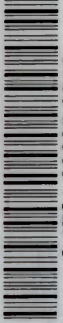


GAMBLES
WITH
DESTINY



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George Griffith



W. H. SMITH & SON
LONDON

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1880

GAMBLES WITH DESTINY



GAMBLES WITH DESTINY

BY

GEORGE GRIFFITH

AUTHOR OF

"THE ANGEL OF THE REVOLUTION," "OLGA ROMANOFF," "GOLDEN STAR,"
"THE DESTINED MAID," "BRITON OR BOER?" ETC. ETC.

LONDON

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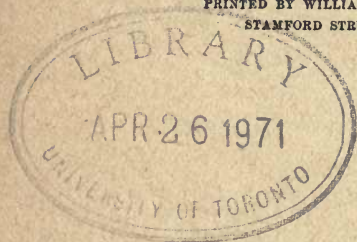
14, BEDFORD STREET, STRAND, W.C.

1899

PR
4728
G85G36

LONDON:

PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.



PREFACE

THOSE who read, not only the lines of the stories which are here told, but also between them, will see that, under other names, and under different conditions of nationality and circumstances, it is the same man—or, to be more correct, the same virile principle—which fights the battle with Destiny and wins or loses, as the reader and the Fates may determine for themselves.



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HELLVILLE, U.S.A.



GAMBLES WITH DESTINY

HELLVILLE, U.S.A.

CHAPTER I

FATHER AND SON

“THEN I am to understand definitely that you won't?”

“It isn't won't, dad; it's more like can't. It's no use. After all, you know, there are some things in the world that are better than money——”

Stanley Raeburn senior threw himself back in his chair and stared, or it might be more correct to say he glared, at his son, who was standing on the hearthrug in front of an open fire-grate in the library of one of the big brown-stone houses overlooking Central Park, New York.

It was a sentiment which would have been heresy from any one's lips, but coming from those of his son it was simply flat blasphemy.

It meant not only the negation of his own life-lesson, a lesson which he had learnt through much labour and strife from the days when he had thought ten dollars a week a princely salary to those later ones in which his millions were accumulating so rapidly that he couldn't always keep track even of the interest on them. It was also an unmistakable notification of the utter failure of the task that he had undertaken and prosecuted with only a little less interest than that with which he had devoted himself to the piling-up of millions.

Ever since his son had reached what he considered to be reasoning years, he had done everything that a man in command of practically unlimited resources could do to make him a duplicate of himself—to make the boy grow up into a man whose first and only life-object should be the multiplication of the millions that he would inherit and the increase of the power into which those millions could be translated.

He himself had started out as a lawyer's office-boy in West 43rd Street on three dollars a week. He was now a United States senator with money and influence enough behind him to justify him in aspiring to the presidency itself. Given, therefore, that his son began, as he might do, where he himself left off, how far might he not go? And here he was talking of losing all this for the sake of a pretty face and a pair of soft brown eyes with a gleam of gold in them belonging to a girl in one of his own offices who worked a typewriter for little more than double the salary he began on.

There were other things which, if possible, were even worse—ridiculous theories on social and political subjects, which somehow, in spite of all his care, this prodigal son of his had managed to absorb; wild and impossible dreams of what he called honesty and purity in public affairs; blank idiotcy which would bring any respectably conducted state to ruin in a fortnight. But these he, Raeburn senior, considered to be quite secondary to the other disturbing cause, and it was just here, as

subsequent events showed, that he went absolutely wrong.

“Look here, Stanley, if you’re going to talk like that, I’ll have to ask you to find another audience. There may be some things better than money, but I’d like to know how you’re going to get them without the money, unless you’re going to get other things with them in the way of shabby clothes and short meals that you’d rather be without. You know, one has to pay a very long price for true love and domestic felicity on a few dollars a week, and that’s a price you can’t pay in cash, mind. You’ve got to pay it with your own life and the lives of those you think you love.

“No, no, Stanley,” he went on, his voice softening a little, “it won’t do. Those sort of things are all very well when they’re made into poetry or slush of that sort, but they’re hard and ugly facts to knock your head against and break your heart over in real life. There’s time to turn back still. Won’t you do it, Stanley lad?”

“It isn’t won’t, dad, as I said before,” he answered with a little break in his voice;

for this was almost the first time he could remember seeing this man of iron and gold who called him son soften even for a moment. "It isn't won't; it's *can't*. Even if I could give up Lucy to please you, that wouldn't make any difference to my convictions; and you know, after all, a man can no more help his convictions than he can help his appetite. Put it as low down as you like, and you must still admit that you can no more help thinking a certain way at a certain time than you can help being hungry at a certain time.

"You, for instance, think that money is everything, or at any rate essential to everything worth having. Suppose you woke up to-morrow morning in a world that had no use for money. You'd think it was a lunatic asylum, and for some time you'd go on thinking as you do about money. You couldn't help it any more than I can help my convictions about the worse than worthlessness of it when it's used as it is here——"

"And everywhere else; don't forget that, young man."

Raeburn senior's voice was harder now than ever.

"Don't make any mistake about the size of the job you've taken in hand. It isn't New York or the United States that you've got to reform; it's the whole world and a trifle of fifteen hundred million human beings sitting tight on the traditions of more centuries than the histories tell us anything about. It's a big order even for a man who thinks himself a deputy Providence to take on."

The sarcasm stung Stanley a little, for he wasn't quite thirty yet, and his moral skin was still thin and sensitive. He flushed slightly and pulled himself up, and replied in a tone that was almost as hard and cutting as his father's—in fact, there was a curious sort of a family likeness in it—

"If you'll allow me to take the frills off that last remark of yours and turn the theory into fact, the United States is just now putting in a ruinous tender for that self-same job; and you, I am sorry to say, are one of the boss contractors."

“What the devil do you mean, sir? Have you forgotten that you’re talking to your father?”

“I hadn’t; but I might do if you forget that you’re speaking to your son. What I mean is this——”

“I don’t care a damn what you mean, sir!” his father almost shouted as he sprang from his seat and faced him as a man faces another who has made him an enemy for life. “What I mean is this: In this house there are millions for you, and the possibility of all that those millions and your own brains can buy. Outside there’s the street and the clothes you stand up in. Here you’re my son, with a passport to the best society in the world. There you’re an outcast, a tramp without a dollar in your pocket, and with every door shut against you. That’s your choice, and you’ve got to take it right here. Will you go or stay?”

“I’ll go, dad, not because I want to, but because I can’t stop on those terms. Good-bye.”

He held out his hand, but his father turned

his back on him, perhaps because he wouldn't shake hands, possibly for another reason. Stanley put his hand in his pocket and walked towards the door. As he opened it with his left hand, he looked back. His father had gone to the window, and was staring out over the park through a little mist that somehow obscured the brightness of the clear winter day. If he had been looking the other way for the moment, many things of great concern might never have happened. But the fates appeared to have made up their minds, and the millionaire didn't look round until he heard the door close. Then he took out his handkerchief and wiped his eyes, and reproached his own and all other prodigal sons in language that would not have been tolerated even in the United States Senate.

Then he turned to the window again, and as he did so he heard the front door close with a very decided bang. He knew what had happened, but somehow he couldn't get away from the window. His son walked past with his hands in the pockets of his ulster.

That was all he had taken with him. He wasn't even carrying a hand-bag, and he was looking straight in front of him.

“If he'd only look up even now!” the old man caught himself saying.

But no, the prodigal walked straight on without looking either up or back.

“Damn the boy!” said Stanley Raeburn senior under his breath, but with a stamp on the floor that added considerable emphasis to the words. And then he turned away and dropped into a big armchair by the fire, and presently he had taken out his handkerchief again.

CHAPTER II

FROM WEALTH TO WORK

STANLEY RAE BURN'S troubles had only just begun when he shut the door of his father's house behind him. He knew that, of course, perfectly well; still, it was rather a curious sensation. An hour ago he could have drawn his cheque for fifty thousand dollars. Ten minutes ago a few words of submission would have earned him five million dollars in hard cash, for that was the splendid price which his father had offered him for his love and his convictions. Now he had less than ten dollars in his pocket, and he had scruples about keeping even that. He had a cheque-book, too, and a substantial sum to his credit at the bank, but that was no longer his.

He didn't even know where he was going.

In point of fact, he had nowhere to go to, although his footsteps were instinctively turning in the direction of his club. As this thought struck him, his rebellious soul rose in even more fervent revolt. From this outside standpoint, this chilly isolation which he had so suddenly reached, he could look back and see how poor a creature he had really been—a sort of gilt-edged pensioner absolutely dependent for his necessaries and his luxuries on the bounty of a man who made his money by methods which he himself considered little short of criminal. True, that man was his father; but that didn't make much difference, after all, especially as he was his father now in little more than name.

Then there came a queer sort of exultation. He had grown up, as it were, in the last few minutes. He would be a man soon, and he might as well set about being so at once.

He went to his club and sat down in the writing-room. He took a long envelope out of the case and put his half-used cheque-book into it. Then he took a sheet of note-paper

and wrote on it the ominous letters, "I. O. U." He next went deliberately through his pockets, and when he had done this, he wrote, "Eight dollars seventy-five cents" under the letters, and signed his name to it. He put this in with the cheque-book, sealed the envelope, and addressed it to his father. Just as he had done so, he heard a voice behind him saying, in a low tone adjusted to the character of the room—

"Morning, Raeburn! How do? You're out early. Is it too early for a cocktail? I've got some fresh news about this European business for you when you've finished."

"Ah, Sinclair, is that you?" said Raeburn, getting up and facing round with the envelope still in his hand. "You are just the one man in all New York that I wanted to see most. Cocktail? Well, it's a bit early, but never mind. Come along; I want to have a talk with you."

When they got in the smoking-room and were comfortably ensconced in a couple of cosy, deep-seated armchairs, Raeburn felt another curious sort of thrill run through his

moral being. This was in all probability his last appearance on the stage of life as a rich man, or at any rate as the son of one. Tomorrow, that afternoon, perhaps, he might be somebody's paid servant, possibly, indeed, as he hoped, the subordinate of the man who was sitting opposite to him; for Frank H. Sinclair was the news editor of the *New York Tribune*, and Stanley Raeburn, ex-heir to the richest man in New York State, was going to ask him for a job.

"Let me pay for these," he said, as the boy brought the cocktails and put them down on the table.

It was a survival of the involuntarily generous instinct of the rich man, and as he gave it voice he took his last five-dollar bill out of his pocket.

"Not quite!" said Sinclair. "I think I mentioned cocktails first, didn't I? Besides, what do you want to pay for? Don't you have a bar account?"

"Great Scott, so I have!" said Raeburn, looking up with quite a scared expression on his face. At a rough-and-ready guess, the

said bar account stood somewhere between seventy and eighty dollars, and Sinclair's casual remark had suddenly brought him face to face with the very awkward fact.

"Why, what's the matter?" said Sinclair. "You look like a man who has just had a protested cheque given back to him."

The waiter had picked up the five-dollar bill and gone away with it, and so Raeburn was able to say, without prejudice—

"That's just it, Sinclair. You've got there in once. If I gave a cheque for the amount of my bar account, it would be protested. See here," he went on, holding up the envelope; "that contains my cheque-book and an I. O. U. for eight dollars seventy-five cents, and you see it's addressed to my father. The cold-drawn truth of it is that the old man fired me this morning, and the person that you see here in this chair is the latest and most up-to-date edition of the Prodigal Son."

"You—you don't mean that, Raeburn, do you? You, the heir to the Lord only knows how many millions, a prodigal! I'm

accustomed to pretty steep things, you know, at the *Tribune* office, but really that——”

“But that is a solid, hard-boiled fact, I regret to say,” replied Raeburn, with a not very mirthful laugh.

“Things came to a head this morning, and the old man and I finally split up over love and principle. In cold figures, he wanted me to swop them for so many millions down and the prospect of more to come. And I couldn't. He said I wouldn't, but the truth is I couldn't. He asked me to stop in the house and pursue the pleasant avocation of a millionaire, or go out into the street. As the result, I'm here, and now I am going to ask you for a job.”

Sinclair looked at him steadily for a moment or two; then he bit the end of a cigar, lit it, and got up. Raeburn was rather encouraged than the reverse at seeing him start off for a walk to the other end of the room, for he knew him of old for a man who thought best on his legs. The waiter brought back his change, and with a further access of recklessness he pushed a quarter towards him and

told him to bring a cigar. By the time he had got it alight, Sinclair plumped himself down in his chair, and said, with the abruptness of a man who has got something to say and wants to get it said—

“Look here, Raeburn, you know the attitude the *Tribune* has taken up on this Imperial America business, and I know your views on the subject. They’re the best, soundest, and straightest I’ve heard, and they also happen to be the *Tribune’s*, or something like them. Now, you’ve not been much use, if you’ll excuse me saying so, as the heir-apparent to more millions than any man ought to have, but I fancy you would be a good deal of use as a man who had to work for his own living.

“I take it that you’ve got your heart pretty well in this business, or you wouldn’t have thrown away several tons of gold for the sake of it. Now, here’s your chance. I shall be on duty pretty nearly all night to-night. My rooms are at your service. Go when you like and write us a leader on the situation. Never mind about literary style

or anything of that sort; just put your heart and brain on paper, and you'll find that it will pan out all right so far as the reading public's concerned. I've a pretty good sort of an idea of the stuff that you'll turn out when you get warm, and stuff like that's worth money. If you want a hundred dollars on account, you can have it now."

"It won't be worth that," said Raeburn, "but I'll do the work, and be glad to do it. In fact, I would, if I were still my father's heir; but as I do frankly want some money, I'll take twenty to begin with, and you shall have the article to-morrow. Then, if you think it's worth more, you can give me the balance. It is very good of you to offer me the use of your room, but I don't think I'll be able to accept that either.

"No, you needn't look offended. It isn't pride. You know," he went on with something suspiciously like a blush, "Lucy's a typist, and she has a machine of her own.

"I've got to go and see her and the old lady on the subject of the cataclysm, and I

think I can talk that article better than I could write it; so, you see, as the old man will probably fire her as he has fired me, I may as well share the job with her."

"Excellent!" said Sinclair, with a laugh. "There is a combination of practicality and sentiment about that idea which augurs well for your future, young man. What a pity you were born in the purple—or the yellow I suppose we should call it here. If you'd only had to earn your own living from the start, you might have been doing something quite good by this time. Anyhow, you may be some one pretty soon, and, by way of a start, if you do this article as I expect you will do it, I guess you'll be able to consider yourself fixed on the literary staff of the *Tribune* till you're looking around for a better job. Now let us go down to Delmonico's and have a bite. We shall just get there about lunch-time, and meanwhile I'll give you a few pointers about your new trade. To tell you the truth, boy, I can't find it in my heart to feel sorry that this has happened, and I'm glad to see that you don't seem very much broken

up over it. You've only been a man around town so far. Now you're going to be a man ; and there's a heap of difference between those two, I can tell you."

CHAPTER III

SOME STRAIGHT TALK

MISS LUCY CARLYLE had received the tidings of the evil and the good that had befallen the prodigal son from his own lips in chilly, troubled, and ominous silence. Her mother had heard them with broken exclamations intermingled with tears, not only for his sake, but for her daughter's, for she knew that Raeburn senior would consider Lucy at least half as guilty as the prodigal, and act accordingly. When he had finished his story, he paused for a moment or two, and then he said, in a somewhat disconcerted tone—

“ Well, Lucy, little girl, haven't you anything of a comforting sort to say ? Don't you think I've done pretty well, considering ? ”

Her reply was gentle in speech, but scarcely comforting in substance.

“I don’t think any son can do well when he quarrels with his father, Stanley. If your father thinks that I am one reason for what he is to some extent justified in considering your obstinacy, you can write and tell him that that reason no longer exists.”

“What do you mean, Lucy?” he said, taking a quick couple of strides towards her. “Surely you don’t mean——”

“I mean, Stanley,” she said, getting up from her chair and facing him with her hands behind her back, “that a great deal of what you tell me your father said is perfectly correct from his point of view, and I will not marry a man if that marriage is to separate a father from his only son. The money is nothing—perhaps worse than nothing—let him give it to charity, or found a university with it. We can do without it, or, if we can’t, we ought to; but if you want me, you will only get me on the day that your father puts my hand into yours. Don’t you think I’m right, mother?”

“Yes, dear, quite right, I suppose,” said Mrs. Carlyle, rather weakly, “but I think it’s very hard and unjust on both of you—and all those millions, too! When you’re as old as I am, you’ll know the value of them. But I suppose there’s no help for it.”

“None, except that one, as far as I’m concerned,” said Lucy, decidedly. “I’m very sorry, Stanley,” she went on more meltingly, and with a suspicion of mist dimming the golden gleam of her brown eyes, “but I really couldn’t. You know that I shall never love any one else than you, and therefore I don’t want to marry any one else; but to know that by marrying you I had estranged you for ever from your father would just make me miserable; and, you know, people don’t marry for that, at least not with their eyes open.”

Stanley knew her well enough to feel quite certain that nothing could be gained by pushing the point any further at present, so he took the wiser course of seeming to bow to the inevitable, and said, more cheerfully than she had quite expected—

“Well, Lucy, I must respect your sentiments, I suppose, however little I like them, and somehow or other the old man will have to get reconciled, that’s all. But meanwhile, after what you have been merciful enough to say, there needn’t be any violent change in our present relations. We can still be sweethearts, I suppose?”

She looked up at him in such a way that somehow the next moment she found herself in his arms, and the provisional bargain was struck in a more decisive fashion than by word of mouth. Then, when the matter was settled, he said—

“Lucy, I want you to be something else——”

“It’s impossible!” she said, drawing back from him. “Haven’t I just told you, and haven’t I promised, at least till you’re reconciled——”

“Oh, I don’t mean that!” he said, with a laugh at her sudden change of manner. “What I was going to say is, I want you to be my typist.”

“What on earth do you mean, Stanley?”

“Exactly what I say. You see, it’s this way. Pending the reconciliation, the old man is practically certain to fire you out. That’s him ; he can’t help it. Meanwhile, I’ve got this work for the *Tribune*, and, from what Sinclair says, it will be pretty well paid. Now, I feel pretty certain that I can talk it better than I can write, and I can do more of it, too, in a given time. Your views and mine are about the same on this general war question, and so the work oughtn’t to be distasteful to you. Now, I’ve promised to do this article to-night, so you just get out your machine and start right away while I’m in the humour.”

It was an eminently practical proposal, and as such commended itself very strongly to Miss Lucy’s sound intelligence, so without another word she just went to her work-table, uncovered her typewriter, put the paper in the carriage, and then looked up and said primly—

“I’m quite ready, sir.”

Something else happened before they got to work, but it didn’t take very long, and

then Stanley began walking up and down the sitting-room, and Mrs. Carlyle settled herself with a vague, wondering interest to listen to what was coming. Presently it came. Stanley Raeburn's natural abilities had been trained and developed by the finest education that money could buy, both in the New and the Old World. He was naturally concise in thought, and fluent in speech, which is just what a newspaper writer should be. Besides, both his heart and his head were full of his subject; and when the article appeared in the columns of the *Tribune* the next morning, its writer's reputation was already made.

Briefly described, it was an appeal to the American people to undertake the reform of the United States, and it was the very model of what such an appeal ought to have been. Where it appealed to the head, it was cold, terse, and almost brutal in its ruthless outspokenness; and where it appealed to the heart, the words burnt and the sentences palpitated with an emotion which rang as true as the notes of an angel-song. It therefore reached the American head as quickly as

it reached the American heart, and the response was instantaneous.

The American head had known for a long time that the United States politics were a mere matter of payment; that the millionaires could have any kind of politics and even any kind of laws that they chose to pay for; and that the United States politicians, from the President himself to the most low-down Irish municipal boss, were merely puppets who danced as the real rulers of the country pulled the golden wires on which they were strung; but this was the first time that the American heart had felt what the American head knew, and the effect of this physiological conjunction was as startling as it was momentous.

One or two brief quotations from this memorable article will not be out of place here, marking as they do the beginnings of a popular upheaval second only in importance, if even that, to the Civil War itself, and they will also show something of the reasons for the startling events that were to follow their publication.

“By the American people is here to be

understood everything that is strong, sound, and good between the Canadian boundary and the Gulf of Mexico. On the other hand, what the outside world understands by the United States is only a political expression—the label of an organization of capital and corruption which has got itself firmly planted in the cab of the locomotive *America*, and, while the engine does all the real work, drives it whithersoever it pleases, and at any speed it likes.”

“So-called American newspapers, with about as much real patriotism in them as you find with a microscope in the columns of the *Irish World*, have been shouting about ‘the Nation,’ about its armies and its fleets, its glorious traditions, and its ability and willingness to take entire charge of the Western Hemisphere, together with as much of the Eastern as it can lay hold of, and to cut up into very small pieces any nation or alliance of nations which is not prepared to hold the New Monroe Doctrine a little higher in authority than the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount. So far, the American people have allowed themselves to be amused, and, to a certain

extent, misled by all this portentous cackling. It tickled the so-called national vanity, and, as the rest of the world only took notice of it in newspaper paragraphs, it did not come very expensive.

“But within the last few months, as you know, a tremendous change has been wrought. We have fought Spain and crushed her—not, perhaps, a feat to be very proud of, but still a fact, and one that has been achieved only at the cost of many thousands of American lives—and with victory has come disillusion. When the war began, our rulers solemnly affirmed that we were fighting only to free the oppressed Cuban, and that, Cuba once free, we would retire. We were fighting in the cause of humanity, and not as aggressors greedy for spoil and territory. But we have freed the Cubans only to find that they never deserved to be free save under the government of the strong hand. We have taken Cuba, Porto Rico, the Canaries, and the Philippines, and are going to keep them. As a consequence, the world has found us out. It is plain now that we did not fight Spain to free

the victims of her tyranny, but to take her territory from her by force. In short, to do a vulgar steal.

“In other words, let our politicians and newspaper men call it what they like, after entering into a quarrel that was not our own, and shedding the blood of thousands of men to humiliate a proud nation which was only standing up for its own rights, we have forgotten our professions of humanity, and embarked on a career of foreign conquest which, if continued as these men would continue it, must inevitably bring us into collision with the armed millions of Europe, with an alliance of the greatest military and naval Powers of the world—Powers with hundreds of warships and millions of men at their command, to which we can only oppose our score or so of battleships and cruisers and our levies of untrained men.

“There are those who think that Great Britain should, and would, stand by us in our defiance of Europe. Great Britain knows better, and so do we. In defence of common rights, the Anglo-Saxon race would stand

shoulder to shoulder against any combination, but to expect England to plunge her millions of subjects into war for the sake of helping us to make foreign conquests, which we solemnly promised we would never make, is to expect her rulers to commit an international crime, for which defeat and ruin would not be too light a punishment.

“ We have fought Spain and conquered her, we have given freedom to the oppressed, and we have the right and the power to say and secure that there shall be no more oppression throughout the Western Hemisphere. Let us be content with that and such material recompense as we can get without becoming oppressors ourselves.

“ As a people, we have no just quarrel with any other on the face of the earth. No one has injured us, no one has insulted us. If any one had, why then we should have fought that some one rightly and justly to the last man in the field and the last dollar in the treasury. But this is not the case now, and what we have to ask ourselves is whether the American people is going to allow the United

States to brag and swagger and bounce it into a war in which it could only win curses by victory, and ridicule by defeat.

“In a word, are the American people prepared to fight half the Powers of the world single-handed for the sake of maintaining a principle which they have continuously and consistently denied and repudiated ever since they became a nation?”

CHAPTER IV

PRESIDENT RAEBURN

BY nightfall, Stanley Raeburn was the most famous man between the Atlantic and the Pacific. His voice had rung like a trumpet-blast throughout the length and breadth of the land. At his bidding the American people had awakened from the dream of subjection to the capitalists at home and empty defiance of the world abroad.

With those two terrible words, "universal war," ringing in its ears, it had opened its eyes and seen the red gulf of battle yawning at its feet. It had looked down into that awful chaos of blood and flame and misery and disaster, out of which it was impossible that it could take either honour or profit; and then it turned round and quietly but steadfastly

refused to allow either its politicians to goad it or its Spread-Eagle paragraphists to cajole it into taking the fatal step which, once taken, could never be retraced save through unspeakable shame and dishonour.

In a word, it had grasped Stanley Raeburn's single, simple argument firmly, and had determined to abide by it.

It saw very clearly that the reverse was not only impossible, but ridiculous, and it saw it all the more clearly when that night a second message went forth over the wires from the *Tribune* office calling upon the American people to ask the United States whether they seriously considered themselves strong enough to sweep the united fleets of Europe off the sea, and, having done that, to invade the Continent *viâ* Spain, and annex the Old World?

Incidentally, the message reminded them that there would be about five hundred ships of war and some ten millions of men to be dealt with, and these would not be mobs of amateur soldiers such as had confronted each other in the Civil War, but armies of highly

trained professional soldiers with generations of warfare behind them, and commanded by the ripest military genius that the world could produce.

It was in vain that the politicians raved themselves speechless about the "imperial destinies" of the American people, and it was equally in vain that the Spread-Eagle editors howled their battle-cries and danced their war-dances to the last limits of the scare-head's capabilities. The American people had got its facts solid, and the next day, with something like a sixty million voice-power, it told the United States in unmistakable tones to come down. And the United States came down just as the French, German, and Russian ministers were preparing to leave Washington.

It so happened, not by any means unnaturally, that this national cataclysm, for it was really nothing else, occurred at the same time as the nominations for the presidency. It had, in fact, been arranged to come off then, just as Mr. Cleveland's Venezuelan message had been engineered; but it also chanced that the day on which the decision

was arrived at was Stanley Raeburn's thirtieth birthday, and this fact made him eligible for nomination. In the then state of American feeling and opinion there was no one else possible, and so the Young Tribune of the People, as he had already come to be called, was nominated in such fashion as promised an overwhelming majority at the election.

But by this time he had begun another crusade which already threatened to involve the country in something like revolution. It was not a wild-cat hunt of the sort in which a Bryan or a Henry George would have involved the country for the sake of personal notoriety and the profits of office. It was a sober, steady, earnest fight against that cuttlefish organization of capital which was sucking the life-blood out of the nation ; that monster of monopoly which had made American politics a scoff and a byword among the nations of the earth, and American law and justice the names of things that could be bought and sold.

In his nomination address, he had said—

“I am neither a socialist nor a silver crank. I believe in every man getting and having that which his hands or his brains can win for him. I believe in every man getting just as rich as he can by honest and legitimate methods. I believe in the survival of the fittest, but I want them to *be* the fittest, and I want the fittest to mean the best, not the worst. I want an open field, and no favour for any one. I want the race to be to the swift, and the battle to the strong; but I also want the race to be run fairly, and the battle to be fought within the four corners of the law. I have as great a horror of mob-rule as I have of purse-rule, and I want to make both of them impossible within the boundaries of what I hope will soon be truly called the United States.”

The meeting at which this speech was delivered was signalized by an extraordinary incident which practically assured the election of the Young Tribune. At the end of the speech, his own father mounted the platform and opposed him. It was the first time they had met since the interview in the library.

It was also notable as the first occasion on which a multi-millionaire Trust-king had come out into the open to defend his order and the principle on which it was founded. What prompted him to do it, he himself didn't know. But he did it, and the result of the discussion on the public mind was simply terrific.

"This is my father. I claim a hearing for him!" Raeburn shouted through the storm of hoots and howls that greeted the appearance of the too well-known monopolist, and almost instantly the tempest was stilled. Then the old man stated his case clearly, calmly, and decisively. When he had done, Stanley refused to make any reply whatever, but his chairman got up and read out a statement showing with pitiless accuracy the sources of his colossal fortune, and ended by saying, without any attempt at oratorical flourish—

"This is the fortune that Mr. Raeburn's son and heir had in the hollow of his hand. The amount of it proves better than any words could do how sincerely he hated the methods by which it has been accumulated,

and why he left his father's home to become, for all he knew then, an outcast and a beggar."

When the tempest of applause which followed had died away, Stanley Raeburn senior went up to his son and held out his hand, and said—

"You may be a dreamer or a fool, or both, but now I see that you are trying to ruin me as well as yourself. I've got to admit that you're an honest man. Let the battle be to the strong, then! Those are the lines I have fought on all my life. Ruin me if you like, and if you can. On the day that you're President of the United States, I'll forgive you. Will you shake on that, Stanley?"

"I will," he said, springing to his feet and taking his father's hand. "I'm not going to ruin you, dad. I'm only going to try and get you to make money that will be cleaner, even if you don't have quite so much of it than what you have now."

Then they shook hands.

After this, the election was a foregone conclusion. The Young Tribune was, in fact,

the only man possible. The Democratic and Republican candidates dropped out of the hopeless contest when Tammany and kindred institutions had bribed themselves almost into bankruptcy. The Silverite and Populist candidates shouted themselves speechless and disappeared after them, leaving as the *Young Tribune's* only opponent the nominee of the Irish-American party, and as he, appropriately enough, was an ex-convict and dynamitard who had been all too leniently released from Her Majesty's prison at Portland, he didn't matter very much.

As every one expected, the day of Stanley Raeburn's inauguration as President of the United States was the beginning of troubles for the dollar-despots of America. Within the next few weeks, senator after senator and member after member of the House of Representatives was impeached on the ground of bribery and corruption, and either unseated or forced to resign; and then gradually, and for the first time since the Civil War, politics in America became possible for respectable people. Men who a year before would have

considered a nomination as an affront to their personal honour came forward and were elected to the vacancies thus created in the midst of a popular quiet and decorum which boded very ill for the old order of things.

The first act of the Raeburn Administration was the enactment of a new and far more stringent Anti-Trust Law, and this was immediately enforced with such ruthless and indiscriminating severity that the Trust-kings speedily found themselves confronted by a choice between fair trading and open markets and outlawry seasoned with confiscation.

The President's own father was, of course, among them, but he stuck to his bargain like a man, and the result of an interview on the night after the election was that Miss Lucy Carlyle was easily persuaded to make such change in her name and estate as enabled her to take her place as mistress of the White House.

Most of the other millionaires, however, arrogant in their conviction that the dollar was still almighty, if you only had enough of it, determined not to yield their more than

royal supremacy without a struggle, even if in that struggle they had to strike at the very foundations of the state itself.

A committee was formed, which was in reality a Trust Defence League, with uncounted millions of capital behind it, and a campaign of wholesale bribery and secret violence was immediately inaugurated. No instrument was too vile for use, and it was not very long before all the worst elements of the population became aware that good times for the tramp and the criminal, the loafer and the enemy of society, were at hand.

The Irish scented revolution and a return to the old system of corruption on which they had fattened. The foreign socialists and anarchists saw a breakdown of the social machine and plunder of some sort.

In short, all that was bad, idle, and greedy, all the human refuse that was to be had for the buying, was at the disposal of the Trust League. And what the League paid for, it had.

Five attempts on the President's life were made in three months, with the result that he

had his left arm broken and his scalp ploughed up with revolver bullets. Small armies of low-down Irish, discharged policemen, tramps, and other mean products collected in different parts of the country. Anarchism suddenly became rampant in the cities, and the enemies of all society rejoiced to see the forces of the law and order confronted by those of capital, and told each other, when the row was over, there might be something left for them.

It was a serious situation, but President Raeburn was more than equal to it. He said, in his next message to Congress:—

“ You see, and the American people will now see, the true nature of those who would have goaded this country into war with the world. They never were its friends. Now they are its declared enemies, and I shall consider it my duty as Chief Magistrate of the State to employ against them the same force as they would have used in their futile and dishonourable struggle against a world in arms.”

To this, America said, in so many words—

“ Go ahead ! ”

And the President went ahead, with the result that something very like civil war followed. There were riots which differed very little from pitched battles; there were dynamite outrages which did more damage than bombardments of the Spanish forts by the American fleet; and in out-of-the-way districts there were murders and burnings and plunderings of which no foreign invading force could have been guilty without bringing the penalties of international law and the execration of civilized mankind down upon it.

The long-smouldering hate between black and white, too, burst into a flame of active frenzy which burnt like a very torch of destruction. In short, the long-expected social war had broken out, and the issue at stake was the choice between cosmos and chaos.

CHAPTER V

SINCLAIR'S IDEA

THE revolt, as might have been expected, centred in and round Chicago, and there the queerly allied forces of capitalism, anarchism, socialism, and all sorts of economic nihilism and good-for-nothingism gradually concentrated as the social war went on. Chicago had had an anarchist governor before, and now she had one again. He was a naturalized German named Saltzmann, who had been a captain in the Kaiser's army, and had got himself cashiered for dishonourable conduct. It was he who had finally and formally raised the standard of revolt, and transformed a series of riots and outrages into definite and deliberate civil war.

In Chicago itself there had been wholesale murders and "executions" of such loyal

citizens of the state as had not been able to escape. But vengeance for these and the other crimes of the revolt came very speedily. The armies of the Republic closed round the city on its landward side, and steamers armed with machine and quick-firing guns played havoc along the Lake Front, and prevented all escape by water. There was a week of bombardment and butchery, of desperate sallies and fierce and bloody repulses. Then, an hour before the bugles were to have sounded for the general assault, the white flag went up, and the remnant of the rebels surrendered at discretion.

This one blow crushed the rebellion as the President had intended that it should ; and as soon as it was over, he lost no time in setting the Republic's house in order. Such of the rebels against whom definite charges of murder, arson, or treasonable conspiracy could be brought home, were either hung or shot, ex-Governor Saltzmann himself having the honour of a special gibbet planted on the roof of the tallest building in Chicago. Those of the Trust-kings whose complicity with the revolt was proved either by the confession of

their tools and dupes, or by other sufficient evidence, were sentenced to confiscation of all their American property, and perpetual banishment from American soil. The rest were told that they were at liberty to go on with their money-making, and to pile up as many millions as they pleased, as long as they kept within the four corners of the present law.

So far so good, but now a very curious situation developed itself, and the Government found that it was confronted by a problem which was unique in the history of national jurisprudence.

During the progress of the revolt from isolated riots to civil war, the country had gradually been cleared by the regular forces, the loyal police, and the vigilance societies, and so the surviving off-scourings of American society had gradually concentrated in Chicago. The consequence was, that when the city surrendered, the Government found itself with several thousand hard and hopeless cases left on its hands. The country, in short, had been purged of its human waste-products, and here was the result of the general

sweeping-up. Then the question arose : What was to be done with them ?

A couple of hundred years ago, or even less, this question would have been answered by general hangings, shootings, and drownings, but nowadays, whatever expediency might say to the contrary, this was impossible. Wholesale banishment, too, was equally not to be thought of, for not even England, that common dumping-ground of international refuse, could be expected to admit such dangerous rubbish as this. To allow it to scatter through the country again would have been as great a crime as the emptying of a tube of cultivated yellow fever or cholera bacilli into a city reservoir would have been, and as for locking them up, there weren't anything like prisons enough in the States to hold them as well as the normal criminal population. Besides, such a mixture could only have led to another revolt, this time on the part of the regular or professional criminals who had so long had the right to consider themselves the spoiled darlings of Uncle Sam.

Altogether it was a problem well calculated to tax the ingenuity of the most capable of legislatures, and the Government was getting sorely puzzled over it, when one night Sinclair, who was now Secretary for Foreign Affairs, called at the White House and found the President discussing the situation with his father, who had loyally and philosophically accepted the new order of things, and was now busily engaged amending his commercial ways on a bare pittance of a couple of million dollars or so.

The rest his son had ruthlessly confiscated to the purposes of the state as having been illegally acquired even under the old Trust Law. Sinclair had come on some business connected with his own office, but this was soon disposed of; and when he had finished it, he lit a fresh cigar, and said—

“Look here, Mr. President, and you too, Mr. Raeburn, I’ve been thinking over this surplus wastrel business, and I’ve worked out a scheme that I’d like your opinion on.”

“If it is anything like practicable, Sinclair, I shall be only too delighted to hear

it, and I don't see how you could have thought out anything that wasn't workable," said the President. "I can assure you it is troubling me more than the whole revolt did."

"In fact, my son seems to think that people who can't make money at all are almost as great a curse to the country as people who make too much," said Raeburn senior, with a dry sort of smile.

"And a trifle worse, perhaps," said Sinclair, "though some people have an idea that those who make too much were in a sort of way responsible for the existence of those who make too little," he continued. "The question is, we've got an army of twenty or thirty thousand of the worst and most useless men and women in this or perhaps any other country on our hands. What are we going to do with them? We can't kill them. We can't banish them. We can't lock them up, and you might as well think of boiling a nigger white as think of reforming them. Well, as far as I can see, there is only one other thing to do. We've got Indian

reservations. Why shouldn't we have a Hard Case reservation?"

"By the good Lord, Sinclair, I believe you've hit it. A reservation, and keep them in it! The very thing. Why on earth did none of us think of that before?"

"That's always what genius gets when it makes the egg stand up!" laughed Sinclair. "But, anyhow, there's the idea, and I think it'll work. You know, for instance, that we have scores of deserted boom-cities lying useless around the country. A good many of them only want a bit of fixing up to make them quite fit for habitation—too good, in fact, for a rabble like this.

"Well, now, suppose the Government picks out the likeliest looking of these, and turns its prisoners of war loose in them. Let them shift for themselves, subject to certain regulations. Let them get what living they can out of the soil, and see if Nature and her hunger-whip can't make them work. Of course we can't let them starve, so for the first year we'd have to find them in rations and stock the land. Once there, let them stop there. Build

a cordon of forts round them if necessary, and let it be understood that the penalty of escape is sudden death. Then leave them to themselves, and let's see what happens."

"Of course you're not forgetting, Mr. Sinclair," said Raeburn senior, after a little silence, "that there are several ex-millionaires among them, and therefore they would very soon have everything that was worth having; and, well, wouldn't that be perpetuating the evils of the old order under Government sanction?"

"If you mean that for a general piece of satire, dad," said the President, gently, "I think I should be justified in saying that that would only be poetic justice. The idea of a millionaire with no money cornering grain, and meat, and greenstuff, and dry goods in a community like that, and dying of anxiety before some one knocked his brains out to burst the corner up would be distinctly picturesque. But anyhow, Sinclair, that is a real good idea of yours. In fact, it's the only good one on the subject. We'll go into it fully to-morrow, and see what can be done."

The result of the deliberations which followed this conversation was the adoption of Sinclair's idea practically in its entirety. A very conveniently situated boom-city was found in Arizona in a fairly good state of repair, and possessing the advantage of standing in the midst of a fairly fertile region, some twelve miles by ten, almost completely surrounded by barren hills and desert country.

It had been called Halleyville after one Halley, an enterprising speculator who had bought the land for a few dollars an acre, and managed to produce apparently conclusive evidence that the hills were full of minerals, mostly gold. The rush and the boom had been excellently engineered, and so Halleyville was a well-built and quite considerable city, which simply needed a few repairs and a new coat of paint to make it look most respectable.

It was, of course, inevitable that the putting of such a population into a place with such a name should instantly inspire the American humorists with the idea of contracting the name to the shorter and more appropriate

form by which the American City of the Plain very shortly became known to the world; and it must be admitted that its new inhabitants were not long in justifying the abbreviation.

Never, perhaps, in the history of the world had so many elements of evil been brought together in one spot. There was not a human being in the place who was not a criminal of some sort, actual or potential, and within their own little territory they were left free to do as they pleased, it being seen that mutual extermination was neither a remote nor an undesirable eventuality.

But they were permitted to have no communication whatever with the outside world, save such as was necessary for the delivery of the monthly dole of Government stores. Within the first week or so after the final location took place, some two hundred were shot in attempting to get back to that society which had cast them off for ever; but as the weeks went by, the attempts and the shootings grew fewer and fewer, till at length they stopped altogether. Forts had been planted at every available outlet, patrols and

bloodhounds guarded both hill and desert, and at length Hellville became convinced that the Government was implacable, and so it turned its attention inward and began to prey upon itself.

CHAPTER VI

HELLVILLE

FROM the practical and strictly economic point of view, Hellville was a distinct and striking success. Thanks to the wise, if hard, provision of absolute seclusion, there was only one channel through which news of its internal doings could reach the outside world, and this was, of course, the depôt through which the provisions, seeds, and agricultural implements provided by the Government were distributed among the inhabitants.

The officials charged with this duty made reports to the criminal department, and although it was intended that these should be kept strictly secret, the American reporter, as usual, proved himself too much for the authorities, and gradually the papers began

to publish dark and gruesome stories of what was going on within the borders of the American Gomorrah. It is quite possible that these were exaggerated, or, at any rate, embroidered by the luxuriant fancy of their writers ; but, still, they were strictly in accordance with the logical possibilities of the unique situation, and so the world accepted them, not without some reason, as being generally true.

According to them, there was no known form of human wickedness that the inhabitants of Hellville did not revel in, and it was further suggested that they had invented several new ones to keep themselves from stagnating.

There had at first been an attempt to set up a sort of elected government, which was to call itself, after its French revolutionary model, the Committee of Public Safety. The election took the shape of a massacre ; but, still, a few who, in the outside world, had been Trustings and electioneering bosses, had managed to get elected somehow, and had passed certain enactments for the regulation of the city.

But the moment any attempt was made to put these enactments into force, the executive was promptly clubbed to death, and the members of the committee were burnt out of their houses. This experiment clearly proved that anarchy pure and simple was the only social or anti-social system possible in such a community.

And so anarchy it was—anarchy, social, moral, and physical, and the stench of its iniquities rose up to heaven, foul as the smoke of the burnt-offerings of Moloch.

Hellville was, in short, working out its own destiny consistently and with perfectly logical precision. By the time it had been in existence a twelvemonth, its original population had decreased by more than half, and the remainder consisted only of the strongest, the vilest, and the most cunning. The temperance societies had succeeded in getting alcohol absolutely prohibited to them in the vain hope that this would give a chance of reformation. Instead of this, their wickedness had become of a cold-blooded, deliberate, calculating sort, a hundred-fold

more hideous than the crimes of excess and intoxication.

They did no work, and lived entirely on the Government rations. Every man and woman loathed and suspected every other, going in constant fear for life and limb. There were no children now, for they, being the weakest and the simplest, had been the first to disappear. And this perhaps, all things considered, was just as well.

Every stealable article of property had been stolen and restolen so many times that there was now practically nothing but common property. There were no pleasures save the indescribable, and the principal pastimes were the torture of those who had made too many enemies, faction fights, and the burning of people out of their houses when they were asleep. When this was done, the spectators were accustomed to make a ring round the burning building, and derive intense amusement from the fights with the flames.

Naturally, under such circumstances, the fame of Hellville spread far and wide over the earth, and from north, south, east, and

west, tourists began to flock towards it, so that from the nearest permissible spots they could look upon it through telescopes set up in favourable situations, the owners of which made very considerable revenues, running as high, in the cases of the more powerful instruments, as five dollars for as many minutes' enjoyment of the spectacle.

This, of course, was only to be expected. In one sense, Hellville was distinctly the most interesting spot on earth—the one place where human wickedness could be as wicked as it liked, and where human depravity could be as depraved as it liked, on the sole condition that it kept to itself, and hurt no one but itself.

Another somewhat curious and unexpected outcome of the situation was, by the way, a very considerable decrease in outside crime, for the unspeakable horrors of Hellville had struck such universal terror into the hearts of the criminal classes that the mere threat of banishment to it proved a greater deterrent than the severest sentence under the ordinary law.

One man who had committed a peculiarly atrocious murder was given his choice between Hellville and electrocution. He tried Hellville for a month. Then he came to the depôt and begged on his knees to be taken away and killed, as he put it, in a decent, civilized sort of way.

Now, if the President and his executive had been allowed to have their own way, the probability is that some day the report would have come that the last two inhabitants of Hellville had either killed each other outright, or wounded each other to death; or when it would have been possible to hang the last inhabitant for the murder of the last but one. They had fully made up their minds, now they had got the essence of the cancerous virus of crime concentrated in one place, that they would keep it there, so that it should prey solely upon itself, and not, as heretofore, strike its roots into the breast of Society, and poison the whole body-corporate of the state.

Who in his senses would think of letting several thousand of physical lepers loose when

they had once been isolated in one spot? Surely, would it not then be as great an act of criminal folly to do the same with such social lepers as these?

But, sound and all as were the theories of the President and the Executive from the practical point of view, there was a good deal to be said against them from the moral standpoint, and on this the churches and philanthropic societies preached and lectured until they succeeded, rightly or wrongly, in rousing the American Conscience to revolt against the American Executive.

However debased and vile the remaining inhabitants of Hellville—of whom there were now about ten thousand left—still, they were human beings, and they had immortal souls to lose or save. What right had the Government to arrogate to itself the prerogatives of Eternal Justice and doom these wretches, not only to a fate of unutterable horror upon earth, but to everlasting perdition hereafter? What would the verdict of Eternal Justice itself be upon a nation which had inaugurated such an impious experiment and carried it

through with such pitiless severity? Did the President wish to make himself as God that he should do this thing?

So thundered the pulpits and so stormed the platforms on the one side. On the other was the cold, dry logic of facts. Society had the right to protect itself at all hazards against the moral contagion of crime. Why should not crime feed upon itself and so poison itself?

Never had American society been so pure, so honest, and so free from crime of all sorts as it was now. True, there was that one plague-spot, but it was fast decreasing, and no infection from it was possible. Curiously enough, too, this view was supported by certain religious sects of the grimmer sort, who turned up their Old Testaments and drew lurid morals from the story of the Cities of the Plain.

But in the end the churches and the platforms gained the victory, and that for the very simple and sufficient reason that they succeeded in winning over the most powerful ally that they could have, and this ally was

the American Woman. There were women still in Hellville, and the churches called upon the American Woman to rescue them. It was no use publishing incontrovertible proofs that these women of Hellville were the vilest where all was vile. The American Woman's own pure soul was aflame, and she said that they should be rescued, and that she herself would do it. And that was enough. The reaction had come, and, whatever the result, it would have to take its course.

Then one morning, about fifteen months after the beginning of the experiment, President Raeburn received a blow which, for the first time, shook him in the course which until now he had pursued so inflexibly; and, for the first time since he had left his father's house on that memorable morning, he had cause to regret he had ever devoted himself to the salvation of his country. Without any previous warning or private intimation of her intentions, his wife came to the White House, at the head of a deputation of the most influential women in Washington, to make a formal request for the necessary powers to

organize a Woman's Mission to Hellville, and calmly announced her own intention of devoting her life to the work, and leading the first body of missionaries into the modern Gomorrah.

CHAPTER VII

SACRIFICE

“ BUT surely, dear, in the name of everything that’s—I won’t say sensible, but possible, you can’t mean what you say. You and other women, at any rate nearly as good as you, are to go in all your white purity and innocence into that inferno of all conceivable crime and wickedness, a place that has only too fearfully earned the name that it is known by all over the world ! No, no, Lucy ; you’ve allowed yourself to be carried away by pulpit eloquence and your own good heart and merciful soul, but for all that it’s impossible. I can’t believe it, and I wouldn’t if I could. Come now, little woman, tell me that all this isn’t true, or at any rate tell me that you’ve thought better of it. Do, dear, unless you

want me to believe that the dream of my whole life is going to be turned into a nightmare just when I am going to realize the highest of my ideals."

It was the evening of the day of the deputation, and the President was at length alone with his wife. This was the end of an appeal that he had made to her—ininitely more eloquent in its purely natural force and the intensity of its genuine emotion than any he had ever made to the thousands whom he had held hanging breathless on the spell of his eloquence—an appeal so earnest that, if he had been pleading for his own life—yes, or even for hers, it could not have been more impassioned.

She had listened to it sitting in a deep armchair by the fire, with her chin resting on her hand, while he had been striding about the room, and every now and then stopping in front of her, as it were, to emphasize one of his arguments. For all the sign that she had given of understanding him, or of interest in what he was saying, she might have been asleep.

The truth was, as Raeburn had yet to learn, one cannot violently disturb any existing order of things, whether good or bad, without producing very unexpected developments, and of these his wife's sudden and apparently inexplicable resolve was one. No one has yet been able to account, either upon the grounds of philosophy or upon those of common sense, for the spirit which, in the later centuries of the Age of Faith, made a gentle, loving mother capable of taking her children by the hand and leading them quietly to the stake at which all were to be burnt alive together ; and the present state of Lucy Raeburn's mind was quite as incomprehensible and yet as indubitable a fact as this.

She seemed, in spirit, to have travelled back to the days when physical martyrdom was considered the crown of spiritual sacrifice. She must have known that there was hardly a chance in a thousand of her or any of her devoted companions coming back alive out of Hellville. The first essential of their mission was that they should go unprotected. She

knew she had but to ask, and ten thousand armed men would have gone—each one with his life in his hand, if necessary, to protect her. But this would have been the mission of force, not of mercy and love. What would be the use of seeking to bring sinners back into the way of righteousness surrounded by loaded rifles and naked sabres?

Her husband had offered this protection—nay, he had implored her to take it, if really in the end she went on this mad mission. But she had refused, knowing, as she well did, that her only strength must be her weakness, and her only protection her utter helplessness. It was, in short, an enthusiasm, a fanaticism that had suddenly taken hold of her. The same spirit which nearly two thousand years before had made the noble Roman maiden choose shame and torment in the arena rather than wedded love and the luxury of a patrician home at the price of sprinkling a few grains of incense on the altar of Diana, had somehow come to possess her, a daughter of America, at the end of the nineteenth century.

To her husband it was an agonized awakening to the possibility—nay, almost to the realization, of an issue which he could never have thought even conceivable. With the purest and most honest intentions, and, as he considered, in the best interests to the state to whose service he had devoted his life, he, like a nineteenth-century Frankenstein, had created a monster to which all that was best and dearest to him in the world was to be sacrificed, and willingly sacrificed, too. That was the peculiar horror of it. All that he had hoped for of real happiness in life had been bound up with, and contained in, this one and only love of his. And now, just in the very first flush of that love's fruition, he was to lose it. In other words, he was doomed to stand by and see the one woman who in all the world was the woman for him deliberately walk over the brink of a Tophet-pit of utter and hopeless vileness and corruption, and vanish into it without one chance in a thousand of ever emerging from it again.

These were the thoughts which formed the rack on which his very soul was being torn

asunder, and it was this that he had been trying to tell her in words which seemed to him, in comparison with his desperate longing to turn her from her fatal purpose, as idle and meaningless as a wind blowing wreaths and wisps of sand about over a desert.

“I’m afraid it’s no use, dear,” she replied, looking up at him half wearily. “My mind is made up—or rather, perhaps, I ought to say that I am firmly convinced that this is a mission that has been laid upon me by Heaven itself. If not, why should such a purpose ever have come to me? Why should every woman worth the name in America have suddenly felt the thrill of revolt so irresistibly against this purpose of yours; and since they have felt it, is not my own feeling a token of what is, perhaps, a Divine appointment to lead them?”

“But don’t you think—no, surely you must have thought of all that you leave behind you—of the vows that you took with me at the altar, of the long life of real honour and usefulness that may lie before us, of the children

that may be born to us, and of all that their lives may contain in the future! Would not this be a nearer and dearer duty than this incomprehensible martyrdom of yours? for, as I believe there's a God above us, I believe that it will be this and nothing less for you—and for me too!”

If anything could have shaken her resolve, it would have been these last four words, spoken as they were; but she had already passed the confines of human reason and emotion into that strange exaltation which for the ordained martyr takes the place of both. She rose quickly from her seat and came and put her two hands on his shoulders and looked him straight in the eyes. As he returned her glance, he saw, to his despair, that hers were shining with a light that he had never seen in them before. If she had been any one else, he would have called it the light of madness.

“Those are sacred duties, Stanley, I think,” she said in a voice whose utter calmness shocked him more than the wildest outburst of passion could have done. “They are sacred,

and they are holy, and they are full of glorious promise here on earth ; but that is no reason why there should not be others higher and holier and more sacred. Do you not remember that story of the Huguenot woman who, rather than recant, left her home to go to the stake, although she knew that her Catholic husband and her children would be forced to witness her torture and death ? ”

“ Yes, yes, ” he said ; “ but that was a matter of religion. That was different ; and, besides, I’m not asking you to recant anything. I am only asking you to give up a project which every one who knows anything of the circumstances has declared to be utter madness, and to stop here at home with me and do the work that God has put nearest to your hand. ”

“ Yes, you are ! ” she said, drawing herself back an inch or so. “ You are asking me to recant a belief, a faith—a faith in God’s infinite mercy, and the belief that, even through such poor instruments as I am myself and those who are going with me, He will work the salvation of those poor wretches in that hell-on-earth

which your heartless, economic science has shown you how to create out yonder in Arizona. No, Stanley dear, I must go ; and I will, for I firmly believe that God Himself has called me to do this work. The greater must come before the less, and the higher before the lower ; but, never fear, I shall go and do the work, and come back again——”

“No, never!” he said in a voice that was broken by something very like a sob. “Once you go into that hell-on-earth, as you rightly call it, you are lost to me for ever, so far as this world is concerned. No, Lucy, no! By all that I hold holy, you shan’t go! No, you shan’t, not even if I have to keep you back by force until this madness of yours is over. You shan’t! You shan’t! I love you too much, and I want you too much, and I’ll keep you, however I have to do it!”

Then he crushed her up in his arms and kissed her with a fierceness that seemed to have something more than passion in it. She submitted without resistance or response, and then she drew back and looked at him

again, and said, in a cold, impersonal sort of tone—

“You can keep me, if you like, Stanley, because you have strength and the law on your side, but you’ll keep me as a slave, not as a wife ; as a woman who remains with you because she is chained to you, not because she loves you ; for, if you did that, I could never think of you as anything else but my master ; not as my husband.”

“Then I suppose you must go,” he said with a harsh, almost savage ring in his voice, “and God forgive you and help me when you have gone ! I suppose there is nothing more to say after that ?”

“No, nothing !” she said, still in the same quiet, trance-like voice. “At least nothing now, I think.”

He let her go and walked towards the door without another word. Halfway he stopped and looked back at her still standing there, white and beautiful and impassive. He took a half-stride back towards her, then stopped and turned again. She never seemed to see him leave the room, but as she heard the door

close she raised her hands to her temples, looked once round the room, and found it empty, and then, where she had stood, she sank in a white, motionless heap on the floor.

CHAPTER VIII

VENGEANCE

So far from being turned from her purpose, the days as they passed only strengthened Lucy Raeburn's resolve to perform what she and her sister-missionaries had thoroughly convinced themselves was a Divine mission. The President had accepted her rejection of his appeal as final; and although he looked upon the day appointed for the setting out of the mission as the day of his wife's death, he nevertheless took every precaution that was possible to strengthen the appallingly slender chance of her returning to the world.

Messages were sent into Hellville telling the inhabitants what was about to happen, and on the day before the appointed one, the President himself went to the depôt and had

an interview with some of the principal citizens, if such a term could be used of a community which had sunk to one common level of vileness and degradation. It was the first glimpse that he had so far had of the result of his own work, and it horrified and appalled him, as he confessed afterwards, beyond his powers of expression.

They had at least been men of a sort when they went in. Now they were rather human incarnations of evil spirits or lost souls that had escaped for awhile from their place of their torment, and been permitted to revisit the world in some semblance of the form they had worn in it. They were neither men nor animals ; they were something else, and that something else was indescribable.

To use an Oriental form of speech, Stanley Raeburn's heart turned to water within him when he saw them and thought of what was going to happen the next day. Still, he nerved himself sufficiently to conquer for the time being both his horror and his agony, and told them, in a few quiet, well-chosen words, what the women of America had

undertaken to do through the agency of his own wife and her sister-missioners. Then he caught himself, by a force of habit, appealing to them as men to respect the splendid courage and devotion which had led them to undertake such a noble task. At the word "men," a ghastly laugh went round, and one of them said—

"There are no men in Hellville now, President. Do we look like men? There are no women, either; only just a lot of males and females—animals, I suppose, some would call us; but if you turned a menagerie loose in this place, I guess the animals would scoot the first show they got to save their morals getting corrupted. Oh, it's a sweet-scented place, I can tell you! Perhaps you'd like to come along with your good lady and spend a week amongst us."

Even the voice was hardly human. It sounded more like that of a beast endowed with the faculty of speech, and the President and all his escort started at the sound of it.

"If I had my way," he replied, "I would come and bring ten thousand men with me

to see that you behave yourselves ; but if you have any manhood left in you, you will remember that these noble women have refused the protection of even a single armed man, and you will respect them. But, mind," he went on in a sterner tone, "if you don't, if any harm befalls them, and if every one of them doesn't return unscathed ten days from now, the next day you shall find a ring of cannon round these hills, and twenty-four hours after that there will be no Hellville. I shall hold the life of every man and woman in the place in pledge for their safety. Forget this, and God forgive you, for America won't !"

"You needn't threaten, President," said the man who had spoken before. "We can guess pretty well what you'd do ; and if we meant mischief, we shouldn't much mind that. We don't take much stock of life in Hellville just now, but you needn't be afraid. There may be some good left in some of us, and the ladies are welcome to come and find it if they can. There'll be no harm done to them."

So the day came, and the devoted little band led by Lucy Raeburn passed through the depôt from the outer world into Hellville. There is no need to describe here the scenes which attended their going, even if that were possible, and so it is better to leave them to be mentally pictured by those who are able to understand the true meaning of a situation that was absolutely unique in the history of the world. Suffice it to say that they went—the incarnation of all that was pure and beautiful and devoted in American womanhood—out of world which was the darker for their going into a Gehenna of infamy which might, perhaps, be made brighter and better for their coming.

The week passed, as it had been expected to do, without word or sign from those who had thus vanished out of the light into the darkness. The whole western world, and a great part of the eastern, meanwhile wrote and talked and thought of little else than this marvellous return of the genius of the nineteenth century to the ways and the faiths of the fourteenth. Those who were connected

by the ties of love and kinship or affection and friendship with the Sisters—now most justly called of Mercy—waited, some in an agony of regret and apprehension, and some in a perfect calm of faith, undisturbed by a single flutter of fear, until the eighth day had passed.

The ninth came, and still no news; and then President Raeburn, on his own initiative, gave orders for ten thousand troops to be under arms and entrained that night, and for twelve batteries of field artillery of six guns, each supplemented by fifty Maxim and Maxim-Nordenfeldt machine-guns, to concentrate with all possible despatch on Hellville. The order was obeyed with an alacrity that was quickened by enthusiastic delight. The whole nation was by this time feeling like one huge spring which for eight days had been held back by an unbreakable cable. This order was the cutting of the cable, and that instant the manhood of America leapt full-armed to its feet, burning with white-hot ardour to save or avenge the fairest flower of its womanhood.

The railways and transport companies made unheard-of efforts to help on the concentration. All day and all night troops marched, batteries rumbled, and trains loaded with living valour and anger thundered over the rails towards the devoted Place of Sin.

The morning of the tenth day dawned, and found the batteries in position, and the troops ready to go in with rifle, revolver, and bayonet to clear Hellville off the face of the earth. As the day wore on, patrols were sent in from the depôt, but none came back. Six o'clock, the appointed hour for the return of the martyrs—as all now believed them to be—came and went, and then President Raeburn, inwardly half mad with the torture of his now realized fears, but outwardly calm with the calmness of despair, issued the order for the troops to stand to their arms and make ready to march in. Then the night came down swift and dark.

What had happened during those ten fateful days, no one knew, and it was destined that no one ever should know. The President had pledged his word to his wife that no

assault should be made before daybreak on the eleventh day; but as midnight approached, and still no tidings came out of the black gulf, in the midst of which the distant lights of Hellville gleamed and twinkled, he so far yielded to the entreaties of his ministers and the friends of those whose unspeakable fate no one now had any doubts of as to order an advance, with the object of peaceably occupying the city until morning.

But meanwhile, as some said afterwards, Heaven itself had wearied of the ghastly experiment and the awful sacrifice that it had entailed. It was the month of November, and the earth was passing on its annual way through the meteoric swarms. That night, just a little after twelve, the skies of Arizona were literally ablaze with shooting stars. Then, as though with one accord, and deliberately guided by some avenging hand, several of the streams ran together and met on the zenith of Hellville.

The President, standing on the highest of the hills beside one of the most powerful batteries, looked up with white face and

straining eyes, and cried, as though in a moment of inspiration—

“‘Vengeance is Mine, saith the Lord; I will repay.’ God’s will be done!”

The already moving troops stopped in their tracks as though some mysterious influence had conveyed the President’s words to them. For a few moments the midmost heaven was a sea of leaping, darting flames. Then out of this fell patches and splashes and white, tangled streams of fire; and then in an instant all the air for twenty miles around was filled with a hissing, screaming, roaring tumult, through which thundered out the crashes of explosions such as no earthly cannonade had ever rivalled.

Straight down from heaven to earth the blazing, shrieking storm descended, too swift for human eyes to follow. Then, as it came, so it passed, and the rest of the shining visitants sped noiselessly through the upper regions of the atmosphere, and lost themselves in the darkness and silence of outer space.

With the earliest glimmer of dawn, the

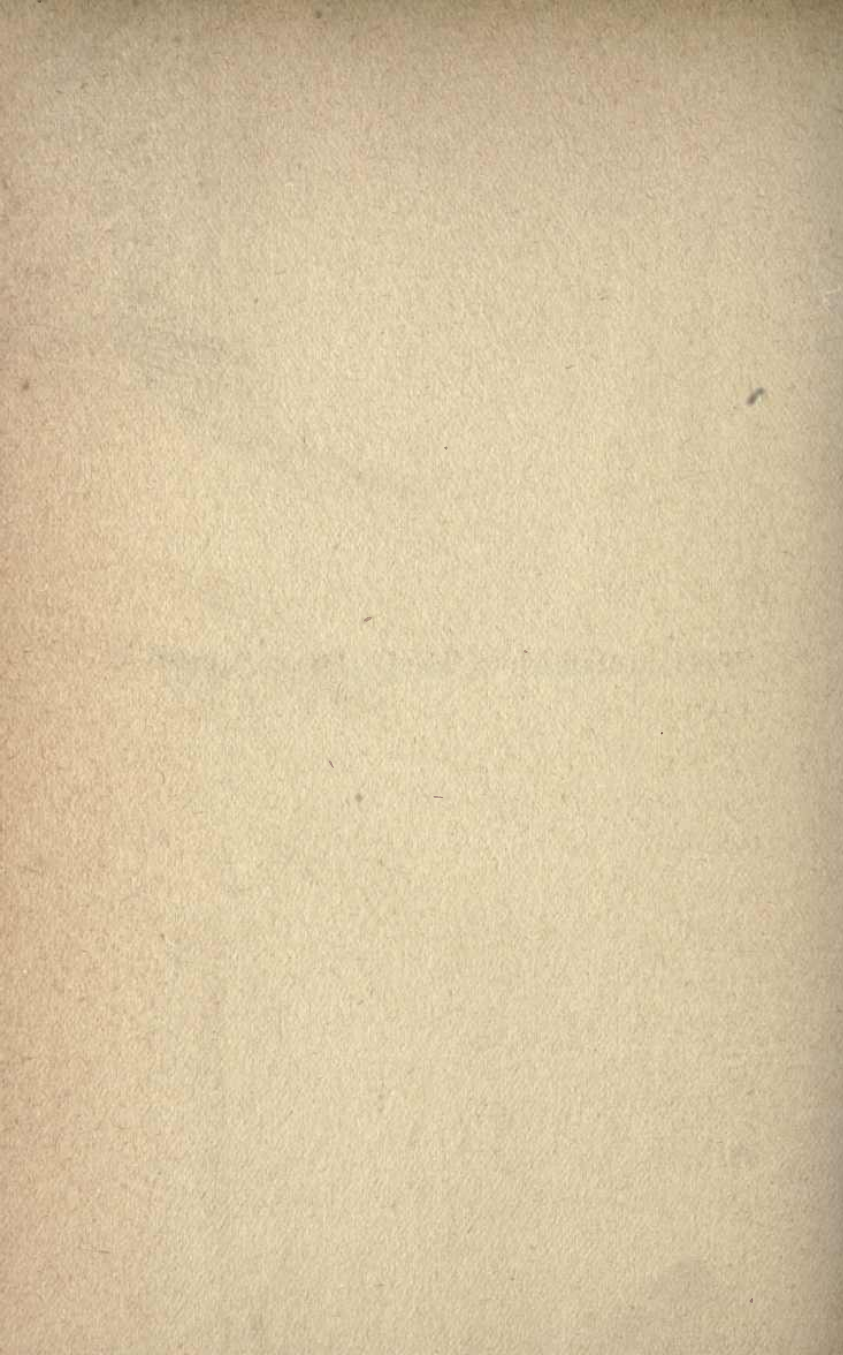
troops marched in towards what had once been the site of Hellville, but they found no trace either of the city or its inhabitants. They could not even penetrate into the plain on which it had stood, so thickly was it strewn with innumerable meteorites and fragments weighing only a few ounces to great blocks that must have weighed tons, and all these were blue-hot still.

It was manifest that when they had reached the earth, they must have been white-hot, and there were thousands upon thousands of them, from which may, without much difficulty, be deduced the fashion in which the last dwellers in Hellville had passed away from a world which had found that it had no use for them.

Later on, thousands of the meteorites were built up into a vast pyramid, and on the top of this was placed a great cross of plain white stone. It bore no inscription. The dead needed no epitaph, since of the evil who had died there none could say evil enough to do them justice; and of the good who had died with them, no human words could have said good enough; but as long as good and evil

remain in the world, the white cross standing on its pyramid built of Heaven's own missiles of vengeance will continue to tell the story of Hellville, and point its fateful moral to all future generations of men.

THE GREAT CRELLIN COMET



THE GREAT CRELLIN COMET

I

IN the first place, perhaps it had better be said at once that the greatest and most imminent peril that the planet Terra has ever been threatened with since it became a world suited to the habitation of men and monkeys, would never have been averted if, in the first place, Mr. Emerson G. Crellin had not made a practically uncountable and ever-increasing pile of dollars by almost every one of the multifarious methods known to the dollar-piling genius of the Great Republic ; and if, in the second place, he had not been possessed of two hobbies, upon either of which he was

prepared to spend the last dollar in his bottomless pockets.

As it would be difficult to say which of these hobbies was to him the more important, we may take as the first of them that which was calculated to bulk most largely in the eyes of the world. This was astronomy. Among the many millionaire countrymen of his who have so magnificently endowed the temples of this noblest of the sciences, Emerson G. Crellin was determined not to be the least. But what he had done for astronomy was done, not in his native land, but amidst the sylvan beauties of the Surrey hills, and it was here that his second hobby came in. He had a daughter, whom he had somewhat boldly but, as the event proved, justifiably, christened Auriole, and his twin ambition to that of finding the means of making wider and longer excursions into the realms of space than any one else had done was to see the glitter of a coronet—none of your new-creation, bobbed-up-with-the-last-

social-earthquake coronets, as he put it, but one that dated back at least to the days when the world had not yet been enriched by the addition of what was some day to be the United States—shining on the brow of his darling Auriole.

It was this that had brought him with his millions and his motherless daughter to the country in which circumstances were most favourable to the making of such an investment, and this was also the reason why the famous Crellin Observatory and the immortal Crellin Reflector with its sixty-four-inch object-glass was located on the Surrey hills instead of on the Alleghanies or the slopes of the Rockies. The observatory was built on the summit of Leith Hill, which had been acquired by the further acquisition and gift in perpetuity to the nation of an addition of about a thousand acres to Hurtwood Common. Leith-hill Place had been included in the purchase and exchange, and here dwelt the millionaire and his daughter with another

member of the household who may as well be introduced at once.

This was Arthur Lennox, a man still in the early thirties, who had not only been first of his year in mathematics at London and Cambridge—which is the same thing as saying he was Gold Medallist and Senior Wrangler—but he had so far distinguished himself in original astronomical research that he had gone straight from Cambridge to Greenwich, and he had already made himself one of the most distinguished of the Astronomer Royal's assistants, when Mr. Emerson G. Crellin offered him the seductive prospect of becoming chief of the Crellin Observatory at an almost dazzling salary, and having the finest telescope and one of the best collections of astronomical instruments in the world absolutely at his disposal.

He was a staid, quiet, strong-faced and strong-limbed man, with not much of the student apparent about him save the squareness of his head, the breadth of his brows,

and a certain suspicion of dreaminess lurking in the clear grey eyes that looked out from beneath them. But underneath the gravity and chilliness of his scientific exterior there lay the nature of an entirely human man; and this being the case, it was hardly to be expected that he should live for months together under the same roof and in almost constant companionship with one of the most delightful products of the union of the East and the West, the old and the new Anglo-Saxondom, or, in other words, one of the fairest daughters of the Imperial Race of earth, without knowing it as such a man might be expected to know it.

But he also knew the purpose which had brought her to England, and had so given him at once the pleasure and the pain of her acquaintance. His own private opinion of this purpose was by no means an exalted one, but, then, it was a biassed opinion, and he knew it. He knew also that his business at Leith Hill had only just as much to do

with this world as was included within the fence which encircled the Observatory buildings. The rest was extra-terrestrial. He recognized, in short, that his proper place was far away in the fields of Space, among planets and suns and stars, star-mists and nebulae; and that he had a great deal more concern with the eccentricities of the orbits of comets than he had with that of human nature complicated by attractions far more difficult of calculation than that of gravity.

He saw all this clearly, and accepted the situation with perfect loyalty. He did not even admit to himself how powerful this attraction was for him. He only recognized that, to use an astronomical simile, conjunction was an impossibility, and that, so far as human probabilities went, it was not his destiny ever to become the companion of this radiant star, already as far removed from him in one sense as the stars which he could only see with the help of his huge telescope, were in another.

As regards Miss Auriole herself, she also, to all appearances, accepted the situation in the most perfectly sensible fashion. She, too, knew her destiny, and didn't appear to have the slightest objection to it. All that she stipulated for, as she had an absolute and admitted right to do, was that the possessor of the coronet should be, as she put it, a man as well as a lord; and that, as far as possible, she should herself have the unfettered choosing of him. Subject always to this paramount consideration, she and the young astronomer were the very best of friends and even companions, and nothing was more delightful to her quick and comprehensive intelligence than the excursions which they took together from the top of Leith Hill into the star-strewn fields of immensity, wandering among the radiant worlds which make their eternal march along the Milky Way, or visiting planet after planet of the Solar System—a proceeding which, in comparison with their wider travels, seemed almost to resemble the making of a

series of calls at the houses of their friends on the country-side.

It was a little after four o'clock one cloudless morning in July that the Professor, as Mr. Crellin took a sort of ceremonious pride in styling his chief astronomer, came out of the Equatorial House and locked the door behind him.

When he had done so, he looked up to the eastward, where the Morning Star hung flashing like a huge white diamond in splendid solitude against the brightening background of the sky. His strong face looked somewhat pale and drawn, his lips were tightly pressed together, and his eyes, which had hardly known three hours' sleep in as many nights, had a look in them that was not to be altogether accounted for by mere weariness.

And yet, tired as he undoubtedly was, he did not take the path which led down to the house after he had let himself out of the inclosure. His work was over for the night, and he might have gone to bed till lunch-time

had he chosen. But instead of that, after another long look up at the Morning Star, he turned away with a sigh that might have been one of weariness or something else, and with his hands thrust deep into his trouser pockets, he began to walk with downbent head and slow, irregular strides westward towards Hurtwood Common.

When he sat down to breakfast that morning at half-past eight, Mr. Crellin said to him in the half-paternal, half-deferential tone in which he usually addressed him—

“Say, Professor, I guess I shall have to lock that observatory up and send you over to see how they’re getting on with their star-finding and comet-hunting in the States. You’re just wearing yourself out body and brain over this new comet of yours. Of course it’s very satisfactory that the Crellin Reflector should have got hold of it before any one else has a notion that there is such a thing knocking around ; but still, you know, we can’t have its discoverer wearing himself to a shadow

before the time comes to take the glory of it."

"No, indeed; that's not to be talked about," said Miss Auriole, looking with a just perceptible admiration at the still fairly substantial frame of the shadow; and as she did so, it seemed to her, whether rightly or wrongly, that there was just a suspicion of a stoop in the broad shoulders, and ever so slight a falling forward of the well-poised, erectly carried head. "I do believe, Professor, that this is about the third night that you have had no sleep; and here, instead of getting in forty winks during the day, you've been blinding yourself over those wildernesses of figures and tangling your brain up with equations and cube roots and things. I know something about them, for I shall never forget my struggles with them at Vassar. Would it be impertinent to ask how much longer you are going to make yourself a martyr to science in this way?"

"Perhaps until the end of the—— Good

Heavens! what nonsense I am talking!" said the Professor, suddenly looking up from his plate with the expression of a man just awakened from a dream. "I really do think I have been going too long without sleep, and I must try to get some to-day. You see, the man who discovers a new comet is like one of the old discoverers the first time he sighted the shore of a new continent. The temptation to go on is irresistible, and one is apt to forget that, after all, a brain is something else than a machine. Still, I don't think you need have any anxiety about me. You know, I have learnt to take my sleep as a Red Indian takes his meals, and when I have settled the question of this precious comet, I shall probably go to bed and stop there the best part of a week."

"The question?" echoed Mr. Crellin. "What's that? I didn't know there was any question about it. You *have* discovered it, haven't you, Professor?"

"I have made a discovery, Mr. Crellin,"

he replied, speaking rather more seriously than the circumstances seemed to warrant; "but whether I have found a hitherto unknown comet or not is another matter. What I have done is this: Thanks to that magnificent instrument of yours, I have seen a comet in a part of the heavens where no comet ought to be just now, according to the calculations of all the known orbits and periods; but whether it is a new one or a known one, which, by one cause or another, has been deflected from its orbit and started off on a new course, is the question of which I spoke just now. That I have not yet been able to decide; but, of course, in any case," he went on, with a smile which Miss Auriole thought somewhat lacking in spontaneity, "the discovery will be an important one—very important, I fear—that is to say, of course, I expect—and the honour of the Crellin Reflector cannot fail to be duly vindicated."

"And also that of the discoverer," corrected

Miss Auriole; "for, after all, however good the telescope is, it's only a mechanical sort of eye that it needs a brain to use properly, and if the brain doesn't take care of itself, the eye won't be much use; so I want you to promise me just now, Professor, that you are going to lie down the moment breakfast's done, and sleep straight on to lunch-time. "You know," she added, colouring ever so slightly, "we're having a garden-party this afternoon, and Lord Westerham and his mother are coming, and I was going to ask you to do the honours of the Observatory, if you hadn't anything else very particular to do."

"I can promise that easily," he replied, looking, as she thought, a trifle earnestly at her out of his tired eyes, "as it is exactly what I was going to do. I shall not have to be at the telescope till nearly eleven to-night, so I shall have plenty of time to get a good nap and do what I can in the way of helping to entertain your friends—and—and his lordship, whom, by the way, I don't think

I've told you before, was rather a chum of mine when we were at Trinity together. Westerham's about as good a specimen of the very falsely styled effete aristocracy of this country as a man would wish to call a friend or—a woman—well, something else."

II

THE garden-party was both socially and scientifically a great success, and even the young Professor appeared to enjoy it in his usual quiet, grave fashion. The great Reflector was, of course, the supreme object of interest, though nothing was said about the new comet which had been discovered swimming in space far outside the confines of all known systems, for that was still a secret, and was to remain so until all calculations had been completed, and Arthur Lennox was able to tell his brother astronomers, all over the world, how they were to point their telescopes in order to observe the newly arriving stranger from the unknown regions beyond the worlds.

Lennox, as has already been mentioned,

had been at Trinity with Lord Westerham, and they had remained good friends since. In fact, it was partly through his lordship's influence as well as his own talents that the young astronomer had got to Greenwich. But even these circumstances hardly seemed to warrant a very direct and intimate question which he put point-blank to him as they were walking together to Ockley Station after the party.

“Westerham,” he said, suddenly stopping and looking him straight in the eyes, “I am going to ask you a question which you will probably think a very impertinent one ; and, further, whether you answer it or not, I am going to ask you not to ask me why I ask it. There now, there are a good many ‘asks’ in that, but I wanted to put it plainly, even at the expense of a little tautology.”

Lord Westerham was one of the frankest and most open-minded of men, and he stared in a somewhat puzzled fashion at Lennox as he replied—

“My dear fellow, you are at perfect liberty to ask me what question you like; and, if I can, I’ll answer it without asking any more questions; but look here, old man,” he broke off with a sudden change in his voice, “I hope it’s nothing—well, unpleasant—nothing that’s going to bring any trouble upon you, for instance—for, ’pon my word, I never saw even you look quite as serious as you do now. But, at any rate, whatever it is, out with it; you can’t offend me even if you tried.”

“You are about the only man; I think, I should find it possible to ask such a question,” Lennox replied, speaking hesitatingly and rather awkwardly, “for it’s—it’s a precious awkward one for any man to ask another. To put it as shortly as I can, it is just this: Have you made up your mind to marry Miss Crellin; and, if so, is the matter irrevocable?”

Lennox, feeling very like a man in the dock who has just heard the fatal “guilty” spoken by the foreman of the jury, waited with a very

plainly depicted expression of mingled apology and apprehension on his slightly flushed face. Lord Westerham's eyes and mouth opened together, but it was a smile that opened his mouth, and there were strong symptoms of a laugh in his honest blue eyes. Then he took a step forward, and his hand fell with a slap on Lennox's shoulder.

"My dear fellow," he said, "why, don't you know——"

"Know what?" said Lennox, with something like a gasp. "You're not——"

"No," said his lordship, shaking his head and trying to look serious—"no, I'm not engaged to her. What I was going to say was, don't you know that I have been engaged to my cousin Lilian Northcote ever since she was old enough—well—to understand the difference between being kissed by a girl and by a boy? No, no; you needn't have any fears of me, old man. Not even Miss Auriole's beauty, with all the glitter of the old gentleman's millions as a halo, would tempt me from

that allegiance ; and then, you know, happily the Westerham coronet doesn't want regilding. But now that I know what your question is, I am rather sorry that I promised not to ask why you asked it. Still, I dare say I can give a pretty good guess at it, so I suppose I must be content with that."

"A pretty good guess at it!" said Lennox to himself about half an hour later, when he was striding back alone. "A pretty good guess! Good God, if he only could, I wonder what he would think! He with all his splendid prospects and, as he believes, a whole long life of happiness in front of him; and thirteen months to-day—yes, almost to this very hour—well, for the present, ignorance is bliss.

"And now, I wonder what the old gentleman will say. Anyhow, that's one load off my mind. There won't be anything mean about it. He or she, or both of them, may say 'Yes' or 'No;' but, after all, neither of them will be able to think there is anything

dishonourable in it. A world for a girl! It sounds quite romantic. Fancy me as a hero of a romance, and one, too, if it only comes off, that will put Jules Verne and Flammarion somewhat in the shade! Ah, well! 'sufficient unto the day,' etc. I think I'll tackle the old man first. No, I don't think I will. It is the conventional way, of course; but the circumstances are anything but conventional, and if she won't have anything to do with me, well, there's an end of it—and possibly of the world too. Seems a rather selfish way to put it. In fact, some exalted moralists might call it a bit mean, but—ah! ten o'clock."

He stopped suddenly as the soft chime of an old church clock came drifting along the valley. He listened to the four chimes, and then to the ten slow, clear strokes that tolled out upon the still air of the July evening. At the tenth he started, and a shudder ran through his well-knit, muscular frame. Then, turning his face upwards towards the well-known constellations that were growing

brighter in the darkening sky, he began his walk and his reverie again.

“Just fancy! A year and a month from to-day that very clock may be sounding the death-knell of the human race, striking the hour of Doom, in fact; and forty-six minutes and thirty-eight seconds later—— Phew! it isn't a pleasant thing even for the callously scientific mind to contemplate. It seems almost wrong to tell her anything about it, but—rubbish! what an ass I am! It's got to be known, and as soon as the Lick and the Yerkes people get on to it, it won't take them very long to work out the orbit and period; and wouldn't they just score nicely over the discoverer of the Crellin Comet? No, I shall tell her myself; and I may as well tell her to-night as any other time. It's rather lucky I made that promise to show it to her to-night for the first time. I couldn't have a better opportunity.”

The result of this resolution was that a little after half-past eleven Miss Auriole was

looking wonderingly into the eye-piece of the great Reflector, watching a tiny little patch of mist, somewhat brighter towards one end than the other, like a little wisp of white smoke rising from a very faint spark, that was apparently floating across an unfathomable sea of darkness. She seemed to see this darkness through, and behind a swarm of stars of all sizes and colours. They appeared very much more wonderful and glorious and important than the little spray of white smoke, because she hadn't yet the faintest conception of its true import to her and every other human being on earth; but she was very soon to know now.

While she was watching it in breathless silence, in which the clicking of the mechanism which kept the great telescope moving so as to exactly counteract the motion of the machinery of the universe sounded like the blows of a sledge-hammer on an anvil, Arthur Lennox stood beside her, wondering should he begin to tell her, and what he should say.

At last she turned away from the eye-piece, and looked up at him with something like a scared expression in her pretty eyes, and said—

“It’s very wonderful, isn’t it, that one should be able to see all that just by looking into a little bit of a hole like that? And you tell me all those great big bright stars around your comet are so far away that if you look at them in the ordinary way you don’t even see them—and there they look almost as if you could put out your hand and touch them. It’s very wonderful, isn’t it? And just a little bit awful, too!” she added, with a little shiver.

“Yes,” he said, speaking slowly and even more gravely than she thought the subject warranted, “yes, it is both wonderful and, in a way, awful. Do you know that some of those stars you have seen in there are so far away that the light which you see them by may have left them when Solomon was king in Jerusalem? They may be quite dead and dark now, or reduced into fire-mist by collision

with some other star. And then, perhaps, there are others behind them again so far away that their light has not even reached us yet, and may never do while there are human eyes on earth to see it."

"Yes, I know," she said, smiling. "You don't forget that I have been to college—and light travels about a hundred and eighty-six thousand miles a second, doesn't it? But come, Professor, aren't you what they call stretching the probabilities a little when you say that the light of some of them will never get here, as far as we're concerned? I always thought that we had a few million years of life to look forward to before this old world of ours gets worn out."

"There are other ends possible for this world besides wearing out, Miss Auriole," he answered, this time almost solemnly. "Other worlds have, as I say, been reduced to fire-mist. Some have been shattered to tiny fragments to make asteroids and meteorites—stars and worlds, in comparison with which

this bit of a planet of ours is nothing more than a speck of sand, a mere atom of matter drifting over the wilderness of immensity. In fact, such a trifle is it in the organism of the universe, that if some celestial body collided with it—say a comet with a sufficiently solid nucleus—and the heat developed by the impact turned it into a mass of blazing gas, an astronomer on Neptune, one of our own planets, wouldn't even notice the accident, unless he happened to be watching the earth through a powerful telescope at the time."

"And is such an accident, as you call it, possible, Professor?" she asked, jumping womanlike, by a sort of unconscious intuition, to the very point to which he was so clumsily trying to lead up. "I thought you spoke rather queerly about this comet of yours at breakfast this morning. I hope there isn't any chance of its getting on to the same track as this terrestrial locomotive of ours. That would be just awful, wouldn't it? Why,

what's the matter, Professor? You are going to be real ill, I know! You had better get down to the house, and go to bed. It's want of sleep, isn't it? You'll be driving yourself mad that way. Come to the couch and lie down for a moment. You look as if you are going to fall. Shall I call Mr. Sandheim?"

A sudden and terrible change had come over him while she was speaking. It was only for the moment, and yet to him it was an eternity. It might, as she said, have been the want of sleep, for insomnia plays strange tricks sometimes with the strongest of intellects; or, more probably, it might have been that and the horror of his secret working on the great love that he had for this girl who was sitting there alone with him in the silence of that dim room and in the midst of the glories and the mysteries of the universe.

His eyes had grown fixed and staring, and looked sightlessly at her, and his face shone ghastly pale in the dim light of the solitary shaded lamp. Certainly, one of those

mysterious crises which are among the unsolved secrets of psychology had come upon him like some swift access of delirium.

He no longer saw her sitting there by the telescope, calm, gracious, and beautiful. He saw her as, by his pitiless calculations, he must do that time thirteen months to come—with her soft grey eyes starting, horror-driven, from their orbits, staring blank and wide and hideous at the overwhelming hell that would be falling down from heaven upon the devoted earth. He saw her fresh young face withered and horror-lined and old, and the bright-brown hair grown grey with the years that would pass in those few final moments. He saw the sweet red lips that had tempted him so often to wild thoughts parched and black, wide open and gasping vainly for the breath of life in the hot, burnt-out atmosphere.

Then he saw—no, it was only a glimpse; and with that the strange trance-vision ended. What must have come after that would in all certainty have driven him mad there and

then, before his work had even begun ; but at that moment, swiftly severing the darkness that was falling over his soul, there came to him an idea, bright, luminous, and lovely as an inspiration from Heaven itself, and with it came back the calm sanity of the sternly disciplined intellect, prepared to contemplate not only the destruction of the world he lived in, but even the eternal loss of the woman he loved—the only human being who could make that world beautiful or even tolerable to him.

The vision was blotted out from the sight of his soul, the darkness cleared away from his eyes, and he saw her again as she still was. It had all passed in a few moments, and yet in them he had been down into hell, and he had come back to earth and her presence.

Almost by the time she had uttered her last word, he had regained command of his voice, and he began clearly and quietly to answer the question which was still echoing through the chambers of his brain.

“It was only a little passing faintness,

thank you, and something else which you will understand when I have done, if you have patience to hear me to the end," he said, looking straight at her for a moment, and then beginning to walk slowly up and down the room past her chair. "I am going to surprise you, perhaps to frighten you, and very probably to offend you deeply," he began again in a quiet, dry sort of tone, which somehow impressed her against all her convictions that he didn't much care whether or not he did any or all of these things; but there was something else in his tone and manner which held her to her seat silent and attentive, although she was conscious of the distinct desire to get up and run away.

"Your guess about the comet, or whatever it may prove to be, is quite correct. I don't think it is a new one. From what I have seen of it so far, I have every reason to believe that it is Gambart's comet, which was discovered in 1826, and became visible to the naked eye in the autumn of 1833. It then crossed the

orbit of the earth one month after the earth had passed the point of intersection. After that, some force divided it in two, and in '46 and '52 it reappeared as two twin comets constantly separating. Now it would seem that the two masses have come together again; and, as they are both larger in bulk and greater in density, it would appear that, somewhere in the distant fields of space, they have united with some other and denser body; and the result is, that what is practically a new comet, with a much denser nucleus than any hitherto seen, is approaching our system; and, unless a miracle happens, or there is a practically impossible error in my calculations, it will cross the orbit of the earth thirteen months from to-day, precisely at the moment that the earth itself arrives at the point of intersection."

So far Auriole had listened to the stiff scientific phraseology with more interest than alarm; but now she took advantage of a little pause, and said—

"And the consequences, Professor? I mean

the consequences to us as living beings. You may as well tell me everything now that you've gone so far."

"I am going to," he said, stopping for a moment in his walk. "And I am going to tell you something more than that. Granted that what I have said happens, one of two things must follow. If the nucleus of the comet is solid enough to pass through our atmosphere without being dissipated, it will strike the surface with so much force that both it and the earth will probably be transformed into fiery vapour by the conversion of the motion of the two bodies into heat. If not, its contact with the oxygen of the earth's atmosphere will produce an aerial conflagration which, if it does not roast alive every living thing on earth, will convert the oxygen by combustion into some irrespirable and poisonous gas, and so kill us by a slower, but no less fatal, process."

"Horrible!" she said, shivering this time. "You sound like a judge pronouncing sentence

of death on the whole human race. I suppose there is no possibility of reprieve? Well, go on, Professor; is there anything else?"

"Yes," he said, "there is something else. Those are the scientific facts, as far as they go. I am going to tell you the chances now, and something beside. There is just one chance—one possible way of averting universal ruin from the earth, and substituting for it nothing more serious than an unparalleled display of celestial fireworks. All that will be necessary is perfect calculation and unstinted expenditure of money."

"Well," she said, "can't you do the calculations, Professor? and hasn't dad got millions enough? How could he spend them better than saving the whole human race from being burnt alive? There isn't anything else, is there?"

"There *was* something else," he said, stopping in front of her again. She had risen to her feet as she said the last words, and the two stood facing each other in the dim light,

while the mechanism of the telescope kept on clicking away in its heedless mechanical fashion, and kept the aperture of the great instrument constantly in such a position that the image of the comet still hovered unseen in the mirror of the Reflector.

“ Yes, there was something else, and I may as well tell you, after all ; for even if you never see or speak to me again, it won't stop the work being done now. I could have kept this discovery to myself till it would have been too late to do anything, for no other telescope without my help would even find the comet for four months to come, and even now there is hardly a day to be lost, if the work is to be done in time ; and then—well, I suppose I must have gone mad for the time being, for I thought—you will hardly believe me, I suppose—that I could make you the price of the world's safety.

“ From that, you will see how much I love you, however mad I may have been. Losing you, I would have lost the world with you.

If my love lives, I thought, the world shall live ; if not, the world shall die. But, just now, when you thought I was taken ill, I had a sort of vision, and I saw you—yes, you, Miss Auriole—as, if my one chance fails, you must infallibly be this night thirteen months hence. I didn't see any of the other millions who would be choking and gasping for breath and writhing in the torture of the universal fire—I only saw you and my own baseness in thinking even for a moment that such a bargain would be possible. That is all."

She had not interrupted him even by a gesture, but as she listened a thousand signs and trifles, which alone had meant nothing to her, now seemed to come together and make one clear and definite revelation. His plainly, almost brutally, spoken words had done the rest. This strong, reserved, silent man had all the time loved her so desperately that he was going mad about her—so mad that, as he had said, he had even dreamed of weighing the possession of her single, insignificant self

against the safety of the whole world, with all its innumerable millions of people—mostly as good in their way as she was.

Well, it might be that the love of such a man was a thing worthy to weigh even against a coronet—not in her eyes, for there was no question of that now, but in her father's. But that was a matter for future consideration. She drew herself up a little stiffly, and said, in just such a tone as she might have used if what he had just been saying had had no personal interest for her—had, in fact, been about some other girl—

“I think it's about time to be going down to the house, Professor, isn't it? I am quite sure a night's rest won't do you any harm. No, I'm not offended, and I don't think I'm even frightened yet. It somehow seems too big and too awful a thing to be only frightened at—too much like the Day of Judgment, you know. I am glad you've told me—yes, everything—and I'm glad that what you call your madness is over. You will be able to do your

work in saving the world all the better, only don't tell dad anything except—well—just the scientific and necessary part of it. You know, saving a world is a very much bigger business than winning a woman—at least it is in one particular woman's eyes—and I've learnt somewhere in mathematics something about the greater sometimes including the less. And now, don't you think we had better be going down into the house? It's getting quite late."

III

It was about two months later, when Professor Lennox had verified and reverified every figure in his calculations, and made a good many more besides, that he at last sent the news of his discovery to the principal observatories of the world, coupled with the request that his own figures should be checked and any possible errors pointed out.

The results of this ominous communication were instantaneous and terrific. With one accord every powerful telescope in the world was turned upon that portion of the distant fields of space out of which the strange and terrible visitant was rushing at a speed of thousands of miles an hour to that awful trysting-place where it and the planet Terra

were to mingle in fiery union. Every astronomer, from California to Greenwich, and from Pike's Peak to Melbourne, set himself to work out the orbit and period of the comet, and a few days later the awful news flashed over the wires of the world, "Lennox figures absolutely correct. Collision with Crellin Comet apparently inevitable. Consequences incalculable."

This was the intelligence which the civilized nations of the earth found in their newspapers on the morning of the first of September. It was followed by digests of the calculations, and these again with speculations of various sorts, some solemn and deliberate, others wild beyond the dreams of phantasy. Those who had for more than a generation made handsome incomes by prophesying the end of the world to occur at about an average of every seven years, gambled with absolute certainty on the shortness of the public memory, revised their figures, and proved to demonstration that this was the very thing they had been foretelling all along.

First there came blank incredulity ; then a sort of stupor, which meant that the popular mind was veering round ; then panic, wild, universal, and uncontrollable. The earth had only another twelvemonth or so to live ! The whole human race was doomed to death by fire ! What did it matter what anybody did—what *could* anybody do, in fact ?

So the planet was in distinct danger of becoming one colossal lunatic asylum, when one morning—it was the fifteenth of September—the *Daily Mail* came out with a double-barrelled interview with Professor Lennox, who was now by far the most famous man in the world, and Mr. Emerson G. Crellin, proprietor of the great Crellin Reflector, and godfather, as it were, of the approaching destroyer.

It was far and away the most interesting communication that had ever appeared in a newspaper, for it informed the world that the discoverer of the worst peril which had ever threatened the human race, and the man

whose wealth and devotion to science had made the discovery possible, had all this time been quietly laying their heads together and elaborating a scheme which, as they both confidently asserted, offered the only hope of saving humanity from the impending peril, and would most probably achieve that object.

The idea was simply stupendous, and it lost none of its magnificence by the modesty with which the Professor described it to the interviewer.

“There is nothing new about the idea,” he said, “except its application to the present circumstances. Of course you have read Jules Verne’s ‘Journey to the Moon’? Well, my plan is simply to do the same thing on a much bigger scale, only instead of firing men and dogs and chickens out of my cannon, I am going to fire something like a ton and a half of explosives. The danger is in the contact of the nucleus of the comet with the earth’s atmosphere. If that can be prevented, there is no further cause for alarm, so, to put

the matter quite shortly, my projectile will have an initial velocity of ten miles a second, and therefore a range that is practically infinite, for that velocity would, if necessary, carry it beyond the sphere of the earth's attraction.

“Hence, if the gun is properly trained and fired at precisely the right moment, and if the fuse does its work, the projectile will pass into the nucleus of the comet, and before the heat has time to melt the shell, the charge will explode and the nucleus—the only dangerous part—will either be blown to fragments or dissipated in gas. Therefore, instead of what I might be allowed to call a premature Day of Judgment, we shall simply have a magnificent display of celestial fireworks, which will probably amount to nothing more than an unparalleled shower of shooting stars, as they are popularly called. The details of the experiment will be practically the same as those which Jules Verne describes—I mean as regards the making and firing of the cannon—only, as

we haven't time to get a big-enough hole dug, we have bought a colliery in Durham which has a perpendicular shaft nearly a mile deep, and which is happily exactly in the right latitude and longitude. Everything is arranged, and we shall begin work at once."

Even the *Daily Mail* interviewer was for a few moments paralyzed by the quiet and yet stupendous audacity of the scheme; and when he had got his breath back, he turned to Mr. Crellin and said—because just then he could think of nothing else to say—

"And your share in this wonderful work, sir, I presume——"

"Just finding the dollars, sir; that's all," replied the old gentleman soberly. "If we can put the business through, they couldn't be better used; and if we can't, I reckon they won't be much use to me or any one else. Other people can come in, if they like; but, if not, I figure that I can foot the bill myself. It'll be worth the dollars, anyhow, if it's only to show what New-World enterprise combined

with Old-World brains can do in the way of bringing off a real big thing. I guess we'll give the planet Terra a new satellite, even if we don't stop the comet ; and if we all have to go to glory through a transformation scene of blue blazes, I for one shall go with the comforting knowledge that I've done something to enrich the Solar System. You see, we can't lose much, if the Professor's figures are right, and we do stand in to win something like eternal glory—and that's good enough for me."

The sale of the *Daily Mail* that morning ran far above its own best records, and by noon the news was all over the world, which promptly went mad again, but after a different and more cheerful fashion. Every existing copy of the "Journey to the Moon" was bought up within an hour ; Camille Flammarion's wonderful story, "The End of the World," had already been translated into every civilized language, and was selling by millions ; while Mr. H. G. Wells's even more extraordinary

“War of the Worlds,” although it had no actual bearing on the great subject, was bought up in colossal editions with almost equal avidity.

The moment that the Professor’s project was made public, money began to flow in from all parts of the world. The iron and steel industries of the north of England were practically bought up for the time being; whole armies of workmen toiled night and day in relays at the preliminary work of making the great cannon. America, not to be behind in the good work of saving the world from its approaching peril, set to work to build an even bigger weapon with which to bombard the still invisible assailant of the earth.

International jealousies and hatreds vanished all the world over; mankind became united in the confronting of the common and the universal menace, and nothing that hands or brains could do to make the great experiment a triumphant success was left undone.

At length, on the first of July, the long and feverishly-awaited word went forth. If

the sky on the night of the fourth was clear of clouds, the Crellin Comet, as it was now universally called, would become visible to the naked eye at forty-six minutes and thirty-eight seconds past ten—that is to say, precisely four weeks before the moment at which its nucleus would come into collision with the earth, provided always that the Professor's projectile failed to do its work.

Of course, it had been for some months within range of the tens of thousands of telescopes which had been directed towards it. Photographs of it had been published broadcast over the world, and practically every civilized, and a great many uncivilized, human beings were familiar with its appearance, but this did not diminish the universal interest in the announcement.

While it could only be seen through telescopes or in photographs, there was still a sort of air of unreality about it. It might be coming, but it was still very far away. None but savages now doubted that it was really

coming; but civilized humanity as a mass wanted something more than this, and this was supplied on that momentous night when, as the world rolled round, bringing each meridian of longitude within view of that one spot in the skies, millions after millions of eyes were turned upwards and saw the stars shining through a pale, yellow, luminous mist spread out in two vast wings, between which there was a speck of deeper and yellower light.

It was very far away still, but there it was. There could be no doubt now, even in the minds of the most ignorant. Months and months before, the astronomers had prophesied its appearance, and there it was! Henceforth there were but three points of interest for the human race—one, by night, was the comet; the others, by day, were the Hetton Colliery in Durham and the Pittsburg Works.

So the last few remaining days and nights passed. Every night the threatening shape in the heavens grew clearer and bigger and

brighter, and every day the newspapers published the most minute details of the progress of the mighty weapons upon which the hopes of humanity, so far as this world was concerned, now rested.

Soon the nucleus of the comet became visible in broad daylight; then the two wings came into view morning and evening, making it look like some colossal bird of prey swooping down from its eerie, somewhere in the heights of space, upon the trembling and terrified world. The professional prophets naturally said, with the assurance of absolute conviction, that it was nothing less awful than the Destroying Angel *in propria personâ*.

At length, when excitement had passed into frenzy, and frenzy into an almost universal delirium, two cablegrams crossed each other under the Atlantic. One was to say that the Pittsburg gun was ready; the other, that the loading of the Lennox gun would commence the following morning. This was just a week

before the fatal night; and when the sun set on the evening of the fourth of August, and when many millions had looked upon it, as they thought, for the last time, the Professor set all the wires of the world thrilling with the news that the operation of loading had been carried out with complete success; that the huge projectile with its thirty hundred-weight of Lyddite was resting quietly in its place in the potential volcano, which at the touch of a woman's hand was to hurl it through space and into the heart of the swiftly advancing enemy of humanity.

At forty-six minutes past ten exactly the cannon would be fired. Ten seconds later the projectile would strike the nucleus of the comet at a point just one hundred miles above the muzzle of the gun, and the eleventh second would see the fate of the world decided. The mouth of the pit-shaft, which was now the case, as it were, of the colossal weapon which was about to do battle for humanity, lay almost in the middle of a wide oval valley

surrounded by ranges of hills. No living thing was permitted to come within five miles of the huge ring of metal out of which that terrific charge was soon to be vomited.

Two electric wires led from the ring over separate rows of poles to the top of a hill five miles away, and ended in two instruments standing side by side on a table. On the same table there were also two chronometers beating time together to the thousandth part of a second.

On all the hills and scattered over the country for miles around was the greatest concourse of human beings that had ever been gathered together on one portion of the earth's surface.

It was numbered by millions, and included nearly every nationality under the sun; and, as the supreme moment drew near, every voice was hushed; and as every eye turned upwards to where the shape of the comet, now vast, menacing, and awful, over-spanned the sky, every heart seemed to beat in unison, as

though counting off what might be the last seconds of human life on earth.

Grouped about the table on which stood the two instruments was gathered a concourse of people amongst whom were nearly all the greatest and most celebrated men and women in the world. But rank and honours were already things of the past. In the presence of that appalling menace which flamed across the heavens, all men and women were equal, since within the next few seconds all might be reduced at the same instant to the same dust and ashes.

The ghastly orange-green glare which had now completely obliterated the moonlight shone down alike on the upturned face of monarch and peasant, the good and the bad, the noble and the base, and tinged them all with its own sickly and hideous hue.

There was only one distinction left among all the hosts of men; only one man stood higher than any one else, and this was he upon whom the hopes of the peoples rested.

He stood on one side of the table facing one of the instruments, and opposite to him at the other stood the woman to whom he had first confided the terrible secret of the world's approaching end.

He had honestly kept the unspoken pact that had been made thirteen months before in the observatory on Leith Hill. Neither word nor look of love had, to her knowledge, passed his lips or lighted his eyes, and even now as he stood opposite to her, scanning her upturned face by that awful light, his eyes were as steady and impassive as they had ever been at the eye-pieces of his instruments.

Auriole had a forefinger already resting on a little white button ready to send the kindling spark into the mighty mass of explosives which lay buried nearly a mile down at the bottom of the giant tube.

Lennox, too, had his finger on the button in front of him, but his left hand was in his coat pocket, and his left forefinger was on the trigger of a loaded and cocked revolver.

Auriole knew nothing of this. She only remembered that a few minutes before—it seemed like several weeks ago already—he had promised that, if the worst happened, she at least should be spared the universal agony.

Lord and Lady Westerham were standing close by the table, and his lordship also had a revolver in his pocket.

The chronometers ticked off the seconds, each one seeming more like eternity than the one before it. The comet grew bigger and bigger, and its flaming nucleus blazed out brighter and brighter. A vague, low, wailing sound seemed to be running round the circle of the hills. It was the first utterance of the unendurable agony of the multitudes.

At last Lennox looked up from his chronometer at Auriole, and said in a quiet, dry voice—

“Ten seconds!”

Then he began to count: “Nine—eight—seven — six — five — four — three—two — NOW!”

Their two fingers went down at the same instant and completed the circuits. The next, the central fires of the earth seemed to burst loose. Such a roar as had never deafened human ears before shook earth and air with a concussion that seemed like the loosening of the foundations of the world, and a mighty column of pale flame sprang up to the zenith over which the nucleus of the comet was now exactly impending.

Then came ten more seconds of mute and agonized suspense; and then, such a sight as no other human eyes will ever see, saving only those which, in the fulness of time, may look upon the awful pageantry of the Last Day.

High up in the air there was a shrill, screaming sound following the roar of the great gun. Something like a white flash of light streamed upwards straight at the heart of the descending destroyer.

Then the whole heavens were illumined by a blinding glare of unearthly light. The

nucleus of the comet seemed to fling out long rays of many-coloured light, and then, like some vast globe of electric fluid, it burst into myriads of atoms.

The watching millions on earth instinctively clasped their hands to their ears, expecting such a sound as would deafen them for ever ; but none came, for the explosion had taken place beyond the limits of the earth's atmosphere. The whole sky was now filled from zenith to horizon with a pale, golden, luminous mist, and through this the moon and stars began to shine dimly.

Then a blast of burning air swept shrieking and howling across the earth, for now the planet Terra was rushing at her headlong speed of nearly seventy thousand miles an hour through the ocean of fire-mist into which the shattered comet had been dissolved. Then this passed ; the cool wind of night followed it, and the moon and stars shone down once more undimmed through the pure and cloudless ether.

So far there had been silence ; but now there rose from earth to heaven such a burst of triumphant thanksgiving as had never welled up from human hearts through human lips before.

A north-country miner with a mighty baritone voice had somewhere started the Old Hundredth Psalm, and away it went, rolling through the now still night over hill and vale, echoing from village to village, and from town to town, until the whole United Kingdom was with one voice giving thanks for the Great Deliverance.

But the man who, under Providence, had wrought it, heard nothing of this. He only felt a soft, trembling clasp closing round his right hand, and he only heard *Auriole's* voice whispering a single word—and that word was his own name.

The next moment a stronger grip pulled his left hand out of his coat pocket—bringing the revolver with it—and the somewhat hard, practical voice of *Emerson G. Crellin*, for the

first and only time shaken by emotion in public, said—

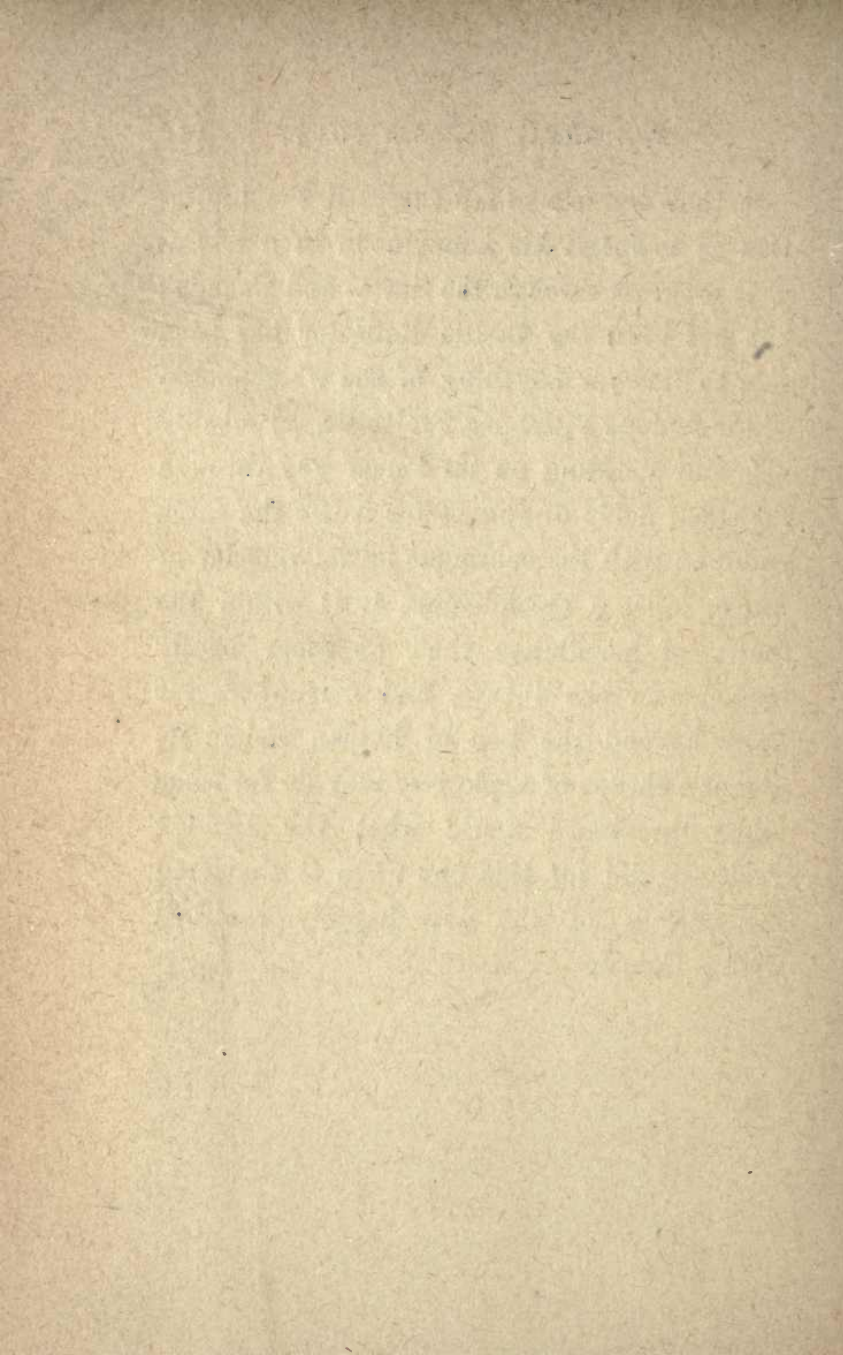
“We may thank God and you, Professor, that there is still a world here with living men and women on it—and there’s one woman who’s going to live henceforth for you and no one else. She told me all about it last night. You’ve won her fair and square, and you’re going to have her. I did have other views for her; but I’ve changed my mind—and, anyhow, you’re the biggest man on earth just now.”

Before daybreak the next morning there was put into the Professor’s hand a cablegram from Pittsburg, worded as follows :—

“Lennox, England.

“Well aimed! As you left no pieces for us to shoot at, we have sent our projectile to take its chance in space. No use for it here. Hope it will hit and stop next comet of same sort coming this way. America thanks you. Any terms you like for lectures.”

Arthur Lennox so far accepted the invitation as to spend his honeymoon in a triumphal progress through the States and Canada ; but not even the Crellin Reflector has been able to discover anything of the whereabouts of the famous Pittsburg Projectile. Probably it is still speeding on its lonely way through the silent fields of space—for it left the earth endowed with the enormous initial velocity of fifteen miles a second—and it is within the limits of possibility that, at some happy moment in the future, and somewhere far away beyond the ken of human vision, its gigantic charge of explosives may do for some other threatened world what the Lennox Projectile did for this one when it shattered the nucleus of the now happily vanished Crellin Comet.



A CORNER IN LIGHTNING



A CORNER IN LIGHTNING

I

THEY had been dining for once in a way *tête-à-tête*, and she—that is to say, Mrs. Sidney Calvert, a bride of eighteen months' standing—was half lying, half sitting, in the depths of a big, cosy saddle-bag armchair on one side of a bright fire of mixed wood and coal that was burning in one of the most improved imitations of the mediæval fireplace. Her feet—very pretty little feet they were, too, and very daintily shod—were crossed, and poised on the heel of the right one at the corner of the black marble curb.

Dinner was over. The coffee-service and the liqueur-case were on the table, and Mr.

Sidney Calvert, a well-set-up young fellow of about thirty, with a handsome, good-humoured face, which a close observer would have found curiously marred by a chilly glitter in the eyes, and a hardness that was something more than firmness about the mouth, was walking up and down on the opposite side of the table smoking a cigarette.

Mrs. Calvert had just emptied her coffee-cup, and as she put it down on a little three-legged console table behind her, she looked round at her husband, and said—

“Really, Sid, I must say that I can’t see why you should do it. Of course it’s a very splendid scheme and all that sort of thing, but, surely you, one of the richest men in London, are rich enough to do without it. I’m sure it’s wrong, too. What should we think if somebody managed to bottle up the atmosphere and make us pay for every breath we drew? Besides, there must surely be a good deal of risk in deliberately disturbing the economy of nature in such a way. How

are you going to get to the Pole, too, to put up your works?"

"Well," he said, stopping for a moment in his walk and looking thoughtfully at the lighted end of his cigarette, "in the first place, as to the geography, I must remind you that the Magnetic Pole is not the North Pole. It is in Boothia Land, British North America, some fifteen hundred miles south of it. Then, as to the risk, of course one can't do big things like this without taking a certain amount of it; but, still, I think it will be mostly other people that will have to take it in this case.

"Their risk, you see, will come in when they find that cables and telephones and telegraphs won't work, and that no amount of steam-engine grinding can get up a respectable amount of electric light—when, in short, all the electric plant of the world loses its value, and can't be set going without buying supplies from the Magnetic Polar Storage Company, or, in other words, from your

humble servant and the few friends that he will be graciously pleased to let in on the ground floor. But that is a risk that they can easily overcome by just paying for it. Besides, there's no reason why we shouldn't improve the quality of the commodity. 'Our Extra Special Greased Lightning!' 'Our Triple-Concentrated Essence of Electric Fluid,' and 'Competent Thunderstorms delivered at the Shortest Notice,' would look very nice in advertisements, wouldn't they?"

"Don't you think that's rather a frivolous way of talking about a scheme which might end in ruining one of the most important industries in the world?" she said, laughing, in spite of herself, at the idea of delivering thunderstorms like pounds of butter or skeins of Berlin wool.

"Well, I'm afraid I can't argue that point with you, because, you see, you will keep looking at me while you talk, and that isn't fair. Anyhow, I'm equally sure that it would be quite impossible to run any business and

make money out of it on the lines of the Sermon on the Mount. But, come, here's a convenient digression for both of us. That's the Professor, I expect."

"Shall I go?" she said, taking her feet off the fender.

"Certainly not, unless you wish to," he said, "or unless you think the scientific details are going to bore you."

"Oh no, they won't do that," she said. "The Professor has such a perfectly charming way of putting them; and, besides, I want to know all that I can about it."

"Professor Kenyon, sir."

"Ah, good evening, Professor! So sorry you could not come to dinner," they both said almost simultaneously as the man of science walked in.

"My wife and I were just discussing the ethics of this storage scheme when you came in," he went on. "Have you anything fresh to tell us about the practical aspects of it? I'm afraid she doesn't altogether approve of

it ; but as she is very anxious to hear all about it, I thought you wouldn't mind her making one of the audience."

"On the contrary, I shall be delighted," replied the Professor ; "the more so as it will give me a sympathizer."

"I'm very glad to hear it," said Mrs. Calvert, approvingly. "I think it will be a very wicked scheme if it succeeds, and a very foolish and expensive one if it fails."

"After which there is, of course, nothing more to be said," laughed her husband, "except for the Professor to give his dispassionate opinion."

"Oh, it shall be dispassionate, I can assure you," he replied, noticing a little emphasis on the word. "The ethics of the matter are no business of mine, nor have I anything to do with its commercial bearings. You have asked me merely to look at technical possibilities and scientific probabilities, and, of course, I don't propose to go beyond these."

He took another sip at a cup of coffee that

Mrs. Calvert had handed him, and went on—

“I’ve had a long talk with Markovitch this afternoon, and I must confess that I never met a more ingenious man or one who knew as much about magnetism and electricity as he does. His theory that they are the celestial and terrestrial manifestations of the same force, and that what is popularly called electric fluid is developed only at the stage where they become one, is itself quite a stroke of genius, or, at least, it will be if the theory stands the test of experience. His idea of locating the storage works over the Magnetic Pole of the earth is another, and I am bound to confess that, after a very careful examination of his plans and designs, I am distinctly of opinion that, subject to two reservations, he will be able to do what he contemplates.”

“And the reservations, what are they?” asked Calvert a trifle eagerly.

“The first is one that it is absolutely necessary to make with regard to all untried

schemes, and especially to such a gigantic one as this. Nature, you know, has a way of playing most unexpected pranks with people who take liberties with her. Just at the last moment, when you are on the verge of success, either something that you confidently expect to happen doesn't happen, and there you are left in the lurch; or the unexpected happens instead, with possibly still more serious consequences. It is utterly impossible to foresee anything of this kind; but you must clearly understand that if such a thing did occur, it would ruin the enterprise just when you have spent the most money on it—that is to say, at the end and not at the beginning.”

“All right,” said Calvert, “we'll take that risk. Now, what's the other reservation?”

“I was going to say something about the immense cost; but that, I presume, you are prepared for.”

Calvert nodded, and he went on—

“Well, that point being disposed of, it remains to be said that it may be very

dangerous — I mean to those who live on the spot and will be actually engaged in the work.”

“Then, I hope you won’t think of going near the place, Sid,” interrupted Mrs. Calvert, with a distinct show of wifely authority.

“We’ll see about that later, little woman. It’s early days yet to get frightened about possibilities. Well, Professor, what was it you were going to say? Any more warnings?”

The Professor’s manner stiffened a little as he replied—

“Yes, it is a warning, Mr. Calvert. The fact is, I feel bound to tell you that you propose to interfere very seriously with the distribution of one of the subtlest and least-known forces of Nature, and that the consequences of such an interference might be most disastrous, not only for those engaged in the work, but even the whole hemisphere, and possibly the whole planet.

“On the other hand, I think it is only fair to say that nothing more than a temporary disturbance may take place. You may, for instance, give us a series of very violent thunderstorms, with very heavy rains; or you may abolish thunderstorms and rain altogether until you get to work. Both prospects are within the bounds of possibility, and, at the same time, neither may come to anything.”

“Well, I think that quite good enough to gamble on, Professor,” said Calvert, who was thoroughly fascinated by the grandeur and magnitude, to say nothing of the dazzling financial aspects, of the scheme. “I am very much obliged to you for putting it so clearly and nicely. Unless something very unexpected happens, we shall get to work on it at once. Just fancy what a glorious thing it will be to play Jove to the nations of the earth, and dole out lightning to them at so much a flash!”

“Well, I don't want to be ill-natured,”

said Mrs. Calvert, "but I must say that I hope the unexpected *will* happen. I think the whole thing is very wrong, to begin with, and I shouldn't be at all surprised if you blew us all up, or struck us all dead with lightning, or even brought on the Day of Judgment before its time. I think I shall go to Australia while you're doing it."

II

A LITTLE more than a year had passed since the after-dinner conversation in the dining-room of Mr. Sidney Calvert's London house. During that time the preparations for the great experiment had been swiftly but secretly carried out. Ship after ship loaded with machinery, fuel, and provisions, and carrying labourers and artificers to the number of some hundreds, had sailed away into the Atlantic, and had come back in ballast and with bare working crews on board of them. Mr. Calvert himself had disappeared and reappeared two or three times, and he neither admitted nor denied any of the various rumours which gradually got into circulation in the city and in the Press.

Some said that it was an expedition to the Pole, and that the machinery consisted partly of improved ice-breakers and newly invented steam-sledges, which were to attack the ice-hummocks after the fashion of battering-rams, and so gradually smooth a road to the Pole. To these little details others added flying machines and navigable balloons.

Others again declared that the object was to plough out the North-West Passage and keep a waterway clear from Baffin's Bay to the Pacific all the year round; and others, somewhat less imaginative, pinned their faith to the founding of a great astronomical and meteorological observatory at the nearest possible point to the Pole, one of the objects of which was to be the determination of the true nature of the Aurora Borealis and the Zodiacal Light.

It was this last hypothesis that Mr. Calvert favoured, as far as he could be said to favour any. There was a vagueness and, at the same time, a distinction about a great

scientific expedition which made it possible for him to give a sort of qualified countenance to the rumours without committing himself to anything; but so well had all his precautions been taken that not even a suspicion of the true object of the expedition to Boothia Land had got outside the little circle of those who were in his confidence.

So far, everything had gone as Orloff Markovitch, the Russian Pole, to whose extraordinary genius the inception and working out of the gigantic project were due, had expected and predicted. He himself was in supreme control of the unique and costly, works which had grown up under his constant supervision on that lonely and desolate spot in the far North, where the magnetic needle points straight down to the centre of the world.

Professor Kenyon had paid a couple of visits with Calvert—once at the beginning of the work, and once when it was nearing completion. So far, not the slightest hitch or

accident had occurred, and nothing abnormal had been noticed in connection with the earth's electrical phenomena save unusually frequent appearances of the Aurora Borealis and a singular decrease in the deviation of the mariners' compass. Nevertheless, the Professor had politely but firmly refused to remain until the gigantic apparatus was set to work; and Calvert, too, had, with extreme reluctance, yielded to his wife's entreaties, and had come back to England about a month before the initial experiment was to be begun.

The twentieth of March, which was the day fixed for the commencement of operations, came and went, to Mrs. Calvert's intense relief, without anything out of the common happening. Though she knew that over a hundred thousand pounds of her husband's money had been sunk, she found it impossible not to feel a thrill of satisfaction in the hope that Markovitch had made his experiment and failed.

She knew that the great Calvert Company,

which was practically himself, could very well afford it, and she would not have regretted the loss of three times the sum in exchange for the knowledge that Nature was to be allowed to dispose of her electrical forces as seemed good to her. As for her husband, he went about his business as usual, only displaying slight signs of suppressed excitement and anticipation now and then as the weeks went by and nothing happened.

She had not carried out her threat of going to Australia. She had, however, escaped from the rigours of the English spring to a villa near Nice, where she was awaiting the arrival of her second baby—an event which she had found very useful in persuading her husband to stop away from the Magnetic Pole. Calvert himself was so busy with what might be called the home details of the scheme that he had to spend the greater part of his time in London, and could only run over to Nice now and then.

It so happened that Miss Calvert put in an

appearance a few days before she was expected, and therefore while her father was still in London; and her mother very naturally sent her maid with a telegram to inform him of the fact and ask him to come over at once. In about half an hour the maid came back with the form in her hand, bringing a message from the telegraph-office that in consequence of some extraordinary accident the wires had almost ceased to work properly, and that no messages could be got through distinctly.

In the rapture of her new motherhood, Kate Calvert had forgotten all about the great Storage Scheme, so she sent the maid back again with the request that the message should be sent off as soon as possible. Two hours later she sent again to ask if it had gone, and the reply came back the wires had ceased working altogether, and that no communication by telegraph or telephone was for the present possible.

Then a terrible fear came to her. The

experiment had been a success, after all, and Markovitch's mysterious engines had been all this time imperceptibly draining the earth of its electric fluid and storing it up in the vast accumulators, which would only yield it back again at the bidding of the Trust which was controlled by her husband.

Still, she was a sensible little woman, and after the first shock she managed, for her baby's sake, to put the fear out of her mind, at any rate, until her husband came. He would be with her in a day or two, and, perhaps, after all, it was only some strange but perfectly natural occurrence which Nature herself would set right in a few hours.

When it got dusk that night, and the electric lights were turned on, it was noticed that they gave an unusually dim and wavering light. The engines were worked to their highest power, and the lines were carefully examined. Nothing could be found wrong with them, but the lights refused to behave as usual, and the most extraordinary feature

of the phenomenon was that exactly the same thing was happening in all the electrically lighted cities and towns in the Northern Hemisphere.

By midnight, too, telegraphic and telephonic communication had practically ceased all over the Northern Hemisphere, and the electricians of Europe and America were at their wits' ends to discover any reason for this unheard-of disaster, for such, in sober truth, it would be, unless the apparently suspended force quickly resumed action on its own account. The next morning it was found that, so far as all the marvels of electrical science were concerned, the world had gone back a hundred years.

Then people began to awake to the magnitude of the catastrophe that had befallen the world. Civilized mankind had been suddenly deprived of the services of an obedient slave which it had come to look upon as indispensable.

But there was something even more serious

than this to come. Observers in various parts of the hemisphere remembered that there hadn't been a thunderstorm anywhere for some weeks. Even the regions most frequently visited by them had had none. A most remarkable drought had also set in almost universally.

In addition to this a strange sickness, whose first symptoms were physical lassitude and depression of spirits, which confounded the best medical science of the world, was manifesting itself far and wide, and rapidly assuming the proportions of a universal epidemic.

In the physical world, too, metals were found to be afflicted with an equally incomprehensible disease. Machinery of all sorts got "sick," to use a technical expression, and refused to do its work; and forges and foundries came practically to a standstill for the simple reason that metals seemed to have lost their best properties, and could no longer be worked with as they had been.

Railway accidents and breakdowns on steamers, too, became matters of everyday occurrence, for metals and driving-wheels, piston-rods and propeller-shafts, had acquired an incomprehensible brittleness which only began to be understood when it was discovered that the electrical properties which iron and steel had formerly possessed had almost entirely disappeared.

So far, Calvert had not wavered in his determination to make, as he thought, a colossal amount of money by his usurpation of one of the functions of Nature. To him the calamities, which, it must be confessed, he had deliberately brought upon the world, were only so many arguments for the ultimate success of the stupendous scheme. They were proof positive to the world, or at least they very soon would be, that the Calvert Storage Trust really did control the electricity of the Northern Hemisphere. From the Southern nothing had yet been heard beyond the news that the cables had ceased working.

Hence, as soon as he had demonstrated his power to restore matters to their normal condition, it was obvious that the world would have to pay his price under penalty of having the supply cut off again.

The plan was as simple as it was colossal. Every civilized nation would be called upon to pay a subsidy to the Trust ; and as long as these contributions were regularly and universally paid, Nature would be left to distribute her electrical favours in the ordinary way ; but if one state failed in its payments, orders would be sent to Markovitch to set the apparatus to work, and the supply would be gradually cut off from all. Not the least advantage of this scheme was that it made every nation a watchman over all the others on behalf of the Trust.

It was now getting towards the end of May. On the 1st of June, according to arrangement, Markovitch would stop his engines and permit the vast accumulation of electric fluid in his storage batteries to flow back into its

accustomed channels. Then the Trust would issue its prospectus, setting forth the terms upon which it was prepared to permit the nations to enjoy that gift of Nature whose pricelessness the Trust had proved by demonstrating its own ability to corner it.

On the evening of May 25th Calvert was sitting in his sumptuous office in Victoria Street, writing by the light of a dozen wax candles in a couple of silver candelabra. The splendid electric-light fittings were of course useless, and for some unexplained but not unknown reason the manufacture of gas had become almost impossible. He had just finished a letter to his wife, telling her to keep up her spirits and fear nothing ; that in a few days the experiment would be over and everything restored to its former condition, shortly after which she would be the wife of a man who would soon be able to buy up all the other millionaires in the world.

As he put the letter into the envelope there was a knock at the door, and Professor Kenyon

was announced. Calvert greeted him stiffly and coldly, for he more than half guessed the errand he had come on. There had been two or three heated discussions between them of late, and Calvert knew before the Professor opened his lips that he had come to tell him that he was about to fulfil a threat that he had made a few days before. And this the Professor did tell him in a few dry, quiet words.

“It’s no use, Professor,” he replied; “you know yourself that I am powerless—as powerless as you are. I have no means of communicating with Markovitch, and the work cannot be stopped until the appointed time. Of course, I am very sorry that the effects of the experiment have been so much more serious than I had anticipated——”

“But you were warned, sir!” the Professor interrupted warmly; “you were warned; and when you saw the effects coming you might have stopped. I wish to God that I had had nothing to do with the infernal business, for

infernal it really is. You have not only sacrificed the industries and convenience of nations to your lust of wealth and power. Thousands of deaths already lie at your door. This mysterious epidemic, which is neither more nor less than electrical starvation, is spreading every day, and human science has no remedy for it. You alone hold the remedy, and yet you confess that you are powerless to apply it before a given date !

“Who are you that you should usurp one of the functions of the Almighty?—for that is really what you are doing. I have kept your criminal secret too long, and I will keep it no longer. You have made yourself the enemy of Society, and Society still has the power to deal with you——”

“My dear Professor, that’s all nonsense, and you know it !” said Calvert, interrupting him with a contemptuous gesture. “If Society were to lock me up, it should do without electricity till I were free. If it hung me, it would never get any, except on Markovitch’s

terms, which would be higher than mine. So you can go and tell your story whenever you please. Meanwhile, you'll excuse me if I remind you that I am rather busy."

Just as the Professor was about to take his leave the door opened, and a boy brought in an envelope deeply edged with black. Calvert turned white to the lips, and his hand trembled as he took it and opened it. It was in his wife's handwriting, and was dated from Nice five days before. He read it through with fixed, staring eyes; then he crushed it into his pocket and strode towards the telephone. He rang the bell furiously, and then he started back with an oath on his lips, remembering that he had made it useless. The sound of a bell brought a clerk into the room immediately.

"Get me a hansom at once!" he almost shouted, and the clerk vanished.

"What is the matter? Where are you going?" asked the Professor.

"Matter? Read that!" he said, thrusting

the crumpled letter into his hand. "My little girl is dead—dead of that accursed sickness which, as you justly say, I have brought on the world; and my wife is down with it, too, and may be dead by this time. That letter's five days' old. My God, what have I done? What can I do? I'd give fifty thousand pounds to get a telegram to Markovitch. Curse him and his infernal scheme! If she dies, I'll go to Boothia Land and kill him! Hullo! What's that? Lightning—by the living God—and thunder!"

As he spoke such a flash of lightning as had never split the skies of London before flared in a huge ragged stream of flame across the zenith, and a roar of thunder such as London's ears had never heard till now shook every house in the vast city to its foundation. Another and another followed in rapid succession, and all through the night and well into the next day there raged, as it was afterwards found, almost all over the whole Northern Hemisphere, such a thunderstorm as had never

been known in the world before and never would be again.

With it, too, came hurricanes and cyclones and deluges of rain; and when, after raging for nearly twenty-four hours, it at length ceased convulsing the atmosphere and growled itself away into silence, the first fact that came out of the chaos and desolation that it had left behind it was that the normal electrical conditions of the world had been restored—after which mankind set itself to repair the damage done by the cataclysm and went about its business in the usual way.

The epidemic vanished instantly, and Mrs. Calvert did not die. Nearly six months later a white-haired wreck of a man crawled into her husband's office, and said feebly—

“Don't you know me, Mr. Calvert? I'm Markovitch, or what there is left of him.”

“Good God, so you are!” said Calvert. “What has happened to you? Sit down and tell me all about it.”

“It is not a long story,” said Markovitch,

sitting down and beginning to speak in a thin, trembling voice. "It is not long, but it is very bad. Everything went well at first. All succeeded, as I said it would, and then, I think it was just four days before we should have stopped, it happened."

"What happened?"

"I don't know. We must have gone too far, or by some means an accidental discharge must have taken place. The whole works suddenly burst into white flame. Everything made of metal melted like tallow, every man in the works died instantly—burnt, you know, to a cinder. I was four or five miles away, with some others, seal shooting. We were all struck down insensible. When I came to myself, I found I was the only one alive.

"Yes, Mr. Calvert, I am the only man that has got back from Boothia alive. The works are gone. There are only some heaps of melted metal lying about on the ice. After that, I don't know what happened. I must have gone mad. It was enough to make a

man mad, you know. But some Indians and Eskimos, who used to trade with us, found me wandering about, so they told me, starving and out of my mind, and they took me to the coast. There I got better, and then was picked up by a whaler, and so I got home. That is all. It was very awful, wasn't it?"

Then his face fell forward into his trembling hands, and Calvert saw the tears trickling between his fingers. Suddenly his body slipped gently out of the chair and on to the floor; and when Calvert tried to pick him up, he was dead. And so the secret of the Great Experiment, so far as the world at large was concerned, never got beyond the walls of Mr. Sidney Calvert's cosy dining-room, after all.

A GENIUS FOR A YEAR



A GENIUS FOR A YEAR

I

“It’s no use, Sturman, I shall never get it finished—at least, to my liking and Sylvia’s. It’s five years now since I made the first sketch for it, and there it is, complete in every detail as far as manual skill and technical knowledge can make it, and yet it’s not a picture. There’s something wanting that only genius can give it. The figures are correct, but they’re not alive. There’s no sight in their eyes, no movement in their limbs. No ; it’s not a picture, and I’m not an artist—only a successful illustrator, and that’s all there is to be said about it.”

“Except that Carlyle’s definition of genius

would hardly fit your case ; for if ever mortal man had an infinite capacity for taking pains, you have, March."

"Yes, Sydney would certainly be a genius if Carlyle had been right. I think the Fates have made a most aggravating division of the talents between us. They have given him the faculty of recreation and almost perfect skill in execution ; while they have given me the tormenting gift of dreams, and denied me utterly the power of reproduction. Now, if instead of being brother and sister we could just be rolled into one, either Sydney would be a great artist, or I should be—well, able to write as well as dream, and then I should live in a heaven of my own creation."

"In which you would yourself be the brightest angel !"

The words slipped out almost before John Sturman knew that he had spoken them. His lips had of their own mere motion echoed what he was saying in his soul at the moment. They brought a just perceptibly deeper

colour into Sylvia March's cheeks, and a faint flush into the deep grey eyes that were looking at his from under the straight, dark, finely drawn eyebrows. Her brother saved her from the awkwardness of replying to such a speech from a man she had only lately refused, albeit in the friendliest fashion, to marry, by saying—

“That's not at all badly put for you, Sturman, though it seems to sound a bit queer from a man who defines poetry as the pearl of literature because it is the result of disease.”

“I'm quite consistent,” said Sturman, half smiling and half serious. “What I ought not to have said just now was the result of disease—heart disease.”

“Now you've made it worse,” said Sylvia, gravely.

“What? The disease? That couldn't be worse.”

“Suppose we change the subject—or get back to our muttons,” said Sylvia, looking more serious than her words. “Now tell me, have you ever heard a satisfactory definition

of this something that Sydney and I seem to want so badly, this mysterious gift of the gods that people call genius without knowing what they are talking about?"

"No, I haven't; and if I did hear one, it would probably be so far above my head that I should not understand it."

"That's only your vanity, Sturman," said March. "I think I've told you before that these aggressive assertions of mediocrity savour somewhat strongly of the pride that apes humility. But, to come to the concrete, I think there's something very like genius in this new book of Marcus Algar's that I'm illustrating. That fellow has a great future before him, if his twenty pounds a thousand words doesn't make him greedy and start him off writing himself out, as it has done with one or two others one could name."

"Or if he doesn't get the notion that he has a mission, and tries to preach instead of telling stories," said Sylvia. "By the way, I suppose you haven't forgotten, Sydney, that

the new genius is coming to tea this afternoon to discuss those last sketches of yours?"

"No, I haven't forgotten. Don't go, Sturman. No, you really mustn't. I particularly want you to meet Algar. Sylvia, tell him to sit down and behave himself. Ah! there he is. 'Talk of an angel,' etc."

A ring and a well-composed fantasia on the knocker sounded as he spoke, and a few moments later the door of the studio opened. As Sturman rose, he saw Sydney go forward with outstretched hand to greet a tall, slightly built, perfectly dressed young fellow, fair-haired and dark-eyed, with the complexion of a boy and the face of a woman—at least it would have been a woman's face, he thought, but for a certain strength of brow and chin, and two little perpendicular lines between the eyebrows, which would not have quite become a woman.

This was Marcus Algar, *le succès de l'heure*, as they would have called him in France—the writer, unknown the day before yesterday,

whose first book was selling in thousands, despite the fact that it didn't even hint at the Seventh Commandment, and hadn't a chapter that either the British Matron or the Young Person could condemn openly with a view to dwelling fondly on it in secret.

The reviewers already called their notices of his work "appreciations," and were almost falling over each other in their haste not to be last or least loud in his praise. Far-seeing editors were competing for his unwritten works, and literary agents were scheming subtly for the honour and profit of standing between him and them.

In a word, Marcus Algar was the man of the hour, as other men and women had been of previous hours. The Vagabonds had entertained him, and the Authors had dined him—and John Sturman knew all this; and if he had had all the wealth of Kimberley, he would have given it cheerfully to stand in his shoes, for he did not possess that priceless gift of literary expression, that God-given, unlearnable

art, the want of which meant to him the difference between Sylvia's friendship, which had been his for years, and her love, which, as she had told him, could be given only to the twin soul for whose advent hers was waiting, the ideal she had not yet met, unless—and as he looked at Marcus Algar and thought of that wonderful book of his, all the evil spirits that lurk behind the rose-bushes in the Garden of Love seemed to come out of their hiding-places and take possession of his soul.

He made his excuses, and got away as soon as he decently could, because he wasn't the sort of man who could chatter cheerful trivialities when his soul was full of bitterness, and while the earth's base seemed stubble and the pillars of the firmament rottenness to him.

He was a strong, straightforward, clean-hearted, clear-headed man, rich, well read, and well educated, but with no more romance in his being than was inspired by his almost lifelong and now hopeless love for the sister of his old schoolfellow and friend, Sydney March,

—this girl with the soft chestnut hair and big dreamy grey eyes whom he had worshipped as a boy and loved as a man, in his own plain, honest, manly fashion, only to learn, as he had learned but a few days before, that that wretched, transcendental soul-theory of matrimony of hers was to condemn him to stand by and see her give herself to some one else just because he lacked the one faculty that she placed above all others.

It was maddening to be so near and yet so far, for, with the confidence born of their life-long friendship, she had even told him that she liked him so much “in other ways” that she really would have tried to love him if she could; and she had said this so innocently and so sweetly that it had hurt him more than the most scornful refusal could have done, for it did not even leave him the poor consolation of getting angry either with her or with himself.

If Mephistopheles had come to his side just then, as he was walking home from March’s studio in Edith Villas, West Kensington, to

the big house in Bolton Gardens—which he had made so beautiful in the hope that Sylvia would one day reign over it—and offered him that one gift of Marcus Algar's in exchange for everything else on the usual terms, he would have struck the bargain there and then, *coûte que coûte*, for Sylvia's sake; and yet, if he had only known it, Mephistopheles was a good deal nearer to his elbow just then than he had any idea of his being.

Altogether, his walk home was anything but a pleasant one, for, do what he would, he couldn't keep his thoughts from wandering back to March's studio, and picturing Sylvia and Algar wandering together in that magical Garden of Romance, which he could only look at over the fast-closed gate that only the key of Genius can unlock.

But when he got home, there were two letters waiting for him, which speedily sent the lover into the background, and brought the man of affairs to the front. One was from Brindisi, and the other from Calcutta, but

both had come by the same mail. The first was from his younger brother Cecil, who had been for the last three years in the Calcutta branch of the great firm of which John Sturman was the head, to tell him that he was coming home invalided; and the second was from a doctor who had attended Cecil.

There were four large pages of foreign note-paper closely covered; and when he got to the end, he turned back and read it over again, and then he put it down and sat for nearly half an hour without moving a muscle, staring straight before him into the fire, and conscious of nothing but a single sentence, which he could no more get out of his brain than he could have helped hearing it if Mephistopheles himself had been whispering it into his ear—

“ Perhaps the most extraordinary property of the drug is the unmistakable power that it has of altering either the mental or moral character, and sometimes both, of its victims, and making those under its influence the exact opposite of what they are in a normal state ! ”

II

It was a curious and perhaps more than usually merciless irony of Fate that Mephistopheles should come to John Sturman in the guise of his younger brother ; and yet such was literally the case. The plain facts, as represented in the doctor's letter, were that Cecil had become a victim to the haschisch habit, and as soon as he had discovered this he had sent him straight home, knowing, as he did, that if he was to have a chance of rescue, he must be almost constantly under the eye of some one for whom he had both affection and respect.

He had himself suggested his elder brother, the only near relation he had left, as soon as the matter had been put plainly before him, and he had been told that his one chance of

life and sanity depended on his placing himself unreservedly in the hands of some one who could bring a strong, healthy mind and an unimpaired will to the task of supervising the gradual diminution of doses which, as it were, marked the milestones along the only possible road to a cure.

The doctor's letter had consisted for the most part of precise instructions as to the course of treatment to be pursued, and if it had not been for that one fatal sentence which had set John Sturman thinking so hard the afternoon he read it, all might have been well.

But there it was, and the work that it had begun was rapidly completed by the inevitable conversations which he had with Cecil on the subject of haschisch and its works. He kept the drug safely in his own care, measuring out the doses with scrupulous exactness, and noting with a fatally growing interest their effects on his patient.

Cecil would come down to breakfast dull and languid and headachy. He would take

his three doses—each one ever so little smaller than the previous one—at ten, two, and six. At lunch he would be well and cheerful, and at dinner and all through the evening brilliant in thought and expression; and then they would sit over the fire in the library and smoke, and Cecil would tell him of his visions, and weave stories splendid with all the gorgeous imagery of Eastern life; and then, when Cecil had gone to bed, he would sit on alone and think, and, unconsciously to himself, and before an atom of the drug had passed his lips, the subtle poison worked, and at last the struggle ended, and he yielded, almost before he knew that it had begun, in deadly earnest.

He had been to tea that afternoon at the studio, and though nothing direct or positive had been said, he had intuitively felt that Sylvia was fast coming to the belief that in Marcus Algar she had at last met the twin soul, the incarnate ideal for which hers had been waiting, and, from a remark or two

dropped, perhaps purposely and with the kindest intentions, by Sydney, that the young genius seemed also to have found his own ideal in Sylvia.

Nay, he had even at the last minute put back the publication of his new book, and, with a few deft and masterly touches, had recreated his heroine in the living likeness of Sylvia, and in a few days more all the world would be at her feet, drawn there by the master-hand which had painted this other self of hers so perfectly that henceforth she would live two lives—her own and the greater and brighter one which Algar's genius had given her.

It was this that had brought his struggle to an end. His rival, as he perforce regarded him, had drawn the magic circle of his genius round his darling, and so, in a sense, had already made her his own. What did it matter then to him what became of the life that was henceforth to be a desert for him?

The enchantment of his hopeless love

turned all the strength of nature which should have saved him against him ; and where a weaker man might have resisted through fear, he took the fatal step, impelled by his own perverted strength.

The night after Cecil had gone to bed, he went to his cabinet and took what was, for a beginner, a heavy dose of haschisch. Then he locked the door and sat down in his easy-chair by the fire to await results.

Soon a delightful languor began to steal over his physical senses. He closed his eyes, and his mind seemed to become detached from his body. A great unearthly light shone into the darkness of the despair which had been clouding all his life, and, as the darkness vanished, the chains that had bound his intellect down to the commonplace were loosed, and it rose at a leap into the long-forbidden, glowing realms of Romance.

Then his eyes opened, and he saw a strange vision. One of those dream-stories of Sylvia's, which she had told to him in her halting,

imperfect way, and which she would almost have given her life to be able to set forth in worthy language, came to him, brilliant and vivid, instinct with the poetry of the most exquisite realism. The characters sprang into incarnate being before him with such life-likeness that he seemed to see and recognize them as though they had been old acquaintances, as they moved and spoke amidst the scenes that Sylvia had imagined for them without being able to reproduce them; and all was so real and vivid and beautiful that it seemed as though he were actually living in that vision-world which she would have painted if she could.

Why should he not paint it for her, since he saw it so plainly before him? There was his writing-table by the wall ready for him. In his early clerking days he had learned shorthand as a convenience, and he had kept it up since as a hobby, and, however swiftly the glowing sentences might come to him, his pencil would keep pace with them.

He made an effort to rise from his chair and go to his table, but, before he reached it, it seemed to him that he was already there. It was curious, but he put it down to the effects of the drug, and caught himself wondering what was going to happen next. He saw himself sitting in the chair, and he went and looked over his own shoulder and saw the pencil already flying over the paper. Sheet after sheet he read as it was finished and thrown aside, and hour after hour he stood there reading and wondering what it all meant, until at last it was finished, and his other self got up and looked at him.

He saw now that his face was ashen grey and deep-scored with the lines drawn by intense mental effort. Beads of sweat were standing out thickly on his brow, and his eyes were burning with a fierce light that might have been either insanity or genius.

Then he saw his lips move into a faint and almost ghastly smile, and heard his own

voice say to him, as though speaking from a distance—

“Well, that’s a good night’s work, and I think it’s about time to go to bed. Good-night!”

Then his two beings seemed to fuse together again and become one. He lit his hand-lamp as usual, turned the gas out, and went to bed, and scarcely was his head on the pillow than he fell into a deep, heavy, dreamless sleep.

When he woke the next morning, all that remained to him of his experiment in visions was a slight tightness across his forehead and a dim recollection of having dreamed a very wonderful dream. That the dream was a reality never occurred to him for a moment.

He got up half an hour later than usual, feeling a trifle repentant and perhaps just a little ashamed of himself, but thinking that, after all, he had got pretty cheaply out of what seemed to him now to be the greatest danger of his life.

He had breakfast with Cecil, as usual, and then went to the library. He found the door locked, a circumstance which struck him as being rather strange, and mechanically put his hand into his pocket for the key. It was there, and he opened the door and went in. On the threshold he stopped and started slightly, and then he looked round to see if any one had seen him come into the room.

Then he went in and locked the door again behind him. His writing-table and the floor beside it were littered with sheets of paper.

He crossed the room and picked one of them up with a hand that was not very steady, and began to read it. There could be no doubt as to what it was. It was a fragment of one of Sylvia's dream-stories written by a master-hand. He read the page through, and then picked up some more at random, and went and sat down in his armchair by the ashes of last night's fire, and read page after page, disconnected as they were, and yet most evidently parts of one beautiful whole.

Then he laid them on the floor beside him, and strove to collect his thoughts so that he might read the riddle, and bit by bit the remembered fragments of his vision came together and took shape, and then the truth dawned upon him.

What the Calcutta doctor had said about the drug was true. Under its influence he had been the exact reverse of his normal mental self, and the net result of his experiment, as far as he could see, had been the division of his being into two separate entities, one of which was still the sober, practical, commonplace man of affairs, and the other the dreamer of gorgeous dreams, the genius dowered with the supreme gift of literary expression in its highest form and most perfect capacity—and yet, for all that, an unreality, a spectre that came out of the darkness of a drug-induced slumber to work its wondrous spells, and then vanish back into the shadows.

Only too clearly did he see this, for the

more he read of his own work the more horribly apparent became the truth that, not to save his soul alive, could he in his natural self put two of those glowing, perfectly worded sentences together.

He got up and collected the sheets, and put them in order, and then read the story through from beginning to end. He had learned enough of the art by reading to see that it was a literary gem, enough even of itself to found a reputation upon, and this was his work—or at least the work of that other self of his which the potent magic of the drug had called into being!

And if it had done this once, why should it not do it many times? Here was Sylvia's own story glorified into a splendid reality, and by him! Was not this a proof that this other self of his was in truth that twin soul which hers had, by her own confession, been waiting to meet and mate with?

He folded up the sheets and put them into his pocket. At eleven his brougham came as

usual to the door, and he took them to the city and gave them to his confidential clerk to transcribe on his typewriter. That evening he paid a visit to the studio, and asked Sylvia to read his first essay in fiction.

III

NOT quite a year had passed since John Sturman had made his first experiment in visions, and during those swiftly passing months he had lived on earth and in heaven, and not infrequently he had descended into the nethermost hell of human suffering. He had carried on his business affairs as of second nature, yet with an ever-lessening interest in them.

That spectre-genius of his had won him fame with all its intoxicating accompaniments, and he had no cause to envy Marcus Algar now, either in his new art or his old love, for his own fame was fresher and brighter than his; and Sylvia, all innocent of its terrible origin, had welcomed the awakening of his long-dormant genius as a Heaven-sent

revelation ; and so his latest wooing had not been in vain.

Sydney's picture, finished at last under his inspiration, was hanging on the line at Burlington House, the wonder and admiration of the thousands who had read the marvellous romance which he had woven round it, and for him the whole earth had been transfigured—until one of those inevitable hours came when he stood alone with his own reproachful and accusing soul on the edge of the deep, black, unbridgeable gulf at which the flower-strewn path of his love and fame must some day infallibly end, for that spectral other self of his had to be fed every day with ever-increasing doses of the poison which ere long must slay both it and him—and then what of Sylvia ?

They were to be married in a month, and meanwhile he was finishing the novel for which all the world was waiting. What was to happen ? Would the remnant of his manhood and self-control compel him to save his

darling from himself while yet there was time, or would he take her hand irrevocably in his, and lead her for awhile along that enchanted path, knowing as he did what the end of the brief journey must be ?

What his own answer to the inexorable question might have been there is no telling, neither is there any need to guess at it, for the Fates themselves answered it in their own way.

One night he sat down to write the last pages of his book. For awhile the ideas came bright and thronging as ever, wedding themselves in harmonious union of sound and sense with the words which flowed so easily from his pen. Then, just on the threshold of the last scene, his pen stopped. The splendid vision, whose realization was to have been the crowning glory of his work, grew dim and blurred and dull as the night-clouds from which the glory of the sunset has faded away. He stared about him, dazed and wondering, like a man suddenly awakened from a dream.

Then he turned back and read the pages he had just written, and could not even recognize his own work. He saw that it was beautiful, but it was utterly strange to him. Who had written it? And how did it come there on his table with the ink scarcely dry on the paper? He had forgotten.

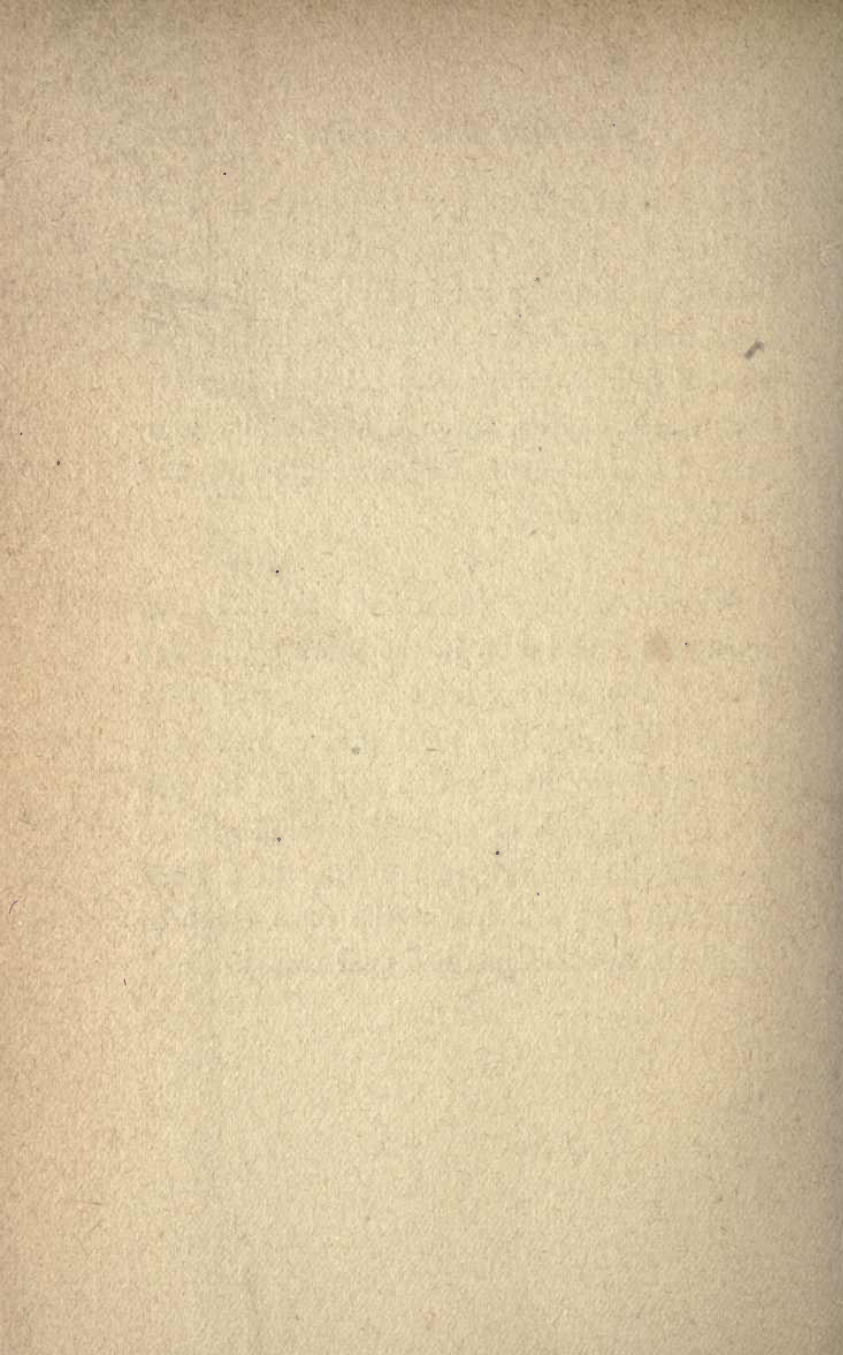
Then his eye fell upon a few little greenish-brown lozenges lying at his elbow. A swift gleam of remembrance shone through the darkness that was falling on his mind like a lightning flash through sudden night. Behind him lay the path of his brief, dear-bought glory, strewn with flowers that now were withered, and before him the gulf, and beyond that a black infinity.

He gathered up the lozenges and swallowed them all at a gulp. Soon the fast-fading fires leaped up into a blaze of light, wild, lurid, and dazzling. Visions of chaotic splendour chased each other in headlong haste through the death-dance of his expiring senses. He had a dim consciousness of seizing his pen and

driving it over the paper as though he were writing for his very life, and more. Then, like the falling of a black pall before his eyes, came darkness darker than night, and he felt himself falling, bound and blinded, into immeasurable depths, through an eternity compressed into moments, and moments stretched out into eternities.

* * * * *

When Cecil, now cured and hale and sane, came and found him in the morning, he was dead. The writing-table was strewn with pages filled with the most piteous nonsense, and under the hand which still held his pen was the last page of all, half covered with an unintelligible scrawl, and ending in a long, wavering line, which was the most eloquent of all the lines his pen had ever traced.



THE PLAGUE-SHIP "TUPISÁ"

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE PLAGUE-SHIP "TUPISÁ"

THE ride from Magdalena to San Pablo is one of the most wearisome on the journey from Pacasmayo, the coast town, into the Interior, as it is always called in Peru, that is to say, the eastern slopes of the Andes, where the fertile Montaña region stretches away in range after range of magnificently wooded mountains, until the mountains become hills, and the hills melt softly away in the boundless plains of the Amazon.

First, a slow, toilsome ascent of three or four thousand feet; then an even more toilsome descent into the next valley, out of which the next ridge towered up, cutting a

clear edge against the sky. At last, however, San Pablo hove in sight—a cluster of white houses in the middle of a green patch far away across an enormous valley three parts up the side of a great ridge about eleven thousand feet high, the last that had to be crossed before the giants of the Andes proper came in sight.

It looked a lovely spot from the distance, but when four hours' more riding brought me to it, I found it just as forlorn and shabby and smelly as all the interior towns of Peru are. It was just about the last place on earth in which I should have expected to stumble across as tragic a sea-yarn as I have heard in the course of somewhat extensive wanderings; and if my man Patricio had not had what he called *una familia*, by which he meant relations, there, I should have gone by another and less difficult route, and the story which is set out hereafter might never have been retold in English. I carried a *recomendacion*, or letter of introduction, to

the cura, or parish priest, of San Pablo, which Patricio had secured for me from the governor of the town we had slept at the night but one before, Magdalena. This cost me an advance of two dollars, which went to entertain the *familia*, and Patricio did it in such style that the next day he was quite unfit to travel. So, too, as it happened, was my mule, which was suffering from a gall consequent on the constant shifting of the saddle in the ascents and descents. And that is how I came to spend the day with the cura.

Now, the cura of a pueblo, or township, in the interior of Peru is not, as a rule, the sort of person I should choose for a host. He is usually dirty, dissipated, and degraded—little better, indeed, than his Indian flock, a goodly proportion of whose blood often flows in his veins. But this man was a gentleman, evidently a descendant of one of the old Spanish families which lorded it in Peru in the days of the Viceroy. He was of fair

height and good carriage, with a grave, strong face, and, although he did not strike me as being much past middle age, his tonsure was perfectly white. His house was only a four-roomed cottage, built of mud and thatched with maize straw, but it was newly white-washed, and it was very clean ; in fact, it was the only really clean house that I entered during my fourteen days' journey. It stood a little way from the village in a pretty, neatly kept garden, and on one side of it there was a piazza commanding a view of simply indescribable grandeur.

By the second evening we had become quite good friends, and he allowed me, after many gentle protestations, to add a bottle of Moquegua, the Burgundy of Peru, to our modest supper. As we sat out on the piazza afterwards, finishing this and smoking our ever-succeeding little brown cigarettes in the delicious coolness of the early evening, we somehow got back into a previous conversation on the Chilian war, which, by the way, seemed

to be the last of the world's events that my host had any clear knowledge of.

"The Chilenos were guilty of some terrible cruelties during that war, I have been told," I said, after a little pause.

The remark was really a sort of feeler, for I knew that there were many dark stories told about that bitter struggle, and perhaps this sad-faced, white-haired exile might know some. It was just the time and place, too, for a story, for the moon was getting up and making the mountains look dim and ghostly, and the fireflies were flashing in the shadows under the edges.

"Yes, señor. That is true; but war is war, you know, and Spanish blood is hot. It is fire when it is pure, but it is molten lava when it is mixed with the Indian. Yes, truly there were many horrible things done. I was down yonder then," he went on, motioning with his hand toward the far-away coast across the dim ridges below.

"And therefore, perhaps, you saw some of them?" I said insinuatingly, as I refilled his

glass. "You know, Señor Padre, I am a story-teller by trade, and——"

"And therefore," he said, with one of his grave, gentle smiles, "when you meet any one on your travels who knows any stories, you like to hear them, eh? Well, yes, that is good. You know, we Spaniards are great story-tellers, and we would rather hear stories than read them. Yes, as I told you, I was down yonder in the war time, and I saw some things and heard of others—things that you could write much about if you knew them. Let me think, now."

He looked out over the mountains, and up at the big bright stars which seemed to hang in clusters down from the firmament, as they always do at considerable altitudes in very clear air. I thought I saw his face harden in the dim light, and his placid brow wrinkle into something like a frown. Then he turned to me, and said rather abruptly—

"Señor, have you ever heard the story of the plague-ship that came from Panama?"

I had heard some vague rumours of the sinking of a plague-stricken steamer off the coast when I was down in Lima, but either no one that I met knew much about it, or no one cared to talk of it, so I said, without any attempt to conceal the curiosity he had aroused—

"I have heard such a thing mentioned once or twice at some of the ports, but I have never heard the story, if, as you say, there is one."

"Yes," he said, "there is; and, as you have nothing else to do just now but listen, I will tell it to you, if you please; and when you go back to England you can write it, and it will show the English people that even in poor, ruined, despised Peru there are born men who know their duty, and can do it, no matter what the cost. Now, this is the story of the plague-ship—

"It was nearly the end of the war, and the Chilian fleet had captured or destroyed nearly all the poor little navy that Peru had, but

there was one vessel which had so far escaped scot free. She was the *Huarura*, a fast merchant steamer which had been armed as a cruiser with good guns, both heavy and light, and, thanks to her speed and good handling, she had done not a little damage to the Chilian shipping and coast towns. She was commanded by a captain of the Peruvian navy, Riccardo Caldera, a man who was then about thirty.

“I must tell you, for the sake of the story, that his father’s brother was a merchant in Valparaiso. His own home was in Lima, and before the war Riccardo had often visited his uncle. Now, at his house, about three years before what I am going to tell you about happened, he had become acquainted with the daughter of another Chilian merchant, Señorita Carmen de Salta. To be short, she was very beautiful, and the two fell in love. Her parents were well pleased, for his blood was good and his family rich. Many Peruvians, you know, were still rich before the war.

"But Doña Carmen was still very young, and they insisted that there should be no talk of marriage until she had been to Paris to finish her education, as you know many sons and daughters of our good families here do. To this, of course, Caldera consented gladly, though the parting was sorrowful. She went, and then came the war, and Caldera saw the clouds of battle rise up between him and his hopes of happiness; for war *is* war between the South American peoples, you know, and the hatred that it leaves is bitter.

"Well, the war went on, as every one knows, all to poor Peru's disadvantage, both on land and sea, until Caldera's ship remained the only one that still flew the Peruvian flag. One day, when she was cruising off the southern coast, well away from the land, towards which she only approached at nightfall, she sighted a steamer chasing a sailing-vessel. Caldera put on steam, and ranged up close to the steamer. The sailing-ship hoisted Peruvian colours as he passed, and the steamer

hoisted Chilian. That was enough for him. He opened fire as soon as he came within range, and so they fell to.

“The Chilian was a vessel something like his own, a passenger-ship made into a cruiser, and in the end he sank her; but just as she was going down she fired a parting shot after the sailing-vessel, which, by an unhappy mischance, tore a great hole in her stern, and caused her, too, to begin to sink. Almost the last shot before this had damaged the propeller of the *Huarura*, but she could still steam, though slowly, and Caldera at once went to the help of the sailing-ship.

“He found that she was from Islay, and that she had over a hundred fugitives, mostly women and children, on board, who had fled from Islay when the Chilians destroyed Mollendo, and were hoping to make their way to Panama. He took these, with the crew, out of the sinking ship on board the *Huarura*, and promised to carry them to Panama himself, since the Chilians held all the coast now,

and, having no orders from the Government, he felt free to do what he thought best for his countrymen in distress.

"So, as there was no possibility for him to get the damage to his propeller made good nearer than Panama, he set out northwards at such speed as he could make with his rescued countrymen on board. This had happened early in the morning, and towards the middle of that afternoon he sighted the smoke of a steamer coming southward, keeping far out as he was for fear of the war-vessels on the coast. He kept on in his course towards her, trusting to his guns in case she should be an enemy, since he had now no more speed left. When the strange vessel came within clear view, he saw that she was a small old passenger-steamer of the Chilian line, which he recognized as one called the *Tupisá*. But there was no flag flying on her, nor, as they came closer, was any attempt made to hoist one.

"He thought this strange, but he saw

something stranger still as he came closer, for then, from the bridge through his glasses, he could see that there were people fighting on her decks, some forward and some aft, and he saw that some one in the forward part on the upper deck was trying to hoist a flag, and others were trying to prevent him; but he could see no signs of guns, and so he steered close in, and then he saw a man and a young girl with revolvers in their hands, keeping back a small throng of men, while another man fastened on the flag and dragged it up.

“As soon as the wind took it, it opened out, for it was not tied up as flags usually are—but that, of course, I need not tell you—and when it opened out, he saw that it was yellow. It was the flag of plague, and as it went up the men made a rush forward at it, crying horribly, as if to pull it down again, and the girl and the man fired two or three times each, and drove them back. And then the other man, when he had pulled up the

flag, ran into the wheelhouse, and presently dragged out a big blackboard, and held it up on the rail. Caldera turned his glasses on it, and saw the dreadful word "Verole" * in big white letters on it. Then the two ships came very near together. The girl, after she had fired away all the shots from her revolver, turned round towards the *Huarura*, and spread her arms out and screamed—

“ ‘ Verole ! Verole ! We are plague-stricken, nearly all of us ! Keep away ! Some hope to escape, and would board you ! Keep away ! ’

“ Then, agonized as the voice was, Caldera, stricken with wonder and horror, recognized it. He turned his glasses on the girl, and recognized her too. It was Carmen, his own Carmen, his promised wife, there on the plague-ship. How she came there, of course he knew not ; but she was there, and that was true enough and horrible enough for him.

* Smallpox.

“Then she saw him standing on the bridge of the *Huarura*, and screamed out again—

“‘Riccardo! Riccardo caro! Keep away from us! Do not try to rescue any! The verole came on board at Guayaquil. The ship is a pest-house. Keep away! If you cannot, then sink us, for we must die.’

“Now, señor, you will easily see that no man could well have been placed in a more dreadful position than poor Caldera was by these words. He was a gentleman with pure Castilian blood in his veins, and he was also a patriotic son of Peru. He loved this heroic girl as only a Spaniard can love, and he saw her now, in this awful situation, for the first time for three years. He would have given his life—nay, his soul, to save her, but he had a hundred women and children dear to others and his own gallant crew to guard. If the ships touched, the stricken ones would leap on board, bringing horrible disease and death with them. Nay, if even a boat passed

from one to the other, the infection would come with it.

"He had seen, too, that the *Tupisá*, slow as she was, was faster a little, a very little, than his own half-crippled ship, and that if he sought to escape her, she must sooner or later overtake him. What hope was there, then, for those under his care save in the last awful resort to the guns?

"Still, even now, he could not bring himself to give the word to fire. Instead, he altered the course of the *Huarura*, and steamed away, shouting back to Carmen—

"'Throw yourself overboard, Carmen mia, you and those who are still clean, and we will save you. You others, keep off, or, by the holy saints, I will fire! I would save you if I could, but I have women and children here, and I dare not.'

"Seeing that the *Huarura* was trying to get away, those who had taken the *Tupisá* changed her course and steamed after her. Then Caldera gave the order, and the guns,

large and small, swung round, and the muzzles went down. Again he and his officers shouted their warning, and, to show that they were in earnest, a shot was fired across the *Tupisá*, but too high to do any harm. Still she came on, slowly gaining on the *Huarura*. Carmen had fled up on to the bridge, where two or three men, and among them the one who had put out the blackboard, were keeping back the crowd with revolvers, but they could not steer the ship from the wheelhouse, because the mutineers had broken the connection, and were steering with the after-wheel.

“At last, when the *Tupisá* was getting very close, those on the bridge had fired all their cartridges away, and so they, too, began to shout to Caldera to fire because of what he had said about the women and children. They were brave men, you see, señor—men who would rather die themselves than bring death on the innocent. And Carmen cried out, too, praying her lover, by the love he bore her, and by all things holy, to forget his

love and do his duty. And while she was crying out thus, there was a rush from the deck to the bridge—a rush of men with faces horrible to behold. There was a fierce fight—a fight with living death for awhile—and then Caldera, his heart torn with agony and his brain reeling with despair, saw one of those deaths in human shape seize Carmen and clap his hand over her mouth.

“The same moment the word ‘Fire!’ left his lips. The great guns roared out, and a shell burst right under the bridge of the *Tupisá*, blowing it and all on it to fragments. Another pierced her side, and tore a great hole down to the water-line, and at the same time the shot and bullets from the smaller guns fell like a hailstorm on her decks, striking down the already stricken, men and women alike, for there were women also on the *Tupisá*, since she was a passenger-ship—horrible work, señor—work, you would think, for devils, not for men; yet what would you—what else could be done?”

“Nothing, I suppose,” I said, speaking for the first time since the cura had begun. “It was a hideous situation; but, after all, Captain Caldera did his duty. Of course, the *Tupisá* went down?”

“I am glad you think that, señor,” he said very softly; “I am glad you think that. Yes, the *Tupisá* sank, and every soul with her. Some of the stricken wretches swam for the lives they had already lost. They were shot in the water that their agony might not be too long; and then the *Huarura* went on to Panama. That is all.”

“You have told me a strange and terrible story, Señor Padre,” I said, “and I will tell it again on the other side of the world for the sake of the heroes who did their duty, and of that brave girl who did hers so well.”

I should have stopped there, but I didn't, and I said—

“But, if you will pardon my curiosity, Señor Padre, you have told the story as only

an eye-witness could have told it. May I ask if that is true?"

"Yes, señor, that is true," he said, rising from his seat and holding out his hand. "I was one of those on board the *Huarura*. Now, *buenos noches!* We have sat late, and you have far to ride to-morrow."

Then I saw the mistake that I had made, and said "Good-night," and went to bed.

At sunrise the next morning the cura brewed me a cup of tea with his own hands, and when I had drank this and the usual *copa* as stirrup-cup, he gave me his blessing, and I started out, with Patricio looking red-eyed and repentant, on my way to scale the pass over which Pizarro and the Conquerors had marched three hundred and sixty years before to seize the last of the Incas in the midst of his victorious host.

Three months afterwards I was sitting with my friend Major Harris on the verandah of the English Club at Callao, telling him of the cura and his story.

“Yes,” he said, when I had done, “that is quite true. Señorita de Salta went on board the *Tupisá* at Panama. She was on her way home from Paris. That was found out after the war from the agent’s passenger-list. When the war was over, Caldera resigned his commission and entered the Church. I heard afterwards that he devoted himself to teaching the Indians in the Interior, and from what you tell me, I have no doubt that you heard the story from his own lips.”

THE END

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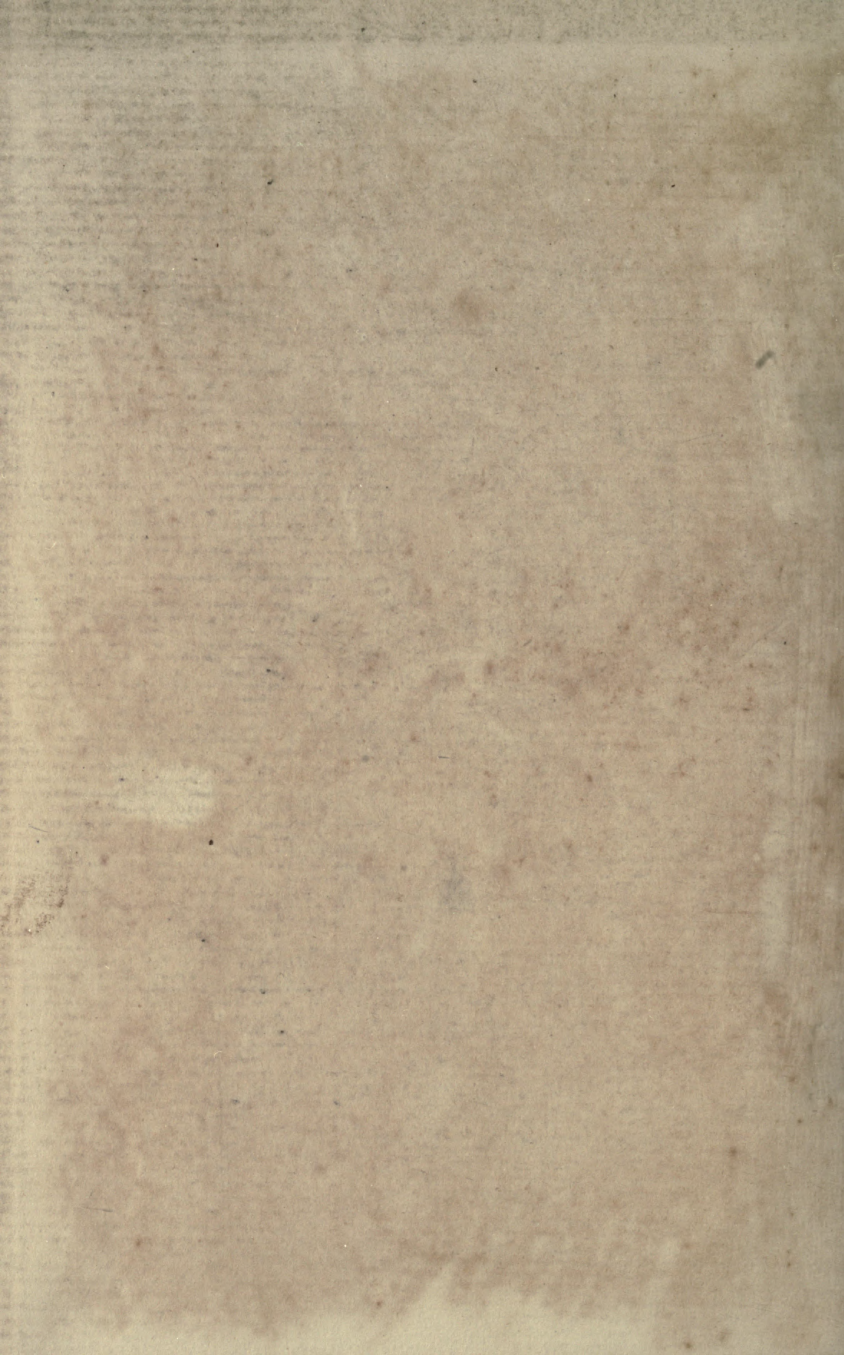
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