



In Saturn's Realm, and Homeward Bound

George Chetwyn Griffith-Jones

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In Saturn's Realm

George Griffith

INTRODUCTION.

— For their honeymoon Rollo Lenox Smeaton Aubrey, Earl of Redgrave, and his bride, Lilla Zaidie, leave the earth on a visit to the Moon and the principal planets, their sole companion being Andrew Murgatroyd, an old engineer who had superintended the building of the Astronef, in which the journey is made. By means of the "R Force," or Anti-Gravitational Force, of the secret of which Lord Redgrave is the sole possessor, they are able to navigate with precision and safety the limitless ocean of Space. Their adventures on the Moon, Mars, Venus, and Jupiter have been described in the first four stories of the series.

THE relative position of the two giants of the Solar System at the moment when the Astronef left the surface of Ganymede, the third and largest satellite of Jupiter, was such that she had to make a journey of rather more than 340,000,000 miles before she passed within the confines of the Saturnian System.

At first her speed, as shown by the observations which Redgrave took by means of instruments designed for such a voyage by Professor Rennick, was comparatively slow. This was due to the tremendous "pull" or attraction of Jupiter and its four moons on the fabric of the Star Navigator; but this backward drag rapidly decreased as the pull of Saturn and his System began to overmaster that of Jupiter.

It so happened, too, that Uranus, the next outer planet of the Solar System, revolving round the Sun at the tremendous distance of more than 1,700,000,000 miles, was approaching its conjunction with Saturn, and thus the pull of the two huge orbs and their systems of satellites acted together on the tiny bulk of the Astronef, producing a constant acceleration of speed.

Jupiter and his System dropped behind, sinking, as it seemed to the wanderers, down into the bottomless gulf of Space, but still forming by far the most brilliant and splendid object in the skies. The far distant Sun which, seen from the Saturnian System, has only about a ninetieth of the superficial extent which he presents to the Earth, dwindled away rapidly until it began to look like a huge planet, with the Earth, Venus, Mars, and Mercury as satellites. Beyond the orbit of Saturn, Uranus, with his eight moons, was shining with the lustre of a star of the first magnitude, and far above and beyond him again hung the pale disc of Neptune, the outer guard of the Solar System, separated from the Sun by a gulf of more than 2,750,000,000 miles.

When two-thirds of the distance between Jupiter and Saturn had been traversed, Saturn lay beneath them like a vast globe surrounded by an enormous circular ocean of many-coloured fire, divided, as it were, by circular shores of shade and darkness. On the side opposite to them a gigantic conical shadow extended beyond the confines of the ocean of light. It was the shadow of half the globe of Saturn cast by the Sun across his rings. Three little dark spots were also travelling across the surface of the rings. They were the shadows of Mimas, Encealadus, and Tethys, the three inner satellites. Japetus, the most distant, which revolves at a distance ten times greater than that of the Moon from the Earth, was rising to their left above the edge of the rings, a pale, yellow, little disc shining feebly against the black background of Space. The rest of the eight satellites were hidden behind the enormous bulk of the planet, and the infinitely vaster area of the rings.

Day after day Zaidie and her husband had been exhausting the possibilities of the English language in attempting to describe to each other the multiplying marvels of the wondrous scene which they were approaching at a speed of more than a hundred miles a second, and at length Zaidie, after nearly an hour's absolute silence, during which they sat with eyes fastened to their telescopes, looked up and said:

"It's no use, Lenox, all the fine words that we've been trying to think of have just been wasted. The angels may have a language that you could describe that in, but we haven't. If it wouldn't be something like blasphemy I should drop down to the commonplace, and call Saturn a celestial spinning-top, with bands of light and shadow instead of colours all round it."

"Not at all a bad simile either," laughed Redgrave, as he got up from his chair with a yawn and a stretch of his athletic limbs, "still, it's as well that you said celestial, for, after all, that's about the best word we've found yet. Certainly the ringed world is the most nearly heavenly thing we've seen so far."

"But," he went on, "I think it's about time we were stopping this headlong fall of ours. Do you see how the landscape is spreading out round us? That means that we're dropping pretty fast. Whereabouts would you like to land? At present we're heading straight for the north pole."

"I think I'd rather see what the rings are like first," said Zaidie; "couldn't we go across them?"

"Certainly we can," he replied, "only we'll have to be a bit careful."

"Careful, what of—collisions? I suppose you're thinking of Proctor's explanation that the rings are formed of multitudes of tiny satellites?"

"Yes, but I should go a little farther than that, I should say that his rings and his eight satellites are to Saturn what the planets generally and the ring of the Asteroides are to the Sun, and if that is the case—I mean if we find the rings made up of myriads of tiny bodies flying round with Saturn—it might get a bit risky.

"You see the outside ring is a bit over 160,000 miles across, and it revolves in less than eleven hours. In other words we might find the ring a sort of celestial maelstrom, and if we once got into the whirl, and Saturn exerted his full pull on us, we might become a satellite, too, and go on swinging round with the rest for a good bit of eternity."

"Very well, then," she said, "of course we don't want to do anything of that sort, but there's something else I think we could do," she went on, taking up a copy of Proctor's "Saturn and its System," which she had been reading just after breakfast. "You see those rings are, all together, about 10,000 miles broad; there's a gap of about 1700 miles between the big dark one and the middle bright one, and it's nearly 10,000 miles from the edge of the bright ring to the surface of Saturn. Now why shouldn't we get in between the inner ring and the planet? If Proctor was right and the rings are made of tiny satellites and there are myriads of them, of course they'll pull up while Saturn pulls down. In fact Flammarion says somewhere, that along Saturn's equator there is no weight at all."

"Quite possible," said Redgrave, "and, if you like, we'll go and prove it. Of course, if the Astronef weighs absolutely nothing between Saturn and the rings, we can easily get away. The only thing that I object to is getting into this 170,000 mile vortex, being whizzed round with Saturn every ten and a half hours, and sauntering round the Sun at 21,000 miles an hour."

"Don't," she said, "really it isn't good to think about these things, situated as we are. Fancy, in a single year of Saturn there are nearly 25,000 days. Why, we should each of us be about thirty years older when we got round, even if we lived, which, of course, we shouldn't. By the way, how long could we live for, if the worst came to the worst?"

"About two earth-years at the outside," he replied, "but, of course, we shall be home long before that."

"If we don't become one of the satellites of Saturn," she replied, "or get dragged away by something into the outer depths of Space."

Meanwhile the downward speed of the Astronef had been considerably checked. The vast circle of the rings seemed to suddenly expand, though it now covered the whole floor of the vault of Space.

As the Astronef dropped towards what might be called the limit of the northern tropic of Saturn, the spectacle presented by the rings became every minute more and more marvellous—purple and silver, black and gold, dotted with myriads of brilliant points of many-coloured lights, they stretched upwards like vast rainbows in the Saturnian sky as the Astronef's position changed with regard to the horizon of the planet. The nearer they approached the surface, the nearer the gigantic arch of the many coloured rings approached the zenith. Sun and stars sank down behind it, for now they were dropping through the fifteen-year-long twilight that reigns over that portion of the globe of Saturn which during half of his year of thirty terrestrial years is turned away from the Sun.

The further they dropped towards the rings the more certain it became that the theory of the great English astronomer was the correct one. Seen through the telescopes at a distance of only thirty or forty thousand miles, it became perfectly plain that the outer or darker ring as seen from the Earth, was composed of myriads of tiny bodies so far separated from each other that the rayless blackness of Space could be seen through them.

"It's quite evident," said Redgrave, "that those are rings of what we should call meteorites on earth, atoms of matter which Saturn threw off into Space after the satellites were formed ."

"And I shouldn't wonder, if you will excuse my interrupting you," said Zaidie, "if the moons themselves have been made up of a lot of these things going together when they were only gas, or nebula or something of that sort. In fact, when Saturn was a good deal younger than he is now, he may have had a lot more rings and no moons, and now these aerolites, or whatever they are, can't come together and make moons, because they've got too solid."

Meanwhile the Astronef was dropping rapidly down towards the port on of Saturn's surface which was illuminated by the rays of the Sun, streaming under the lower arch of the inner ring.

As they passed under it the whole scene suddenly changed. The rings vanished. Overhead was an arch of brilliant light a hundred miles thick, spanning the whole of the visible heavens. Below lay the sunlit surface of Saturn divided into light and dark bands of enormous breadth.

The band immediately below them was of a brilliant silver-grey, very much like the central zone of Jupiter. North of this on the one side stretched the long shadow of the rings, and southward other bands of alternating white and gold and deep purple succeeded each other till they were lost in the curvature of the vast planet. The poles were of course invisible since the Astronef was now too near to the surface; but on their approach they had seen unmistakable evidence of snow and ice.

As soon as they were exactly under the Ring-arch, Redgrave shut off the R. Force, and, somewhat to their astonishment, the Astronef began to revolve slowly on its axis, giving them the idea that the Saturnian System was revolving round them. The arch seemed to sink beneath their feet while the belts of the planet rose above them.

"What on earth is the matter?" said Zaidie. "Everything has gone upside down."

"Which shows," replied Redgrave, "that as soon as the Astronef became neutral the rings pulled harder than the planet, I suppose because we're so near to them, and, instead of falling on to Saturn, we shall have to push up at him."

"Oh yes, I see that," said Zaidie, "but after all it does look a little bit bewildering, doesn't it, to be on your feet one minute and on your head the next?"

"It is, rather; but you ought to be getting accustomed to that sort of thing now. In a few minutes neither you, nor I, nor anything else will have any weight. We shall be just between the attraction of the Rings and Saturn, so you'd better go and sit down, for if you were to give a bit of an extra spring in walking you might be knocking that pretty head of yours against the roof," said Redgrave, as he went to turn the R. Force on to the edge of the Rings.

A vast sea of silver cloud seemed now to descend upon them. Then they entered it, and for nearly half-an-hour the Astronef was totally enveloped in a sea of pearl-grey luminous mist.

"Atmosphere!" said Redgrave, as he went to the conning-tower and signalled to Murgatroyd to start the propellers. They continued to rise and the mist began to drift past them in patches, showing that the propellers were driving them ahead.

They now rose swiftly towards the surface of the planet. The cloud wrack got thinner and thinner, and presently they found themselves floating in a clear atmosphere between two seas of cloud, the one above them being much less dense than the one below.

"I believe we shall see Saturn on the other side of that," said Zaidie, looking up at it. "Oh dear, there we are going round again."

"Reaching the point of neutral attraction," said Redgrave; "once more you'd better sit down in case of accidents."

Instead of dropping into her deck chair as she would have done on Earth, she took hold of the arms and pulled herself into it, saying:

"Really it seems rather absurd to have to do this sort of thing. Fancy having to hold yourself into a chair. I suppose I hardly weigh anything at all now"

"Not much," said Redgrave, stooping down and taking hold of the end of the chair with both hands. Without any apparent effort he raised her about five feet from the floor, and held her there while the Astronef made another revolution. For a moment he let go, and she and the chair floated between the roof and the floor of the deck-chamber. Then he pulled the chair away from under her, and as the floor of the vessel once more turned towards Saturn, he took hold of her hands and brought her to her feet on deck again.

"I ought to have had a photograph of you like that!" he laughed. "I wonder what they'd think of it at home? "

"If you had taken one I should certainly have broken the negative. The very idea, a photograph of me standing on nothing! Besides, they'd never believe it on Earth."

"We might have got old Andrew to make an affidavit to that effect," he began.

"Don't talk nonsense, Lenox! Look! There's something much more interesting. There's Saturn at last. Now I wonder if we shall find any sort of life there—and shall we be able to breathe the air?"

"I hardly think so," he said, as the Astronef dropped slowly through the thin cloud-veil. "You know spectrum analysis has proved that there is a gas in Saturn's atmosphere which we know nothing about, and, whatever it may be for the inhabitants' it's not very likely that it would agree with us, so I think we'd better be content with our own. Besides, the atmosphere is so enormously dense that even if we could breathe it it might squash us up. You see we're only accustomed to fifteen pounds on the square inch, and it may be hundreds of pounds here."

"Well," said Zaidie, "I haven't got any particular desire to be flattened out like that, or squeezed dry like an orange. It's not at all a nice idea, is it? But, look, Lenox," she went on, pointing downwards, "surely this isn't air at all, or at least it's something between air and water. Aren't these things swimming about in it—something like fish in the sea? They can't be clouds, and they aren't either fish or birds. They don't fly or float. Well, this is certainly more wonderful than anything else we've seen, though it doesn't look very pleasant. They're not nice looking, are they? I wonder if they are at all dangerous!"

While she was saying this Zaidie had gone to her telescope, and was sweeping the surface of Saturn, which was now about 100 miles distant. Her husband was doing the same. In fact, for the time being they were all eyes, for they were looking on a stranger sight than human beings had ever seen before.

Underneath the inner cloud-veil the atmosphere of Saturn appeared to them somewhat as the lower depths of the ocean would appear to a diver, granted that he was able to see for hundreds of miles about him. Its colour was a pale greenish yellow. The outside thermometers showed that the temperature was a hundred and seventy-five. In fact the interior of the Astronef was getting uncomfortably like a Turkish bath, and Redgrave took the opportunity of at once freshening and cooling the air by releasing a little from the cylinders where it was stored in liquid form.

From what they could see of the surface of Saturn it seemed to be a dead level, greyish-brown in colour, and not divided into oceans and continents. In fact there were no signs whatever of water within range of their telescopes. There was nothing that looked like cities, or any human habitations, but the ground, as they got nearer to it, seemed to be covered with a very dense vegetable growth, not unlike gigantic forms of seaweed, and of somewhat the same colour. In fact, as Zaidie remarked, the surface of Saturn was not at all unlike what the floors of the ocean of the Earth might be if they were laid bare.

It was evident that the life of this portion of Saturn was not what, for want of a more exact word, might be called terrestrial. Its inhabitants, however they were constituted, floated about in the depths of this semi-gaseous ocean as the denizens of earthly seas did in the terrestrial oceans. Already their telescopes enabled them to make out enormous moving shapes, black and grey-brown and pale red, swimming about, evidently by their own volition, rising and falling and often sinking down on to the gigantic vegetation which covered the surface, possibly for the purpose of feeding. But it was also evident that they resembled the inhabitants of earthly oceans in another respect since it was easy

to see that they preyed upon each other.

"I don't like the look of those creatures at all," said Zaidie when the Astronef had come to a stop and was floating about five miles above the surface. "They're altogether too uncanny. They look to me something like jelly-fish about the size of whales only they have eyes and mouths. Did you ever see such awful looking eyes, bigger than soup-plates and as bright as a cat's. I suppose that's because of the dim light. And the nasty wormy sort of way they swim, or fly, or whatever it is. Lenox, I don't know what the rest of Saturn may be like, but I certainly don't like this part. It's quite too creepy and unearthly for my taste. Look at the horrors fighting and eating each other. That's the only bit of earthly character they've got about them; the big ones eating the little ones. I hope they won't take the Astronef for something nice to eat."

"They'd find her a pretty tough morsel if they did," laughed Redgrave, "but still we may as well get some speed on her in case of accident."

In obedience to a signal to Murgatroyd, the propellers began to revolve, beating the dense air and driving the Star Navigator about twenty miles an hour through the depths of this strangely-peopled ocean.

They approached nearer and nearer to the surface, and as they did so the strange creatures about them grew more and more numerous. They were certainly the most extraordinary living things that human eyes had looked upon. Zaidie's comparison to the whale and the jelly fish was by no means incorrect; only when they got near enough to them they found, to their astonishment, that they were double-headed—that is to say, they had a head furnished with mouth, nostrils, ear-holes, and eyes at each end of their bodies.

The larger of the creatures appeared to have a certain amount of respect for each other. Now and then they witnessed a battle-royal between two of the monsters who were pursuing the same prey. Their method of attack was as follows: the assailant would rise above his opponent or prey, and then, dropping on to its back, envelope it and begin tearing at its sides and under parts with huge beak-like jaws, somewhat resembling those of the largest kind of the earthly octopus, only very much larger. The substance composing their bodies appeared to be not unlike that of a terrestrial jelly-fish, but much denser, and having the tenacity of soft India rubber save at the double ends, where it was much harder, in fact a good deal more like horn.

When one of them had overpowered an enemy or a victim the two sank down into the vegetation, and the victor began to eat the vanquished. Their means of locomotion consisted of huge fins, or rather half fins, half wings, of which they had three laterally arranged behind each head, and four much longer and narrower, above and below, which seemed to be used mainly for steering purposes.

They moved with equal ease in either direction, and they appeared to rise or fall by inflating or deflating the middle portions of their bodies, somewhat as fish do with their

swimming bladders.

The light in the lower regions of this strange ocean was dimmer than earthly twilight, although the Astronef was steadily making her way beneath the arch of the rings towards the sunlit hemisphere.

"I wonder what the effect of the searchlight would be on these fellows!" said Redgrave. "Those huge eyes of theirs are evidently only suited to dim light. Let's try and dazzle some of them."

"I hope it won't be a case of the moths and the candle!" said Zaidie. "They don't seem to have taken much interest in us so far. Perhaps they haven't been able to see properly, but suppose they were attracted by the light and began crowding round us and fastening on to us, as the horrible things do with each other. What should we do then? They might drag us down and perhaps keep us there; but there's one thing, they'd never eat us, because we could keep closed up and die respectably together."

"Not much fear of that, little woman," he said, "we're too strong for them. Hardened steel and toughened glass ought to be more than a match for a lot of exaggerated jelly-fish like these," said Redgrave, as he switched on the head search-light. "We've come here to see strange things and we may as well see them. Ah, would you my friend. No, this is not one of your sort, and it isn't meant to eat."

A huge, double-headed monster, apparently some four hundred feet long, came floating towards them as the search-light flashed out, and others began instantly to crowd about them, just as Zaidie had feared.

"Lenox, for Heaven's sake be careful!" cried Zaidie, shrinking up beside him as the huge, hideous head, with its saucer eyes and enormous beak-like jaws wide open, came towards them. "And look, there are more coming. Can't we go up and get away from them?"

"Wait a minute, little woman," replied Redgrave, who was beginning to feel the passion of adventure thrilling in his nerves "If we fought the Martian air fleet and licked it I think we can manage these things. Let's see how he likes the light."

As he spoke he flashed the full glare of the five thousand candle-power lamp full on to the creature's great cat-like eyes. Instantly it bent itself up into an arc. The two heads, each the exact image of the other, came together. The four eyes glared half dazzled into the conning-tower and the four huge jaws snapped viciously together.

"Lenox, Lenox, for goodness sake let us go up!" cried Zaidie shrinking still closer to him. "That thing's too horrible to look at."

"It is a beast, isn't it?" he said, "but I think we can cut him in two without much trouble."

He pressed one of the buttons on the signal board three times quickly and once slowly. It was the signal for full speed on the propellers, that is to say about a hundred earth-miles an hour. The Astronef ought to have sprung forward and driven her ram through the

huge, brick-red body of the hideous creature which was now only a couple of hundred yards from them; but instead of that a slow, jarring, grinding thrill seemed to run through her, and she stopped. The next moment Murgatroyd put his head up through the companion-way which led from the upper deck to the conning-tower, and said in a tone whose calm indicated, as usual, resignation to the worst that could happen:

"My lord, two of those beasts, fishes or live balloons, or whatever they are, have come across the propellers. They're cut up a good bit, but I've had to stop the engines, and they're clinging all round the after part. We're going down, too. Shall I disconnect the propellers and turn on the repulsion?"

"Yes, certainly, Andrew!" cried Zaidie, "and all of it, too. Look, Lenox, that horrible thing is coming. Suppose it broke the glass, and we couldn't breathe this atmosphere!"

As she spoke the enormous, double-headed body advanced until it completely enveloped the forward part of the Astronef. The two hideous heads came close to the sides of the conning-tower; the huge, palely luminous eyes looked in upon them. Zaidie, in her terror, even thought that she saw something like human curiosity in them.

Then, as Murgatroyd disappeared to obey the orders which Redgrave had sanctioned with a quick nod, the heads approached still closer, and she heard the ends of the pointed jaws, which she now saw were armed with shark-like teeth, striking against the thick glass walls of the conning-tower.

"Don't be frightened, dear!" he said, putting his arm round her, just as he had done when they thought they were falling into the fiery seas of Jupiter. "You'll see something happen to this gentleman soon. Big and all as he is there won't be much left of him in a few minutes. They are like those monsters they found in the lowest depths of our own seas. They can only live under tremendous pressure. That's why we didn't find any of them up above. This chap'll burst like a bubble presently. Meanwhile, there's no use in stopping here. Suppose you go below and brew some coffee and bring it up on deck with a drop of brandy in it, while I go and see how things are looking aft. It doesn't do you any good, you know, to be looking at monsters of this sort. You can see what's left of them later on."

Zaidie was not at all sorry to obey him, for the horrible sight had almost sickened her.

They were still under the arch of the rings, and so, when the full strength of the R. Force was directed against the body of Saturn, the vessel sprang upwards like a projectile fired from a cannon.

Redgrave went back into the conning-tower to see what happened to their assailant. It was already trying vainly to detach itself and sink back into a more congenial element. As the pressure of the atmosphere decreased its huge body swelled up into still huger proportions. The skin on the two heads puffed up as though air was being pumped in under it. The great eyes protruded out of their sockets; the jaws opened widely as though the creature were gasping for breath.

Meanwhile Murgatroyd was seeing something very similar at the after end, and wondering what was going to happen to his propellers, the blades of which were deeply imbedded in the jelly-like flesh of the monsters.

The Astronef leaped higher and higher, and the hideous bodies which were clinging to her swelled out huger and huger, and Redgrave even fancied that he heard something like the cries of pain from both heads on either side of the conning-tower. They passed through the inner cloud-veil, and then the Astronef began to turn on her axis, and, just as the outer envelope came into view the enormously distended bulk of the monsters collapsed, and their fragments, seeming now more like the tatters of a burst balloon, dropped from the body of the Astronef and floated away down into what had once been their native element.

"Difference of environment means a lot, after all," said Redgrave to himself. "I should have called that either a lie or a miracle if I hadn't seen it, and I'm jolly glad I sent Zaidie down below."

"Here's your coffee, Lenox," said Zaidie's voice from the upper deck, "only it doesn't seem to want to stop in the cups, and the cups keep getting off the saucers. I suppose we're turning upside down again."

Redgrave stepped somewhat gingerly on to the deck, for his body had so little weight under the double attraction of Saturn and the Rings that a very slight effort would have sent him flying up to the roof of the deck-chamber.

"That's exactly as you please," he said, "just hold that table steady a minute. We shall have our centre of gravity back soon. And now, as to the main question, suppose we take a trip across the sunlit hemisphere of Saturn to, what I suppose we should call, on Earth, the South Pole. We can get resistance from the Rings, and as we are here we may as well see what the rest of Saturn is like. You see, if our theory is correct as to the Rings gathering up most of the atmosphere of Saturn about its equator, we shall get to higher altitudes where the air is thinner and more like our own, and therefore it's quite possible that we shall find different forms of life in it too—or if you've had enough of Saturn and would prefer a trip to Uranus -? "

"No, thanks," said Zaidie quickly. "To tell you the truth, Lenox, I've had almost enough star-wandering for one honeymoon, and though we've seen nice things as well as horrible things—especially those ghastly, slimy creatures down there—I'm beginning to feel a bit homesick for good old mother Earth. You see, we're nearly a thousand million miles from home, and, even with you, it makes one feel a bit lonely. I vote we explore the rest of this hemisphere up to the pole, and then, as they say at sea—I mean our sea—'bout ship, and see if we can find our own old world again. After all, it's more homelike than any of these, isn't it?"

"Just take your telescope and look at it," said Redgrave, pointing towards the Sun, with its little cluster of attendant planets. "It looks something like one of Jupiter's little moons

down there, doesn't it, only not quite as big?"

"Yes, it does, but that doesn't matter. The fact is that it's there, and we know what it's like, and it's home, if it is a thousand million miles away, and that's everything."

By this time they had passed through the outer band of clouds. The huge, sunlit arch of the Rings towered up to the zenith, and apparently overarched the whole heavens. Below and in front of them lay the enormous semi-circle of the hemisphere which was turned towards the Sun, shrouded by its many colored bands of clouds. The Repulsive Force was directed strongly against the lower Ring, and the Astronef dropped rapidly in a slanting direction through the cloud-bands towards the southern temperate zone of the planet.

They passed through the second, or dark, cloud-band at the rate of about three thousand miles an hour, aided by the Repulsion against the Rings and, the attraction of the planet, and soon after lunch, the materials of which now consented to remain on the table, they passed through the clouds and found themselves in a new world of wonders.

On a far vaster scale, it was the Earth during that period of its development which is called the Reptilian Age. The atmosphere was still dense and loaded with aqueous vapour, but the waters had already been divided from the land.

They passed over vast, marshy continents and islands, and warm seas, above which thin clouds of steam still hung. They passed through these, and, as they swept southward with the propellers working at their utmost speed, they caught glimpses of giant forms rising out of the steamy waters near the land; of others crawling slowly over it, dragging their huge bulk through a tremendous vegetation, which they crushed down as they passed, as a sheep on earth might push its way through a field of standing corn.

Yet other shapes, huge winged and ungainly, fluttered with a slow, bat-like motion, through the lower strata of the atmosphere.

Every now and then during the voyage across the temperate zone the propellers were slowed down to enable them to witness some Titanic conflict between the gigantic denizens of land and sea and air. But her ladyship had had enough of horrors on the Saturnian equator, and so she was quite content to watch this phase of evolution (as it had happened on the Earth many thousands of ages ago) from a convenient distance, and so the Astronef sped on southward without approaching the surface nearer than a couple of miles.

"It'll be all very nice to see and remember and dream about afterwards," she said, "but really I don't think I can stand any more monsters just now, at least not at close quarters, and I'm quite sure if those things can live there we couldn't, any more than we could have lived on Earth a million years or so ago. No, really I don't want to land, Lenox, let's go on."

They went on at a speed of about a hundred miles an hour, and, as they progressed

southward, both the atmosphere and the landscape rapidly changed. The air grew clearer and the clouds lighter. Lands and seas were more sharply divided, and both teeming with life. The seas still swarmed with serpentine monsters of the saurian type, and the firmer lands were peopled by huge animals, mastodons, bears, giant tapirs, nyledons, deinotheriums, and a score of other species too strange for them to recognise by any earthly likeness, which roamed in great herds through the vast twilit forests and over boundless plains covered with grey-blue vegetation.

Here, too, they found mountains for the first time on Saturn; mountains steep-sided, and many earth-miles high.

As the Astronef was skirting the side of one of these ranges Redgrave allowed it to approach more closely than he had so far done to the surface of Saturn.

"I shouldn't wonder if we found some of the higher forms of life up here," he said. "If there is anything here that's going to develop some clay into the human race of Saturn, it would naturally get up here."

"Of course it would," said Zaidie, "as far as possible out of the reach of those unutterable horrors on the equator. I should think that would be one of the first signs they would show of superior intelligence. Look, I believe there are some of them. Do you see those holes in the mountain side there? And there they are, something like gorillas, only twice as big, and up the trees, too—and what trees! They must be seven or eight hundred feet high."

"Tree and cave-dwellers, and ancestors of the future royal race of Saturn, I suppose!" said Redgrave. "They don't look very nice, do they? Still, there's no doubt about their being far superior in intelligence to what we left behind us. Evidently this atmosphere is too thin for the two-headed jelly-fishes, and the saurians to breathe. These creatures have found that out in a few hundreds of generations, and so they have come to live up here out of the way. Vegetarians, I suppose, or perhaps they live on smaller monkeys and other animals, just as our ancestors did."

"Really, Lenox," said Zaidie, turning round and facing him, "I must say that you have a most unpleasant way of alluding to one's ancestors. They couldn't help what they were."

"Well, dear," he said, going towards her, "marvellous as the miracle seems, I'm heretic enough to believe it possible that your ancestors even, millions of years ago, perhaps, may have been something like those; but then, of course, you know I'm a hopeless Darwinian."

"And, therefore, entirely horrid, as I've often said before when you get on subjects like these. Not, of course, that I'm ashamed of my poor relations; and then, after all, your Darwin was quite wrong when he talked about the descent of man—and woman. We—especially the women—have ascended from that sort of thing, if there's any truth in the story at all; though, personally, I must say I prefer dear old Mother Eve."

"Who never had a sweeter daughter!" he replied, drawing her towards him.

"And, meanwhile, compliments being barred, I'll go and get dinner ready," she said. "After all, it doesn't matter what world one's in, one get's hungry all the same."

The dinner, which was eaten somewhere in the middle of the fifteen-year-long day of Saturn, was a very pleasant one, because they were now nearing the turning-point of their trip into the depths of Space, and thoughts of home and friends were already beginning to fly back across the thousand-million-mile gulf which lay between them and the Earth which they had left only a little more than two months ago.

While they were at dinner the Astronef rose above the mountains and resumed her southward course. Zaidie brought the coffee up on deck as usual after dinner, and, while Redgrave smoked his cigar and Zaidie her cigarette, they luxuriated in the magnificent spectacle of the sunlit side of Rings towering up, rainbow built on rainbow, to the zenith of their visible heavens.

"What a pity there aren't any words to describe it!" said Zaidie. "I wonder if the descendants of the ancestors of the future human race on Saturn will invent anything like a suitable language. I wonder how they'll talk about those Rings millions of years hence."

"By that time there may not be any Rings," Lenox replied, blowing a ring of smoke from his own lips. "Look at that—made in a moment and gone in a moment—and yet on exactly the same principle, it gives one a dim idea of the difference between time and eternity. After all it's only another example of Kelvin's theory of vortices. Nebulae, and asteroids, and planet-rings, and smoke-rings are really all made on the same principle."

"My dear Lenox, if you're going to get as philosophical and as commonplace as that I'm going to bed. Now that I come to think of it, I've been about fifteen earth-hours out of bed, so it's about time I went. It's your turn to make the coffee in the morning—our morning I mean—and you'll wake me in time to see the South Pole of Saturn, won't you? You're not coming yet, I suppose?"

"Not just yet, dear. I want to see a bit more of this, and then I must go through the engines and see that they're all right for that thousand million mile homeward voyage you're talking about. You can have a good ten hours' sleep without missing much, I think, for there doesn't seem to be anything more interesting than our own Arctic life down there. So good-night, little woman, and don't have too many nightmares."

"Good-night!" she said, "if you hear me shout you'll know that you've to come and protect me from monsters. Weren't those two-headed brutes just too horrid for words? Good-night, dear!"

Homeward Bound

George Griffith

AFTER leaving Saturn the Astronef pursued her lonely course on her homeward voyage across the fields of space, while the Ringed World, which had so nearly proved the end of Lord and Lady Redgrave's wanderings, grew dimmer every hour behind them.

On the morning of the fourth day from Saturn Lord Redgrave went as usual into the conning-tower to examine the instruments and to see that everything was in order. To his intense surprise he found, on looking at the gravitational compass, which was to the Astronef what the ordinary compass is to a ship at sea, that the vessel was a long way out of her course.

Such a thing had never yet occurred. Up to now the Astronef had obeyed the laws of gravitation and repulsion with absolute exactness. He made another examination of the instruments; but no, all were in perfect order.

"I wonder what the deuce is the matter," he said, after he had looked for a few moments with frowning eyes at the Heavens before him. "By Jove, we're swinging more. This is getting serious.

He went back to the compass. The long, slender needle was slowly swinging farther and farther out of the middle line of the vessel.

"There can only be two explanations of that," he went on, thrusting his hands deep into his trouser pockets; "either the engines are not working properly, or some enormous and invisible body is pulling us towards it out of our course. Let's have a look at the engines first."

When he reached the engine-room he said to Murgatroyd, who was indulging in his usual pastime of cleaning and polishing his beloved charges:

"Have you noticed anything wrong during the last hour or so, Murgatroyd?"

"No, my lord, at least not so far as concerns the engines. They're all right. Hark now, they're not making more noise than a lady's sewing machine," replied the old Yorkshireman with a note of resentment in his voice. The suspicion that anything could be wrong with his shining darlings was almost a personal offence to him. "But is anything the matter, my lord, if I might ask?"

"We're a long way off our course, and for the life of me I can't understand it," replied Redgrave. "There's nothing about here to pull us out of our line. Of course the stars—good Lord, I never thought of that! Look here, Murgatroyd, not a word about this to her

ladyship. and stand by to raise the power by degrees, as I signal to you."

"Ay, my lord. I hope it's nothing bad."

Redgrave went back to the conning-tower without replying. The only possible solution of the mystery of the deviation had suddenly dawned upon him, and a very serious solution it was. He remembered that there were such things as dead suns—the derelicts of the Ocean of Space—vast, invisible orbs, lightless and lifeless, too distant from any living sun to be illumined by its rays, and yet exercising the only force left to them, the force of attraction. Might not one of these have wandered near enough to the confines of the Solar system to exert this force, a force of absolutely unknown magnitude, upon the Astronef?

He went to a little desk beside the instrument-table and plunged into a maze of mathematics, of masses and weights, angles and distances. Half-an-hour later he stood looking at the last symbol on the last sheet of paper with something like fear. It was the fatal x which remained to satisfy the last equation, the unknown quantity which represented the unseen force that was dragging the Astronef into the outer wilderness of interstellar space, into far-off regions from which, with the remaining force at his disposal, no return would be possible.

He signalled to Murgatroyd to increase the development of the R. Force from a tenth to a half. Then he went to the lower saloon, where Zaidie was busy with her usual morning "tidy-up." Now that the mystery was explained there was no reason to keep her in the dark. Indeed, he had given her his word that he would conceal from her no danger, however great, that might threaten them when he had once assured himself of its existence.

She listened to him in silence and without a sign of fear beyond a little lifting of the eyelids and a little fading of the colour in her cheeks.

"And if we can't resist this force," she said, when he had finished, "it will drag us millions—perhaps millions of millions—of miles away from our own system into outer space, and we shall either fall on the surface of this dead sun and be reduced to a puff of lighted gas in an instant, or some other body will pull us away from it, and then another away from that, and so on, and we shall wander among the stars for ever and ever until the end of time!"

"If the first happens, darling, we shall die—together—without knowing it. It's the second that I'm most afraid of. The Astronef may go on wandering among the stars for ever—but we have only water enough for three weeks more. Now come into the conning—tower and we'll see how things are going."

As they bent their heads over the instrument-table Redgrave saw that the remorseless needle had moved two degrees more to the right. The keel of the Astronef, under the impulse of the R. Force, was continually turning. The pull of the invisible orb was dragging the vessel slowly but irresistibly out of her line.

"There's nothing for it but this," said Redgrave, putting out his hand to the signal-board, and signalling to Murgatroyd to put the engines to their highest power. "You see, dear, our greatest danger is this; we have had to exert such a tremendous lot of power that we haven't any too much to spare, and if we have to spend it in counteracting the pull of this dead sun, or whatever it is, we may not have enough of what I call the R. Fluid left to get home with."

"I see," she said, staring with wide-open eyes at the needle. "You mean that we may not have enough to keep us from falling into one of the planets or perhaps into the sun itself. Well, supposing the dangers are equal, this one is the nearest, and so I guess we've got to fight it first."

"Spoken like a good American!" he said, putting his arm across her shoulders and looking at once with infinite pride and infinite regret at the calm, proud face which the glory of resignation had adorned with a new beauty.

She bowed her head and then looked away again so that he should not see that there were tears in her eyes. He took his hand from her shoulder and stared in silence down at the needle. It was stationary again.

"We've stopped!" he said, after a pause of several moments. "Now, if the body that's taken us out of our course is moving away from us we win, if it's coming towards us we lose. At any rate, we've done all we can. Come along, Zaidie, let's go and have a walk on deck."

They had scarcely reached the upper deck when something happened which dwarfed all the other experiences of their marvellous voyage into utter insignificance. Above and around them the constellations blazed with a splendour inconceivable to an observer on earth, but ahead of them gaped the vast, black void which sailors call "the coal-hole," and in which the most powerful telescopes have only discovered a few faintly luminous bodies. Suddenly, out of the midst of this infinity of darkness, there blazed a glare of almost intolerably brilliant radiance. Instantly the forward end of the Astronef was bathed in light and heat—the light and heat of a re-created sun, whose elements had been dark and cold for uncounted ages.

Hundreds of tiny points of light, unknown worlds which had been dark for myriads of years, twinkled out of the blackness. Then the fierce glare grew dimmer. A vast mantle of luminous mist spread out with inconceivable rapidity, and in the midst of this blazed the central nucleus—the sun which in far-off ages to come would be the giver of light and heat, of life and beauty to worlds unborn, to planets which were now only little eddies of atoms whirling in that ocean of nebulous flame.

For more than an hour the two voyagers stood motionless and silent, gazing on the indescribable splendours of a spectacle such as no human eyes but theirs had ever beheld. Every earthly thought seemed burnt out of their souls by the glory and the wonder of it. It was almost as though they were standing in the very presence of God,

for were they not witnessing the supreme act of omnipotence, a new creation? Their peril, a peril such as had never threatened mortals before, was utterly forgotten. They had even forgotten each other's presence. For the time being they existed only to look and to wonder.

They were called at length out of their trance by the matter-of-fact voice of Murgatroyd saying: "My lord, she's back to her course. Will I keep the power on full?"

"Eh! What's that?" exclaimed Redgrave, as they both turned quickly round. "Oh, it's you, Murgatroyd. The power? Yes, keep it on full till I have taken the bearings."

"Ay, my lord, very good." replied the engineer. As he left the deck Redgrave put his arm round Zaidie and drew her gently towards him and said: "Zaidie, truly you are favoured among women! You have seen the beginning of a new creation. You will certainly be saved somehow after that."

"Yes, and you too, dear," she murmured, as though still half-dreaming. "It is very glorious and wonderful; but what is it all—I mean, what is the explanation of it?"

"The merely scientific explanation, dear, is very simple. I see it all now. The force that was dragging us out of our course was the united pull of two dead stars approaching each other in the same orbit. They may have been doing that for millions of years. The shock of their meeting has transformed their motion into light and heat. They have united to form a single sun and a nebula, which will some day condense into a system of planets like ours. To-night the astronomers on earth will discover a new star—a variable star as they'll call it—for it will grow dimmer as it moves away from our system. It has often happened before."

Then they turned back to the conning-tower. The needle had swung to its old position. The new star, henceforth to be known in the annals of astronomy as Lilla-Zaidie, had already set for them to the right of the Astronef and risen on the left, and, at a distance of over nineteen hundred million miles from the earth, the corner was turned, and the homeward voyage began.

A few days later they crossed the path of Jupiter, but the giant was invisible, far away on the other side of the sun. Redgrave laid his course so as to avail himself to the utmost of the "pull" of the planets without going near enough to them to be compelled to exert too much of the priceless R. Force, which the indicators showed to be running perilously low.

Between the orbits of Jupiter and Mars they made a decided economy by landing on Ceres, one of the largest of the asteroids, and travelling about fifty million miles on her towards the orbit of the earth without any expenditure of force whatever. They found the tiny world possessed of a breathable atmosphere and a fluid resembling water but nearly as dense as mercury. A couple of flasks of it form the greatest treasures of the British Museum and the National Museum at Washington. The vegetable world was represented by coarse grass, lichens, and dwarf shrubs, and the animal by different species of worms,

lizards and flies, and small burrowing animals of the rodent type.

As the orbit of Ceres, like that of the other asteroids, is considerably inclined to that of the earth, the Astronef rose from its surface when the plane of the earth's revolution was reached, and the glittering swarm of miniature planets plunged away into space beneath them.

"Where to now?" said Zaidie, as her husband came down on deck from the conning-tower.

"I am going to try to steer a middle course between the orbits of Mercury and Venus," he replied. "They just happen to be so placed now that we ought to be able to get the advantage of the pull of both of them as we pass, and that will save us a lot of power. The only thing I'm afraid of is the pull of the sun, equal to goodness knows how many times the attraction of all the planets put together. You see, little woman, it's like this," he went on, taking out a pencil and going down on one knee on the deck: "Here's the Astronef; there's Venus; there's Mercury; there's the sun; and there, away on the other side of him, is Mother Earth: If we can turn that corner safely and without expending too much power we should be all right."

"And if we can't, what will happen?"

"It will be a choice between morphine and cremation in the atmosphere of the sun, dear, or rather gradually roasting as we fall towards it."

"Then, of course, it will be morphine," she said quite quietly, as she turned away from his diagram and looked at the now fast increasing disc of the sun. A well-balanced mind speedily becomes accustomed even to the most terrible perils, and Zaidie had now looked this one so long and so steadily in the face that for her it had already become merely the choice between two forms of death with just a chance of escape hidden in the closed hand of Fate.

Thirty-six earth-hours later the glorious golden disc of Venus lay broad and bright beneath them. Above was the blazing orb of the Sun, nearly half as big again as it appears from the earth, with Mercury, a round black spot, travelling slowly across it.

"My dear Bird-Folk!" said Zaidie, looking down at the lovely world below them. "If home wasn't home-"

"We can be back among, them in a few hours with absolute safety," interrupted her husband, catching at the suggestion. "I've told you the truth about getting back to the earth. It's only a chance at best, and even if we pass the sun we may not have force enough left to prevent the Astronef from being smashed to dust or burnt up in the atmosphere. After all we might do worse-"

"What would you do if you were alone, Rollo?" she said, interrupting him in turn.

"I should take my chance and go on. After all home's home and worth a struggle. But you, dear-"

"I'm you, and so I take the same chances as you do. Besides, we're not perfect enough for a world where there isn't any sin. We should probably get quite miserable there. No, home's home, as you say."

"Then home it is, dear!" he replied.

The vast, resplendent hemisphere of the Love-Star sunk down into the vault of space, growing swiftly smaller and dimmer as the Astronef sped towards the little black spot on the face of the sun, which to them was like a buoy marking a place of utter and hopeless shipwreck in the ocean of immensity.

The chronometer, still set to earth time, had now begun to mark the last hours of the Astronef's voyage. She was not only travelling at a speed of which figures could give no comprehensible idea, but the Sun, Mercury, and the Earth were rushing towards her with a compound velocity, composed of the movement of the Solar System through space and of the movement of the two planets round the sun.

Murgatroyd was at his post in the engine-room. Redgrave and Zaidie had gone into the conning-tower, perhaps for the last time. For good fortune or evil, for life or death, they would see the end of the voyage together.

"How far yet, dear?" she said, as Venus began to slip away behind them, rising like a splendid moon in their wake.

"Only sixty million miles or so, a matter of a few hours, more or less—it all depends," he replied, without taking his eyes off the compass.

"Sixty millions! Why I feel almost at home again."

"But we have to turn the corner of the street yet, dear, and after that there's a fall of more than twenty-five million miles on to the more or less kindly breast of Mother Earth."

"A fall! It does sound rather awful when you put it that way; but I am not going to let you frighten me. I believe Mother Earth will receive her wandering children quite as kindly as they deserve."

The moon-like disc of Venus grew swiftly smaller, and the black spot on the face of the sun larger and larger as the Astronef rushed silently and imperceptibly, and yet with almost inconceivable velocity, towards doom or fortune. Neither Zaidie nor Redgrave spoke again for nearly three hours—hours which to them seemed to pass like so many minutes. Their eyes were fixed on the black disc of Mercury, which, as they approached it, expanded with magical rapidity till it completely eclipsed the blazing orb behind it. Their thoughts were far away on the still invisible earth and all the splendid possibilities that it held for two young lives like theirs.

As the sunlight vanished they looked at each other in the golden moonlight of Venus, and Zaidie let her head rest for a moment on her husband's shoulder. Then a swiftly broadening gleam of light shot out from behind the black circle of Mercury. The first crisis had come. Redgrave put out his hand to the signal-board and rang for full power.

The planet seemed to swing round as the Astronef rushed into the blaze. In a few minutes it passed through the phases from "new" to "full." Venus became eclipsed in turn as they swung between Mercury and the Sun, and then Redgrave, after a rapid glance to either side, said:

"If we can only keep the two pulls balanced we shall do it. That will keep us in a straight line, and our own momentum ought to carry us into the earth's attraction."

Zaidie did not reply. She was shading her eyes with her hand from the almost intolerable brilliance of the sun's rays, and looking straight ahead to catch the first glimpse of the silver-grey orb. Her husband read her thoughts and respected them. But a few minutes later he startled her out of her dream of home by exclaiming:

"Good God, we're turning!"

"What do you say, dear? Turning what?"

"On our own centre. Look! I'm afraid only a miracle can save us now, darling."

She looked to the left-hand side where he was pointing. The sun, no longer now a sun, but a vast ocean of flame filling, nearly a third of the vault of space, was sinking beneath them. On the right Mercury was rising. Zaidie knew only too well what this meant. It meant that the keel of the Astronef was being dragged out of the straight line which would cut the earth's orbit some forty million miles away. It meant that, in spite of the exertion of the full power that the engines could develop, they had begun to fall into the sun.

Redgrave laid his hand on his wife's, and their eyes met. There was no need for words. Perhaps speech just then would have been impossible. In that mute glance each looked into the other's soul and was content. Then he left the conning-tower, and Zaidie dropped on to her knees before the instrument-table and laid her forehead upon her clasped hands.

Her husband went to the saloon, unlocked a little cupboard in the wall and took out a blue bottle of corrugated glass labeled "Morphine, poison." He took another empty bottle of white glass and measured fifty drops into it. Then he went to the engine-room and said abruptly:

"Murgatroyd, I'm afraid it's all up with us. We're falling into the sun, and you know what that means. In a few hours the Astronef will be red-hot. So it's roasting alive—or this. I recommend this."

"And what might that be, my lord?" said the old engineer, looking at the bottle which his master held out towards him. "That's morphine—poison. Fill that up with water, drink it, and in half-an-hour you'll be dead without knowing it. Of course, you won't take it until there's absolutely no hope; but, granted that, you'll find this a better death than roasting or baking alive." Then his voice changed suddenly as he went on: "Of course, I need not say, Murgatroyd, how deeply I regret now that I asked you to come in the Astronef."

"My lord, my people have served yours for seven hundred years, and, whether on earth or among the stars, where you go it is my duty to go also. But don't ask me to take the poison. It is not for me to say that a journey like this is tempting Providence, but, by my lights, if I am to die it will be the death that Providence sends."

"I daresay you're right in one way, Murgatroyd, but it's no time to argue about beliefs now. There's the bottle. Do as you think right. And now, in case the miracle doesn't happen, good-bye.

"Good-bye, my lord, if it be so," replied the old Yorkshireman, taking the hand which Redgrave held out to him. "I'll keep the power on to the last, I suppose?"

"Yes, you may as well. If it doesn't keep us away from the Sun it won't be much use to us in two or three hours."

He left the engine-room and went back to the conning-tower. Zaidie was still on her knees. Beneath and around them the awful gulf of flame was broadening and deepening. Mercury was rising higher and growing smaller. He put the bottle down on the table and waited. Then Zaidie looked up. Her eyes were clear, and her face was perfectly calm. She rose and put her arm through his, and said:

"Well, is there any hope, dear? There can't be now, can there? Is that the morphine?"

"Yes," he replied, slipping his arm beneath hers and round her waist. "I'm afraid there's not much hope now, little womam. We're using up the last of the power, and you see—"

As he said this he looked at the thermometer. The mercury had risen from 65 deg. Fahrenheit, the normal temperature of the interior of the Astronef, to 93 deg., and during the half-minute that he watched it rose another degree. There was no mistaking such a warning as that. He had brought two little liqueur glasses in his pocket from the saloon. He divided the morphine between them, and filled them up with water.

"Not until the last moment, dear," said Zaidie, as he set one of them before her. "We have no right to do it until then."

"Very well. When the mercury reaches a hundred and fifty. After that it will go up ten and fifteen degrees at a jump, and we —"

"Yes, at a hundred and fifty," she replied, cutting short a speech she dared not hear the end of. "I understand. It will be impossible to hope any more."

Now, side by side, they stood and watched the thermometer.

Ninety-five—ninety-eight—a hundred and three—a hundred and ten—eighteen—twenty-four—thirty-two—forty-one—

The silent minutes passed, and with each the silver thread—for them the thread of life—grew, with strange contradiction, longer and longer, and with every minute it grew more quickly.

A hundred and forty-six.

With his right arm Redgrave drew Zaidie still closer to him. He put out his left hand and took up the little glass. She did the same.

"Good-bye, dear, till we have slept and wake again!"

"Good-bye, darling, God grant that we may!" But the agony of that last farewell was more than Zaidie could hear. She looked away at the little glass in her hand, a hand which even now did not tremble. Then she raised her eyes again to take one last look at the glory of the stars, and at the Fate incarnate in flame which lay beneath them.

"The Earth, the Earth—thank God, the Earth! "

With the hand that held the draught of Lethe—which in another moment would have passed her lips—she caught at her husband's hand, pulled the glass out of it, and then with a little sigh she dropped senseless on the floor of the conning-tower. Redgrave looked for a moment in the direction that her eyes had taken. A pale, silver-grey crescent, with a little white spot near it, was rising out of the blackness beyond the edge of the solar ocean of flame. Home was in sight at last, but would they reach it—and how?

He picked her up and carried her to their room and laid her on the bed. Then he went to the medicine chest again, this time for a very different purpose.

An hour later, they were on the upper deck with their telescopes turned on to the rapidly-growing crescent of the home-world, which, in its eternal march through space, had come into the line of direct attraction just in time to turn the scale in which the lives of the star-voyagers were trembling. The higher it rose, the bigger and broader and brighter it grew, and, at last, Zaidie—forgetting in her transport of joy all the perils that were yet to come—sprang to her feet and clapped her hands, and cried:

"There's America!"

Then she dropped back into her long deck-chair and began a good, hearty, healthy cry.

Note.- The manner of the ending of the Astronef's marvellous voyage is now as much a matter of public knowledge as are the circumstances of its beginning. Everyone knows now how, with the remains of the R force, Lord Redgrave managed to steer the star-navigator so accurately between the earth and the moon that, descending obliquely towards the earth, she became, during eleven days and twelve nights of terrible suspense, a tiny satellite of the Mother Planet with a constantly decreasing orbit. How, during one awful hour, by the exertions of the last unit of power, of which her engines were capable, she almost grazed the highest peaks of the Bolivian Andes, swept like a meteor over the foot-hills and plains of the western slope of Peru and took the waters of the Pacific barely ten miles from the coast. It is equally needless to recapitulate the delights and the splendours of the welcome home which the whole civilised world united to give to Lord Redgrave and his lovely countess, whose diary of the star voyage

has, thanks to her Ladyship's generous condescension, furnished alike the groundwork and the inspiration of the present series of narratives.