

THE LAKE OF LONG SLEEP

Cave Folk, not without apprehension, found themselves travelling in the vanguard of an army of tall, high-antlered beasts which stared at them with mild eyes of inquiry and appeal.

Marching at their best speed, the Tribe kept easily in the van of the distressed sambur, and more than once in the next few hours, Grôm had reason to congratulate himself upon his venture into this strange fellowship. First, for instance, he saw a herd of black buffalo overtake the sambur host and dash heavily into its rear ranks. The frightened sambur closed up, instead of scattering, and the impetus of the buffalo presently spent itself upon the unresisting mass. They edged their way through to the left, leaving swathes of gored and trodden sambur in their wake, and went thundering off on another line of retreat, caroming into a herd of aurochs, which fought them off and punished them murderously. It was obvious to Grôm, as he studied the dust-clouds of this last encounter, that the buffalo herd, here in the open, would have rolled over the tribe irresistibly, and trampled it flat.

Journeying thus at top speed toward that hill of promise before them, the travellers came at length to a wide space of absolutely level ground which presented a most curious appearance. It was as level as a windless lake, and almost without vegetation. The naked surface was of a sort of indeterminate dust-colour, but dotted here and there with tiny patches of vegetation so stunted that it was little more than moss. Grôm, with his