlight, he did not feel that all this was good, but that all this was as good as ever, that a fine emotion of old was being repeated in splendour to-day.

The dream deepened the further south he went, and an uncanny sense of knowledge seemed to grow in him. Vigo was like an old friend; in Lisbon's river he was startled at his familiarity with scenes and landmarks Xavier Bermingham could not have seen before. The Canaries filled him with the same sensation, and so did all the Brazilian coast from Pernambuco to Bahia. It was, however, when they made the mighty harbour of Rio that he seemed to reach the very crescendo of this emotion, for the sight of Rio harbour hurt him. He felt like a man coming home.

He deserted at Rio.

He never really knew whether he had meant to desert all along. He had never put it into thought, though, when the act was committed, he had the feeling that, after all, this was only part of his plan. And perhaps it was, in spite of his apparent lack of premeditation, for on landing he had brought all his money, together with a revolver and cartridges a good-humoured engineer had given him. Also he sat on a hill and watched unperturbed the liner go out to sea.

He sat on this hill and was perfectly calm. Although while in the crisply active streets of Rio itself, he had been visited by

sudden gusts of fear of what was to become of him, how he was to exist, what the end of all this madness would be, up on the hill and in the warm and fragrant southern breeze he felt none of these qualms. If he had thought, he may have realised the madness of the whole business from beginning to end. He did not think. He only felt. And he felt that it was all right, that it would be all right. The glow of his dream was in him, carrying him forward. He was serene where he should have trembled. Something bigger than himself seemed to have the ruling of his life, and now he did not care.

When the last plume of the liner's smoke melted out of view, he stood up on his hill. His nostrils lifted and sucked in the odorous air in ecstasy, and he looked long at the sea, as a man looks long at a dear friend when parting. Then he hung a little, turned and walked down the hill with unhesitant steps, going, a baggy, incongruous figure in incongruous clothes, not towards the town, but along an aloe-lined road leading away from the town. The road struck straight into the heart of Brazil. He did not set eyes on the sea again for eleven months.

It was madness, his journey, but he did not think of madness. He went forward light-heartedly to conquer a country bigger than Europe with a handful of silver and a cheap revolver. But he did not know what he was out to conquer, either. He went on calmly, with the rapt look of the dreamer of dreams in his eyes, a steadily impelling force in his heart. He did not hurry—there seemed no need for hurry, only a need to go on. So he went on, striking north by north-east, with an unruffled and leisurely step.

He spent some of his money at his first and second stops. On the third day a lonely priest with some English gave him board and bed throughout a couple of days for the pleasure of talk about the large world the priest had denied himself all liberty to see. The priest talked to him, gave him advice, listened. He was a gentle, delightful companion. He invited Xavier to stay many days, and Xavier was sorry he had to go.

"Iss eet a long travel you mak?" asked the priest. "Where you travel?"

Xavier looked out to the north-east and wondered where he was travelling, and he answered—

"I go on. I go straight on."

"The Matto Grosso country, si?" said the priest. "Eet iss a wilda land. You mus' tak' care, senhor. The seerpents are in the forests, and the ants. Eef a black ant bit you, eet iss feevlar, si." He looked kindly at the clerk. The dream look in Xavier's eyes had touched him. He was a dreamer of big dreams himself. "Iss eet diamonds?" he asked. "On the Matto Grosso Plateau there are diamonds."

Xavier's face was still turned to the north-east. Was it diamonds? he wondered. Diamonds ought to carry a thrill, but he was not thrilled. He said again—

"I go straight on—straight on."

The priest said no more—he was a dreamer of dreams, too—he helped. He gave Xavier clothes more suitable than his own for travelling in that intense climate, a broad hat of soft grass, a light shirt of strong canvas, a pair of leggings for the forests in which were "seerpents," a haversack with food and quinine in the haversack. He also told the clerk many things of value—how to get drink from the *sipor d'agua* (the water-vine) when there was no water about, the forest fruits that could be eaten, and what could not be eaten. Quietly he helped Xavier without asking for recompense. He dreamed large dreams himself—he understood.

Xavier went on. He went on for months. Sometimes he worked, sometimes he ate and slept in hospitable huts, sometimes he slept out on the plains or on a forest track. Once he shipped on a dug-out barge and helped to sail her on a big river that seemed to run for miles, only to desert quite abruptly at a little town the name of which he had never heard, the name of which, indeed, he never knew. He went on walking again, sometimes living desperately, sometimes living comfortably, but going on, always going on.

He had gone beyond any reaction now, or any sense of fear. He went into wild places, where tracks ran through the morning-black gloom of forests, where the forests themselves were creeping with malignant beasts he could hear, and the more malignant beasts it was impossible to hear. He went through these forests steadily, almost miraculously. The forests were death-traps to expert woodmen sometimes, labyrinths whose swift, green growth they never really knew from month to month. Yet Xavier never went astray, he was never lost in the labyrinth. The glamour of the dream that called him also guided him. He went onward, doing things

that most experienced men could not do and live. His clothes went to rags, and he was given other clothes. His hat—many hats—were thrashed to ribbons by vines. Men looked into his gentle, dreamy eyes and gave him fresh hats. He expended all his cartridges on game; a large-sized Englishman filled his pouch again as thankoffering for a day's talk about Camberwell. He got a big vine-cutting *tassado* from somewhere, he never quite knew where.

His dream was with him every night now, more vivid, more rich, more real. He could see it and understand it better. The trees of the forest were the trees of his dream; the flowers, the meshing vines, the perfect sky, the callous sunlight of Brazil, were in and of his dream. He was in the country of his vision. He was marching through the country of his vision to the place of his vision. He no longer questioned his dream; he merely felt the pull of it and obeyed. In the middle of the fifth month he came upon an Englishman and upon something that seemed to him a message. The Englishman was there to extract immediate rubber dividends out of an estate that had only just been planted. He was hospitable, as most Englishmen in foreign lands are, but his solitude had made him curious. "Why and where?" he had demanded, when Xavier had said he was going on, just going straight on. Xavier shrugged his shoulders and said it again.

"You won't mind my asking if you're mad?" said the Englishman politely. "This estate is the last of the cultivated belt—if chopping down weeds can be called cultivation. Beyond this runs the rank forest, that has been untouched since three days before Adam—virgin forest, or practically virgin. I'm the last white man on earth. You'll find a few Indians, rubber-gatherers, orchid-men, and the like, in the next thousand miles, and nothing else but trees and vines. There may be forest tracks, but if you find them, you can work miracles. It's practically all impenetrable bush—and yet you are going on."

Xavier smiled, but did not argue.

"What's the game?" demanded the Englishman. "Treasure?"

Xavier stopped smiling. He looked at the Englishman and feared.

"Treasure?" he asked. "Why treasure?" He pulled his wits together. "Do I look like treasure, then?"

"Not much," grinned the Englishman, and Xavier knew he was safe. "But the

air about here is sizzling with treasure talk. Perhaps the whole of Brazil is, too, for all I know. There is always an enormous fortune in jewels lying somewhere where no one can find it."

"What is the treasure talk here?" asked Xavier, and he smiled, for he felt he knew what was coming.

"Oh, I dare say it's usual enough." The planter stared north-east. "Somewhere hidden deep in that infernal mass of trees there is supposed to be an old shrine, an old temple. It's supposed to be absolutely packed with jewels."

"So," smiled Xavier.

"That's the tale," continued the Englishman. "There's the usual yarn, too, of its being discovered so many hundred years ago—like Golconda—by Spanish pioneers. When the Spaniards touched the jewels, so the legend runs, the gods of the place rose up and smote them dead. The gods of the place always smite 'em dead in this sort of story, eh? Saves such a lot of further explanation."

"It's quite interesting," said Xavier. And next morning he went on again, wearing a pair of the Englishman's cord breeches, and carrying fifty of the Englishman's revolver cartridges and a lot of quinine in a stout new haversack the Englishman had given him.

"Pay me back with a diamond or two when you hit your treasure," the planter laughed. And Xavier laughed, too, softly, quietly, for he had dreamed his dream that night, and it had never been so rich, so precise and vivid in its detail.

But that was the last time he dreamed for three weeks. The three weeks were terrible. The forest, indeed, was virgin, and meshed like a nightmare. Xavier cut his way slowly—a yard an hour with infinite toil—through the felted mesh of vines. Once he got bogged, went up to his armpits in age-old slime before he knew what had happened. In that deep and humid darkness under the trees no sun could penetrate to dry his clothes, so for a day Xavier wore them wet. That night he had fever, and for many days that followed he had fever, and lay in a clearing, swallowing quinine and wondering exactly when he would die.

He did not die, but rose like a ghost and went on. The forest barred his way like a sentient thing. He fought the forest. Not by yards now, but by feet he hacked his forward way, and even that small progress was the fruit of agony. When he came to

open glades, he followed these slowly, savouring the exquisite sense of moving without excessive toil. But there were not many glades. He found one track only, almost closed with vines, but still a track, and he followed that for half a day. That was all his relief. He met no human being at all, nor sign of human beings.

The awful toil was nothing, nothing at all. It was the absence of the dream that dismayed him most. Its going left him without support. He felt trivial, feeble, hopeless. For the first time since he had shipped from Southampton real terror engulfed him. He saw the futility of his travelling, the absurdity of his taking vision for reality; he saw the hopelessness of his quest, foresaw the tragic end of it. Standing, a tiny, an absurd figure, in the midst of all these ruthless forces of Nature, he felt that his questing could end only one way. He saw mammothine trunks, fallen and phosphorescent in death. Nature had killed those giants. How easily Nature would slay so small a thing as himself! Fever was in his bones. He was weak with despair. If only the dream would come to him! But it did not.

So, in the end, fever and despair beat him. He had come out into the sunlit blaze of a little clearing that seemed to be still fighting the invading rush of the forest that had already half conquered it. As he stood in the bitter sun of the clearing, a final despair came to Xavier. He felt that he and the clearing were alike—they were fighting a force too enormous for their strength. Across the clearing the wall of trees barred his way, implacably green, and, as he saw them, something broke within him, and he knew that he had reached his limit—that, whatever happened, he was not going on. He stood there looking at his enemies, the trees and the vines, and all desire to continue, all will to go forward, drained out of him. And then he fell down. With the snapping of will, the fever burst in on him, and he lay in the sun, writhing, muttering, delirious.

It was then, like a mocking chimera, his dream came to him again.

He did not know if his eyes were shut in sleep or open, but it did not matter. He saw it all well, all vividly, and with a greater sense of definition than he had ever seen it before. (That must be the fever, he thought, for a queer, bright thread of consciousness ran through the fabric of his delirium.) Before, the figures, the temple, the events, had never been aught but dream things.

Now he thought they had bulk, had substance, had real life.

Dreams are mad things. This dream was madder than all dreams. It had changed the little clearing, that had inflicted him with despair, into the clearing of his dreams. The all-conquering trees had gone back, and, in the larger area exposed, the temple of his dream shone brown-white against the verdure as it had always shone.

And the men moved and fought before the temple as they always fought, but now he thought that, if he rose up and went to them, he would find them solid, find them human flesh and blood. It was real, real! The hacking of the swords, the wounds, the slithering fall of the dead, was horribly real.

The three men went into the temple, remained a space, and came out. He saw their horror as they stood over the dead guide, the horrible death of the poisoned twain. He saw the grim accent of utter loneliness etched on the single living figure—he saw the burying of the five wallets.

But it was very real. Xavier seemed to take part in the burial. He saw the wet, black loam of the forest turned up; he even felt the loam, wet and clinging and smelling of rot, on his hands as he flung it aside with his big *tassado*. The vines seemed to impede the digging, and he brushed them away. It was real, it was extraordinary.

Somehow, the man who ought to be digging, the survivor, had stood aside, and it was himself who did all the digging. That must be the fever, too, Xavier thought, but he went on digging.

Then the most startling thing of this extraordinary dream happened. Instead of digging a hole deep enough to take the wallets, he came upon the wallets. He plunged his fingers through the damp, loose, leafy mould, and his hand came upon something hard. He lifted it, looked at it. It was a buckle, a buckle of an odd, unfamiliar yet familiar shape, but a buckle, all the same. Xavier was startled. He plunged his hands downward again, sweeping away the mould. From out the excavation there leaped at him a thousand raying points of light. The bottom of the excavation was a mass of jewels.

Xavier gazed at them in astonishment. He saw them all tumbled there, free of the wallets that the years had rotted to nothing, glittering, wonderful, each gem enormously valuable. And, as he gazed, it seemed to him that his fever had left him, that he was clear-eyed, sane, unless he was mad

He started to his feet, looking up, and before him stood the man, leaning against the pedestal of the altar, gazing at him as he had always gazed, bending on him that pregnant, meaning look down all the ages. For a moment they hung so, then, even as Xavier looked, things changed. The pedestal crumbled, became a jumbled heap of ruined stone, and what Xavier had thought to be the man was not a man. It was a shadow—his own shadow flung across the ruined altar and the vines that clung about it.

And then, as Xavier, completely well, completely free from fever, turned about, he saw through an opening in the trees the little clearing, the little half-conquered

clearing, and nothing else. It was there, bright with sunlight, as it was when he had faltered and fallen in it just now, and his own haversack was lying bright in the sunlight. He must have risen to his feet and come here this short way through the trees in his delirium.

He turned again, saw the crumbled stone of the altar, saw his shadow on it, and, looking down, he saw the jewels. He bent down and touched them with his hands. Yes, they were real—they were not dream things, they were real jewels.

He began to fill his pockets with them, to load the bosom of his loose shirt.

At last he was realising, was understanding the meaning of his dream.

