

Under Water World in Jules Verne's 'Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea: Part First'

Stuti Tiwari

An Assistant Professor with the Dept. of English, Kalaburagi. Central University of Karnataka, Kadaganchi.

Abstract

Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea begins with a phenomenon which leaves the seaports and people living in coastal regions of America and Europe stunned. This paper explores people living near seaports, traders, mariners encounter "an enormous thing" in the sea, which gives off a phosphorescent glow.

Keywords: Jules Verne, science fiction, French classics, adventure fiction.

The novel begins with a phenomenon which leaves the seaports and people living in coastal regions of America and Europe stunned. People living near seaports, traders, mariners encounter "an enormous thing" (13) in the sea, which gives off a phosphorescent glow. It was a matter of

concern, confusion, and mystery. This phenomenon was seen in the different parts of the planet by different people on voyage. People assumed it to be a runaway reef.

Pierre Aronnax, Professor of Natural History at Paris Museum is given a letter by Secretary of Navy France Government to join an expedition with Commander Farragut in Abraham Lincoln to chase the monster.

After given the charge to chase the monster in the underwater world, Aronnax takes it to be the sole purpose of his life. Commander Farragut is the rigorous captain of Lincoln. His determination to get the sea rid off the narwhale was passionate enough.

The vessel also had a king of Harpooners, Ned Land. He is a forty years old Canadian, unsociable, serious. In one of his encounters with a fleet Monroe, he helped American whalers in hunting a whale.

The voyage went on looking for the narwhale. On one of the days of their voyage, there emerged a black body above the waves and it was one and a half mile away from the frigate. They assumed it to be cetacean. The frigate chased the cetacean, but could not reach it.

In one of his attempts to catch a martingale, Ned shot his harpoon and a collision occurred. In no time all were into the sea not able to catch hold of frigate. Professor was accompanied by his loyal Conseil into the sea. Both of them struggled swimming in water for a long time.

After long hours in water, Professor heard a human voice. It was Ned. Ned explained him that the harpoon which was shot was blunted because the monster they were hunting for was made of boilerplate steel.

Then the professor narrates:

"No doubts were possible! This animal, this monster, this natural phenomenon that had puzzled the whole scientific world, that had muddled and misled the minds of seamen in both hemispheres, was, there could be no escaping it, an even more astonishing phenomenon- a phenomenon made by the hand of man." (65)

And it was because of this man-made monster they were able to survive over the sea. The night passed and in the morning mists they were dragged down into the human machine by a bunch a men, who seemed like wearing masks.

The men in the machine where assumed to be anti-social, cannibals, speaking different dialect. The food given to them in utensils bore a Latin inscription

"MOBILIS IN MOBILI

N" (77)

They were moving within the moving element. N would be the initial of the commander was their assumption. Yes, the name of the commander was Nemo and the name of the large steel vessel was Nautilus. Captain Nemo knew French, English, German, and Latin. He was a man who

has cut himself from human world and humanity. It was a reason behind his reluctance to meet Professor.

Nautilus is a world in itself created by Captain Nemo. It has a vast library, made of black-rosewood bookcases, wide shelves with large number of books. The narration by professor goes like this:

"Among these books I noted masterpieces by the greats of ancient and modern times, in other words, all of humanity's finest achievements in history, poetry, fiction, and science from Homer to Victor Hugo, from Xenophon to Michelet, from Rabelais to Madame George Sand. But science, in particular represented the major investment of this library: books on mechanics, ballistics, hydrography, meteorology, geography, geology, etc., held a place there no less important than works on natural history, and I realised that they made up the captain's chief reading". (98)

There were also books on psychology, astronomy and other subjects.

Apart from the huge library, Nautilus is also home to all the wonders of the world. It had a museum of paintings by thirty renowned masters.

The zoophyte section had wide varieties of corals from across the world, specimens of mollusks from Indian ocean, American seas, shells from East Indies.

On the walls of Nautilus there were hangings of instrument like thermometer, barometer, humidistat, sextant, and chromometers. On the speed of movement

of Nautilus Nemo answered Professor that everything functioned because of electricity. He explained that the bottom of the sea had a good amount of accumulated zinc, iron, and silver, gold. But he didn't go for mining. Instead he was dependent on sea for electricity. The electric cells were composed of sodium extracted from sea water.

The sea also has rivers, just as continents. These rivers are in the form of currents, the remarkable one is the Gulf Stream. There are five chief currents under the water. And they are in the north Atlantic, south Atlantic, north Pacific, South Pacific, and Southern Indian Ocean.

Captain Nemo writes a letter to Professor Aronnax and invites him on a hunting trip in Crespo Island forests. Captain calls these forests as his own possession. Those are underwater forests grown only for the Captain.

Next day they went on hunt. Even at "300-foot depth" they were able to see sun's rays penetrating in reddish twilight. Ruhmkorff device was ready to help them in darkness. The chapter on underwater forests gives a vivid description of plants and animal species. Captain Nemo's hunt of a large bird, it was an albatross of the finest species.

The longingness to be ashore made them stay on island for a period of time and when they were back into the sea, they toiled for long hours working on salinity of water, electric cells, electric properties and so on.

The last chapter in the first part of the book discusses about the cemetery, a hole which was a grave dug to bury one of their companions, who died last night. It was an inaccessible ocean floor, a resting place for the dead. Captain Nemo along with the companions carries out the ritual. He sobs and adds,

"There lies our peaceful cemetery, hundreds of feet beneath the surface of the waves!

For which the Professor replies, "At least, captain, your dead can sleep serenely there, out of the reach of sharks!"

The first part ends with a statement made by Captain Nemo, "Yes, sir, of sharks and men!" (237)

The paradox lies in the last statement made by Nemo, who doesn't seem to be that unsocial as he appears to be. The first part of the novel doesn't provide any information about the history of the captain. If at all he would be unsocial, he would never help Professor and his team. But he is a reserved person, who doesn't want Professor and his team to return to the human world. He doesn't want the human world to know about his existence under the water and a world of his own created by him, for his own self under the water.

The imageries, descriptive details provided in the text are outstanding and magnanimous, making the novel unique and an interesting read.

Work Cited

1. Verne, Jules. Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea. Hyde Park Editions Book. Atlantic Publication.2014.Print.

About the Author

Stuti Tiwari is an Assistant Professor (on contractual basis) with the Dept. of English, Kalaburagi. Central University of Karnataka, Kadaganchi, Karnataka.

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