

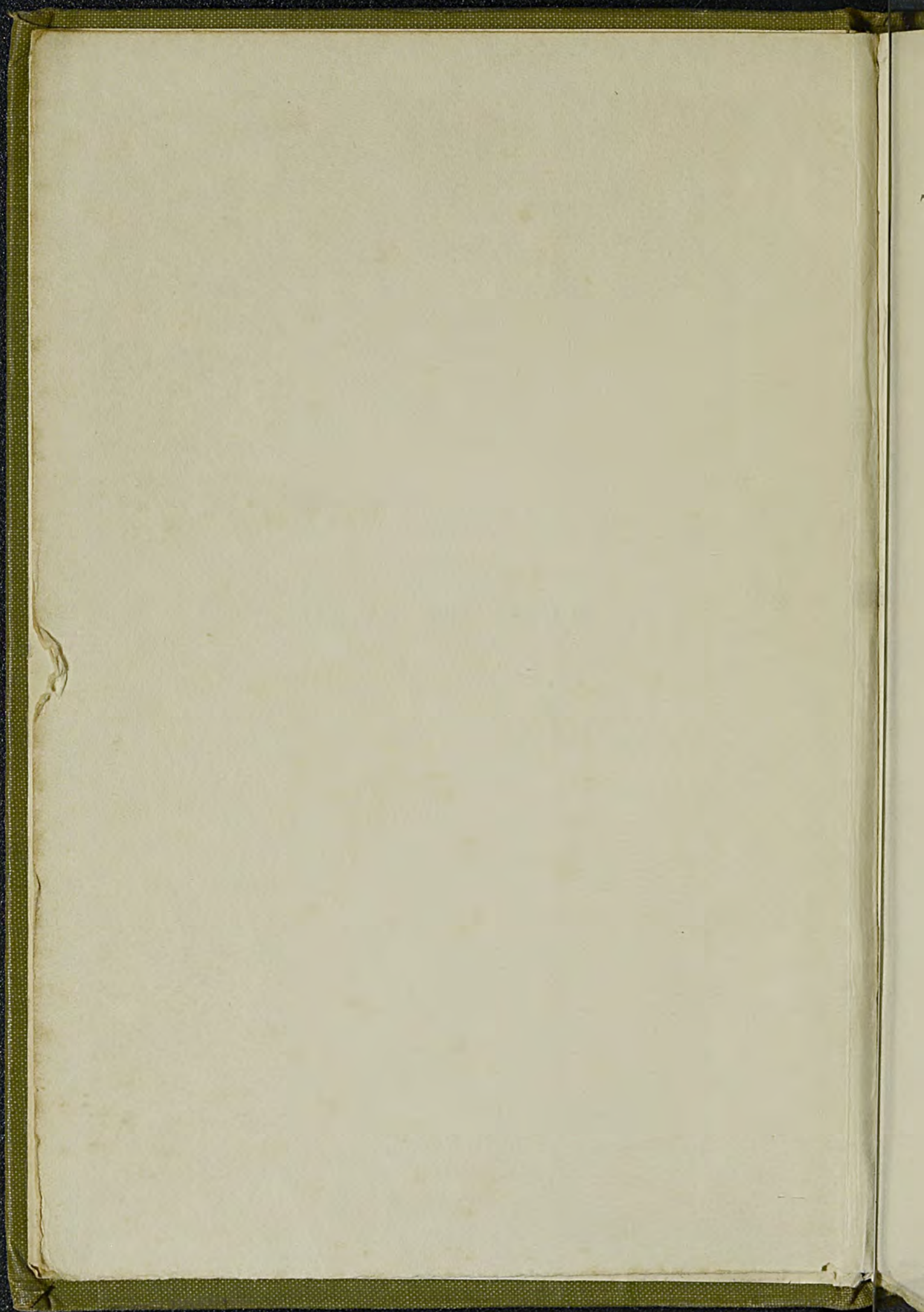
The Lake of Gold

George Griffith

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THE LAKE OF GOLD



THE LAKE OF GOLD

*A NARRATIVE OF THE
ANGLO-AMERICAN CONQUEST OF EUROPE*

BY

GEORGE GRIFFITH

AUTHOR OF

"THE ANGEL OF THE REVOLUTION," "BROTHERS OF THE CHAIN,"
"GAMBLES WITH DESTINY," "THE JUSTICE OF REVENGE,"
"A HONEYMOON IN SPACE," ETC., ETC.

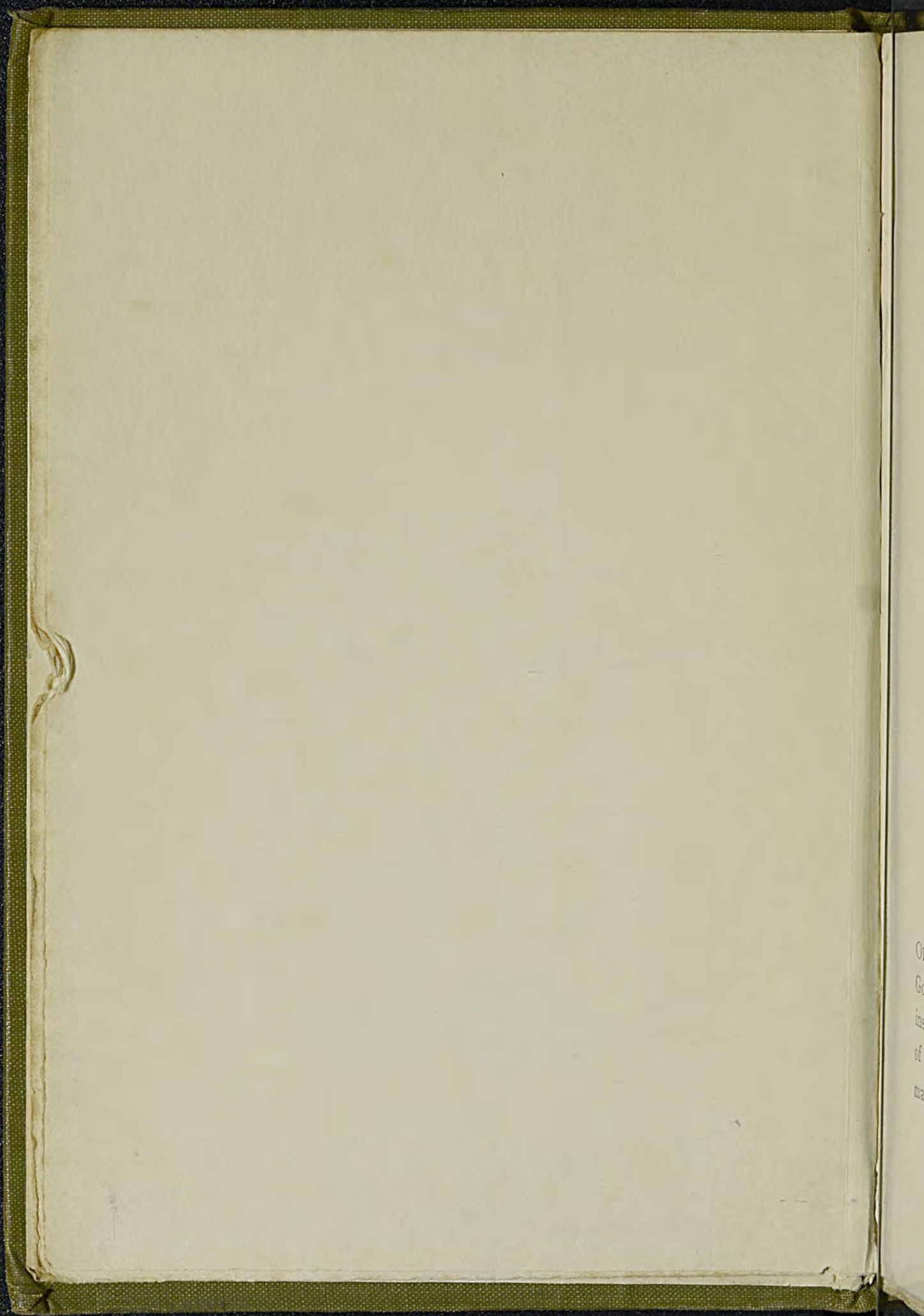


LONDON:

F. V. WHITE & CO., LIMITED

14 BEDFORD STREET, STRAND, W.C.

1903



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FOREWORD

Gold! Gold! Gold!
Bright and yellow, hard and cold,
Molten, graven, hammer'd and roll'd;
Heavy to get, and light to hold;
Hoarded, barter'd, bought and sold,
Stolen, borrow'd, squander'd, doled:
Spurn'd by the young, but hugg'd by the old
To the very verge of the churchyard mould;
Price of many a crime untold;
Gold! Gold! Gold!—*Hood.*

OF all the material forces in existence the power of Gold is the greatest. It has, indeed, in too many instances, proved more potent than the strongest of human passions and moral sentiments. The maiden, loving one man, has been sold to another—

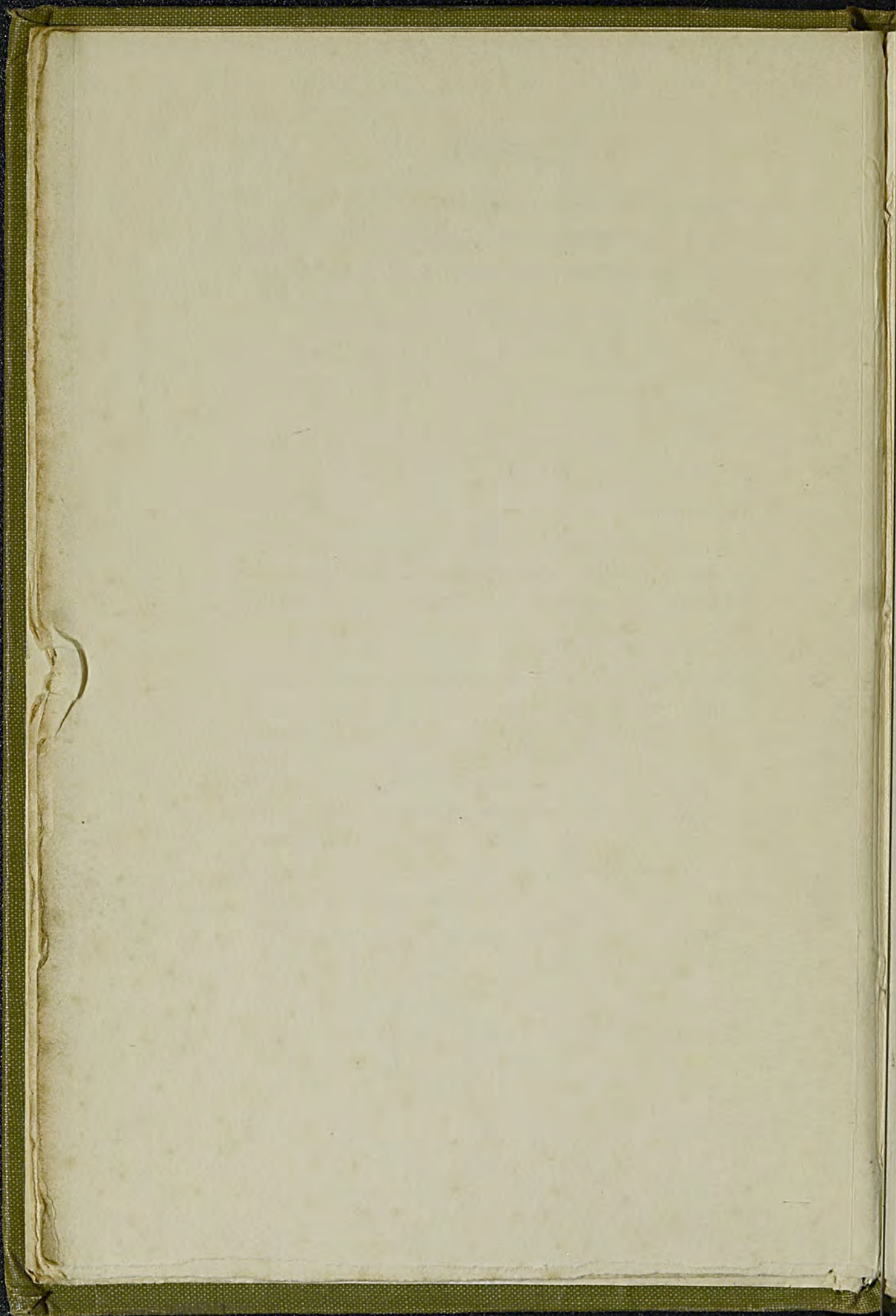
for gold. Statesmen and Kings have sold their country's trust—for gold. Men and women have changed their faith and even turned their backs on their God—for gold. There is no crime that has not been committed, no dishonour that has not been incurred—for gold.

In the following chapters an attempt has been made to forecast the possibilities—Moral, social and political—of the control of a practically unlimited supply of gold in the hands of two or three people who are prepared to use it well or ill as circumstances, which they themselves to a great extent create, may demand.

The first use they make of their illimitable wealth is to enthrone themselves as Lords of Air and Sea, in other words Dictators of Human Affairs. The outcome of such a situation is not far to seek. As that Power was used for good or ill the world would become a more or less imperfect imitation of Heaven or Hell.

The vast accumulation of wealth in a few hands—not always of the cleanest—is undoubtedly the most ominous feature of Modern Commercial life. Whether the exercise of such a terrific Power by rich despots as too many of these men have proved themselves to be—would in the end work out as a blessing

or a curse to Humanity is a problem which, in accomplishing their destinies, the characters of this story may possibly help in some measure to solve.—G. G.



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THE LAKE OF GOLD

CHAPTER I

"WELL I guess that's fixed it as far as figuring out can fix anything, and if Dad was right and I'm right—and I'll take my iron-clad oath that I am—the Great Problem is solved at last. It's curious how near Dad had got to it and yet managed after all to stop so far away. It was just the placing of those discs to begin with. His gravity destroyers as he called them—only he didn't make them destroy gravity. I shan't either, but I'll do a lot to counteract it.

"Well good-night, my beauties! We've had a good many pleasant evenings together and now it is all over except finding the money to change you from drawings and paintings on cardboard into real things of steel, and glass and aluminium—cruisers of the air and the deep sea! Ah, if I only had a million or just a half! Yes, getting that is the dream now—not the airships or the submarines. It's just dollars now—dollars or nothing!"

During his little soliloquy Paul Kingston had collected the exquisitely-drawn plans and elevations, details of machinery, parts of structures, sections and

scales with which his big drawing table was littered, put the sheets of cardboard and paper together with loving care and stowed them away in a big drawer. Then he picked up a corn-cob pipe, filled and lit it, and went out on to the verandah which ran along the end of the house fronting towards the south-east.

Lake City, Colorado, was still a town with a certain amount of business and prosperity, but nothing to what it had enjoyed in the great days of the Silver Boom. In fact its fall from greatness was still amply manifested in the ragged fringe of unoccupied houses and deserted stores which had once formed its flourishing suburbs. The present Lake City, a town between six and seven thousand inhabitants, which had once had fifty, stood on the south-eastern slope of a range of hills which was an offshoot of the once famous Sierra De La Plata, or Silver Range. Paul's verandah looked out over the lake, which now lay shining silver-blue under the moonlight, fringed with a broad, sombre border of giant pines. Another range of hills rose, pine-crowned beyond it, and beyond this again, nearly a hundred miles away but looking only half the distance in that wonderful atmosphere, the snowy pinnacles of the Sierra Blanca twinkled like diamonds against the blackness of the midnight sky.

"Fancy being able to fly over those!" he went on, continuing his waking dream aloud, "to think no more of a mountain range than a bird does of a house-roof. Fancy being able to rise from the earth just when you like, start your engines, and then away to where you want to go on a bee line. No need to crawl round curves and under snow-sheds, worrying all the time about land-slides and wash-outs—and then away over the sea, not caring a cent whether

it is rough or smooth, and looking down and watching the big steamers crawling along and fighting the storm for every mile they make while the Lord of the Air rides on the wings of the wind. Yes, it will be glorious, glorious—if I can only get those dollars!”

“Paul, don’t you think it is time you were getting to bed? Have you any idea what the time is?”

“Ah, is that you? Say, Mother, how would you like to be Mistress of the World?”

“Mistress of the world, Paul! what on earth are you talking about? You’ve not been thinking too much again, have you? You know what I’ve told you about the trouble I had with your father to keep him from doing that. I’ve been listening to you here for the last minute or so dreaming aloud about flying over land and sea. My dear Paul, I hope for my sake and your own, that you’re not going to waste your time and your talent as he did, dreaming about that impossible air-ship which he was always going to get perfect and never did.”

“Don’t you worry about that, Mother,” exclaimed the lad—for as a matter of fact Paul Kingston was only a little over eighteen. “It wasn’t dreaming, it was all hard thinking that Dad did; only for some reason or other he didn’t think quite far enough. And there’s no such thing as wasting time in hard thinking. Every hour that he put into this is going to be worth a few million dollars to us, if I can only get the money to start with. If I get that what you call his dreaming and wasted time over, the air-ship will be the biggest legacy a man ever left to his son, for it will be nothing less than the mastery of the world, and that is what I meant when I asked you if you would like to be mistress of it.”

"But surely, my dear Paul—are you quite serious? You know that no one would be more delighted at your success than your mother—but to be able to fly in a ship through the air over land or sea in storm or calm just as you please as I heard you saying to yourself just now! Are you really quite serious, quite sure that you haven't been dreaming one of your father's day-dreams again?"

"Serious, Mother," he replied, putting his arm round her shoulders, "never a man, or a boy if you like, had better reason to be serious than I have just now. I've done it, at any rate, as far as theory and calculation go. I've worked everything out to thousandths of inches and ounces, and hundredths of a horse-power. I've got his anti-gravity discs into the right position. I've perfected his conversion principle of turning petroleum and coal-dust into actual working energy right away without boilers or furnaces, and so I've been able to get motors that will exert a horse-power for about every half-pound of their weight. Of course, with that the problem of direct flight is solved. The other puzzle, which no one has ever been able to find an answer to before, how to balance yourself perfectly in the air as a bird does, is solved by the gravitational discs.

"Now just come in and have a look at my plans," he went on, drawing her towards the door; "I'm not going to bother you with figures or mechanics or mathematics or anything of that sort—they will be for the millionaire and his experts when they come along; but I just want to give you a general idea as to what the thing will be like, if I can only get it materialized."

They went to the drawing-table and he took out

his beloved plans again and showed her everything from the smallest details of machinery to the beautifully drawn and tinted representation of the complete air-ship—as she might be some day. His mother, full for the moment of sadly tender memories of the hours she had spent with his father looking at similar drawings and listening to just such confident talk of instant success, followed his rapid descriptions as well as she could with more fear than hope in her heart; for if it had not been for dreams such as this her husband, so all his friends had told her, might have lived a millionaire instead of breaking his neck at the bottom of a mine-shaft doing his work as an ordinary, though very successful engineer.

“And now,” said Paul when he had finished his glowing description, “you’ve asked me what would one of those ships cost. Well, say two hundred thousand dollars, about the twenty-fifth of the price of an ordinary battleship like the Iowa, and yet she could fight twenty Iowas. It isn’t only money, Mother, it’s mastery. A syndicate that owned ten of these ships could run the earth, in fact, the earth just wouldn’t have anything to say about it. England pays thirty million pounds a year to keep her navy going, we spend about eighteen, and yet ten of these ships could take on the English and American navies and knock them into scrap-iron just as fast as the ships came in sight. It’s just a question of money to begin with and that is all there is to it.”

“Ah but, my boy, two hundred thousand dollars! Why we haven’t twenty thousand outside our income, and of course no one would advance you anything on just a lot of sheets of papers with drawings on them.”

"No, I guess not, unless I happened to strike the right man, and there's maybe ten men like that wandering around between Maine and Mexico—and yet, just think of it! Only a million dollars, which a hundred men in the States could put down without missing them and—there's the empire of earth and sea! Oh, I forgot, I haven't shown you these yet. See, this is the same principle applied in the reverse way—submarine navigation, and I believe I've found a variant of the Hertz rays that will give me a light that I can see under water as well as you can see by electric light through the air, and that, you see, would solve the problem of submarine navigation in once. Everything else is easy, but no one has found out yet how to see through water, and until we can do that, it's no use talking about effective submarines. If that pans out all right it is only a question of dollars between us and an empire that might be as big as the Solar System."

"Yes, I see, dollars, dollars!" said the mother, putting her arm over her son's shoulder. "Your father always said that it was just dollars or rather the want of them that kept him from being rich and famous. I hope it won't be the same with you, Paul."

"It won't," he replied, full of "the daring dreams of trustful twenty," "it won't. I've done the work and the dollars will come somehow; they must."

"They will, I hope," said the mother with more meaning than he dreamt of. "I hope for your sake they will. And now, don't you think that you had better go to bed? Do you know that it is nearly two o'clock?"

"Fourteen, you mean," he replied, getting up.

"You haven't forgotten that the twenty-four hour system was made legal in Lake City, Colorado, last week?"

"Well, it doesn't matter whether it is two or fourteen, it is very late and quite time you went to bed and gave that poor brain of yours a rest after all that thinking. We must talk about the dollars another day."

"All right, Mother," he said, beginning to pack up his papers, "and I'll dream about myself as Emperor of the Air, and Lord Paramount of the Sea. I've done a better night's work than any other man in the States, and I reckon I've earned a good sleep. Good night; I hope you have not been stopping up on my account."

"No, not altogether," she replied with a somewhat sad little smile. "Now be off to bed, and I hope your dreams will be happy and come true."

Mrs. Paul Kingston had dreams of her own that night, but they were mostly waking ones. Her son's enthusiastic belief that he had solved the problem which his father had spent so many years on without success had set her thinking about a letter which she had received that morning. It was from one of her husband's friends and former associates in engineering and mining enterprises. Paul Kingston, now dead nearly two years, had been a man of great genius, not only in civil engineering and mining work, his own profession, but even still greater in mechanical engineering. He had, in fact, left England quite early in his career mainly because he was too far ahead in his ideas for English enterprise. He soon got on far enough in the States to marry Shiela Cornell, a bright and pretty American girl, whom he

had met on the ship, and, under her father's advice, had migrated West.

In Colorado he had met Gillette H. Marvin, a man a few years older than himself, and they had become great friends. Marvin was a typical Westerner, and he possessed that genius for accumulating dollars which Kingston almost totally lacked. In fact, where money-making was concerned Marvin was as hard as a nail, was as unscrupulous as a brigand, at least, so those he had worsted at the financial game were wont to declare.

But in private life no one had a bad word to say against him. Tall, blue-eyed, golden-bearded, as straight as a pine, and as strong as a horse, he was the incarnation of gentleness, good humour and generosity. In fact, those who knew him intimately would tell you that if he did rob ruthlessly with the right hand of business he gave a great deal of the plunder away again with the left hand of charity.

He was also, always apart from business, a visionary with a strong vein of poetry, and his favourite theory of the future was a millennium brought about by an intellectual despotism of money. At this time he was good for some seven or eight millions, and had interests in half the industries of the United States.

This was the man who had written the letter which Mrs. Kingston read over again for about the fifth time when she reached her room:

"MY DEAR MRS. KINGSTON,

"I am afraid that this letter will cause you considerable surprise, but not, I trust, either pain or anger. It is now nearly two years since poor Paul died, and I am going to tell you a secret which

I hope you have never guessed before. Anyhow, I have taken all the pains I know to prevent you doing so. I loved you from the first time I saw you. I did it just because I couldn't help it; but I know Paul never guessed it, and I don't think you did so there is no harm done but you know why I didn't marry the English Lord's daughter. Of course I know nothing of your feelings about me, if you have any, which, perhaps, you have not. You see I am playing this hand blind, but if there is any chance for me, I mean if you will give me permission to try to win the greatest prize that the whole earth could give me, just send a couple of lines to say that I may take a run down to Lake City.

"Yours faithfully,

"GILLETTE H. MARVIN."

Shiela Kingston had thought a great deal about this letter during the day and now she put in some more thinking, because the brief conversation with her son had given her new thoughts. She had married at seventeen and was now nearly thirty-seven, but she came of a good old American stock that wore well, and she didn't look more than thirty-two. Her figure was as straight and as shapely as it had been at twenty-five, and her fair, soft-skinned face, with its small regular features and laughing brown eyes, looked very sweet and fresh in its framework of abundant chestnut hair.

She had known Marvin for over five years, and they had been excellent friends; but for all that the letter came to her as a very distinct shock. She had always liked and admired him, but this was a thing that she had never even dreamt of, so well had he kept his secret. That, certainly, was a point in his favour,

and a great one. If she did marry again—and there was no reason why she shouldn't—why not her husband's old friend and hers, a man she had known and liked for years, rather than a stranger—a man, too, who had been a good friend to her son and had mainly made it possible for him to step into his father's place and make striking success that he had done?

And then his millions! Ah, that was the other thought. Not a mercenary one, exactly, for if she decided to permit him to make the attempt it would not matter whether he had ten millions or ten thousand—still, if she did—would he not be just the man to be fascinated with Paul's splendid schemes?

And then, what if Paul's genius and Marvin's millions *did* realise the miracle! Her son, her only child, would verily be one of the greatest among men, raised by the might of his own genius above all the thrones of the world. It was truly a magnificent prospect for a mother's fancy to dwell on, even in Dreamland.

She had another good think over it in the morning and another talk with Paul, who seemed even fuller of hope and confidence than he had been the night before. Nothing but the money to construct the models was needed to convince any engineer or other practical person that both air-ships and submarines would do everything that he claimed for them—only the experiments would cost about five thousand dollars, and it was quite out of the question to take such a large sum as that out of the little fortune that his father had managed to save.

When the talk was over and he had gone back

to his work Mrs. Kingston sat down with a bright, almost girlish flush on her cheeks and wrote:—

“DEAR MR. MARVIN,

“Your letter has astonished me very much. I can make no promises, but, if you really wish to pay a visit to Lake City, both Paul and myself will be very glad to see you. Paul, by the way, has some wonderful ideas about flying ships and submarines which I am sure he would very much like to talk over with you.

Sincerely yours,

SHIELA KINGSTON.”

CHAPTER II

GILLETTE MARVIN arrived six days later from San Francisco. It was the quickest time he could make without having a special, and he knew that would find anything but favour in Mrs. Kingston's eyes. He came just in the ordinary way, as he had done many times before, and so perfectly guarded was his manner that Paul never had the remotest notion of the real object of his visit until the secret came out several weeks later. All he noticed was that his mother flushed a little as they shook hands and turned away rather quickly; but this, of course, did not convey the slightest hint of the real state of affairs to his mind.

Marvin's first impression on Shiela was a distinctly favourable one. Of course she could not help looking on him with other eyes now. It was quite impossible that she should not, since she had gone so far on the way to meet him as to give him permission to woo her if he wished, and win her if he could, and she could not help knowing, that he was here beside her for that very purpose. She was well aware, too, that Marvin had the reputation of having successfully carried through every enterprise that he had set his hand to, and she was bound to confess to herself that he looked it.

"I'm going to bring some other visitors down to Lake City in a few days," he said in part response

to Mrs. Kingston's request for news from San Francisco, "and I reckon that will be the most interesting of all the news to you. What do you say to having a real gilt-edged English duke and his lovely and only daughter stopping right here in Lake City? Not a brewer, or a dry-goods man, or a stock-rigger that has bought a title with big subscriptions to his party; but a regular high-toned aristocrat, with blood as blue as a Spanish grandee; and with no more of the nobility nonsense about him than I have."

"Ah, that is a piece of news!" exclaimed Shiela, "a real duke—the highest title next to royalty isn't it? But what in the Land is so much nobility coming here for?"

"You've got it in once," laughed Marvin; "it's just the land his Grace is after; certain chunks of God's own Country, those with metals and ores in them for choice. You see, although his title and his family are about as old as the English throne and he has got money to burn, he's also one of the new sort of nobility that they are getting in England; men who like enterprise for its own sake, who go in for running as much of the earth as they can get hold of just for the sport of the game, as we do over here. That's how I came to strike him over in London. He is a very fine fellow, and we froze to one another at once."

"And now what's his name—and what is his daughter like?"

"His name and style, as they say over there, is Geoffrey Lorraine Lovell, Duke of Romney and Marquis, Earl, Baron and all the rest of it, of half a dozen other places. He's about my age, or perhaps a year or two older. He lost his eldest son, the

Marquis of Chesney, about six months ago in the South African war—shot leading a charge like many other good English noblemen. Of course it was a terrible sorrow to him, and that is one reason why he is over here. His wife died of influenza and pneumonia only about a year before that, so he is left with a young lad at Eton and the Lady Margaret."

"Poor man!" said Mrs. Kingston. "Well, I suppose even dukes have their sorrows like the rest of us. And now we come to the daughter."

"The daughter—say, Paul, if your heart isn't in someone else's safe-keeping already, you'll need to get a good grip of it and hold it hard when Lady Margaret is on hand. She's just a perfect peach, as sweet and pretty and good a girl as the Lord ever put blue blood into. She's rising seventeen, tall, dark, and with a pair of eyes—well, I guess you'll not be long finding out what they're like."

"It's to be hoped you won't, Paul. I'm afraid you will find the distance between a duke's daughter and a poor mining engineer in Colorado a little bit too great for your peace of mind, unless, of course, you got your wonderful inventions to work, and then, perhaps——"

"What's that?" exclaimed Marvin. "So have you turned inventor, like your father, Paul? I hope you will do more at it. I always told you that that flying-ship business of his was a regular wild-cat scheme. Yours isn't anything of that sort, I suppose?"

"That's just what it is, Mr. Marvin," laughed Paul, "only I've added submarining to it. I've found out where father went wrong, but of course I have had all the good of his work in the experiments. I daresay you think I am talking through my hair, but

I'm dead sure I can fly when I get my ship made."

"My dear Paul," said Marvin seriously, "I never knew of an inventor yet that couldn't fly or do any other old thing on paper."

Then, remembering his errand, he laughed and went on, "Still, I'm not a man to discourage genius. I know something about engineering and mechanics, and so you must let me have a look at these plans of yours. Have you made your model yet?"

Paul smiled and said somewhat sadly: "A proper working model of the air-ship would cost a round five thousand dollars."

"Well, five thousand dollars is considerable money to burn over an experiment," said Marvin; "still, we'll have a look at it later on."

There was a slight change of tone in the last few words which caused Paul's mother to look away out of the window. What if Marvin had guessed her thought—or perhaps was it a thought of his own? She hoped so, for the other would be really too terrible. What would he think of her? He would just think that she was to be bought for her son's sake, and she would rather that Paul should be a mere mining engineer all his days than have him think that.

That evening after supper Marvin went with Paul into his work-room and they spent a couple of hours going over the plans and calculations. Gillette Marvin was a man of many parts, and among those he had played, not a few had been connected with mechanics. Like so many of the successful men of the States, he had started as a workman at the bench, whence he had climbed up to the post of foreman of a big machine shop. He had done this, as the American workman generally does, by a thorough

study of the theory underlying his trade. He had done the same thing when he had made some money by a patent and went in for mining engineering. He had studied the subject, both literally and metaphorically, to the bottom so that he might know exactly what he was putting his money into, and the natural result had been a rapid transition from the workman's bench to the board-table of half a dozen big mining and engineering corporations.

He went through the plans and figures and listened to Paul's explanations and enlargements, and the longer he bent over the papers and drawing-sheets and the more closely he examined the plans and the figures, the keener grew the glint of anticipation in his eyes and the harder the lines of his face.

The other side of his nature was coming out—the business side. The best friend Paul Kingston had ever had, save his father and mother, the man who had loved his mother in silence for six years and had come now to win her, if he could, for his wife, disappeared, and in his place came Gillette Marvin, millionaire and money-maker at all costs and hazards. If Paul was only right—and he certainly could find no flaw in his calculations—he saw, not only money in this, but the means of controlling the whole commerce and communication of the globe, which, of course, meant practically being money-lord of the whole world, the controller of every market and of every line of land and sea traffic.

"Well, young man," he said, in a totally changed voice that made Paul look up suddenly from a sheet of paper on which he was jotting down some figures, "I reckon there's something in it as far as figures can show. You've done all you can so far, but I

needn't tell you that figures can lie like politicians. Everyone knows that, and so, you see, however carefully they have been fixed up they are not much to gamble on, especially when it comes to thousands and hundreds of thousands of dollars. Now suppose—mind, I just say suppose—I felt inclined to go into the business, what sort of a deal would you be ready to make?”

“Deal?” said Paul. “Well, I guess if the thing is a success; if I find the ideas and the work and you find the money, half shares would be about a square deal, wouldn't they?”

“No, sir!” said Marvin, slewing his chair round and looking at him with hard, unmoving eyes, “not by half. I don't do business that way, and this is business. I'm not talking to my son's friend now, I am talking to a young man who thinks he has got a good idea—and maybe he has—and wants money to work it out. You are making sure of success. I've got to look out for failure. To put it quite straight, what are you prepared to gamble on failure?”

“I'm afraid I've nothing but these and the work I should put in making the ships,” said Paul, putting his hand on the papers. “You see, suppose I came to grief down a shaft like poor Dad did, there wouldn't be much left for Mother except the twenty thousand dollars or so that he left behind, and I couldn't touch that. Yet I'm so certain of this that—well, I'd stake my life on it.”

“Good enough” said Marvin quietly. “If you are solid on that I'll take you. This is no child's play and I want to have you in dead earnest about it. Now, look here: They call me a pretty hard man to do a trade with. So I am; but what I say I do, and

if the other man gets left at the bottom of the deal, well, that's his funeral. I am ready to gamble money on this business and plenty of it; but I never lost on a deal yet and I'm not going to start now."

"I think I understand you," said Paul quite steadily, although perhaps he turned a shade paler. "It's my life against your money, gambled on the success or failure of these air-ships and submarines. Well, I'm on it. What do you propose?"

"That sounds good for a start," said Marvin with no more emotion than if he had been discussing a stock speculation; "that's a square proposition on your side. Mine is this: On the day that I give you a certified cheque for five hundred thousand dollars, which you will use as working capital, you will give me a bond guaranteeing me joint ownership and control of the fleets of air-ships and submarines; half the profits of all operations we may find it necessary to make, dating from the time we begin work; and lastly, the bond shall contain a promise from you to me as between gentlemen and men of honour that, if at the end of two years from now the first air-ship and the first submarine are not fully equipped and have made their trial trips successfully, you will take your own life in any way you may choose, provided I ask you to do so. That is necessary from my point of view, for I shall insure your life for three years against accident for a sum sufficient to cover my advance and interest on it. Now, how does that strike you?"

"It's perfectly straight," replied Paul quietly and with the shadow of a smile on his lips. "I've said that I'm ready to gamble my life on the success of this thing and I'll do it; but anyhow I've got the best

of the proposition. I'd sell it to-morrow for half a million as long as *she* knew nothing about it. I'd be sure then that she would have a good time."

"Don't talk such all-fired rubbish as that, boy!" said Marvin almost roughly. "Do you suppose she would take that for *your* life? You just get down to work on your scheme and I guess you'll make a bigger provision for her than that, if she should happen to want it. Now, what are you going to do first; make a model?"

"Not now," said Paul. "If I'd had five thousand dollars I'd have spent it on a model. Now I have got half a million I shall build the air-ship right away to begin with. You see, that saves time and gives me another chance. It would take six months or so to build a model—nearly as long as a ship. Then I daresay you know that when you build a ship or a machine to scale from a working model it sometimes happens that the full-sizer doesn't do what the model promised it should do. It's due to something in mathematics that we don't understand, and many an inventor and even practical engineer has got badly left over it. These plans and calculations of mine are for the full-sized ship. If I find an error in the first I can either alter it or build another. That's my best hold, I believe, and I'm going on it."

He spoke with all the confidence and assurance of American youth; but also with the absolute faith of the inventor who believes in his creation. Marvin, being an American, liked and respected him for it. His manner changed at once. He stretched out his hand, smiling for the first time since he had come into the room, and said:

"Well, Paul, that's straight talk anyhow, and I guess

if anybody can put this business through, you can. Now we're partners. But you will remember that the bond between us is hard business and concerns no one else but ourselves. Mrs. Kingston, of course will know nothing about it."

"Not much," said Paul, "or the half-million either. I shall just tell her that you've taken hold of the idea and advanced me money enough to make a start on it. Then when I've got the ship built I'll take her a trial trip on it."

"No," said Marvin after a little pause, "I wouldn't do that—I mean, tell her that I've advanced you the money. There's no blazing hurry, and I'd rather you said I was interested enough in it to try and form a little syndicate to run you. Yes, I really would prefer you to put it that way."

"As you please," said Paul; "just anyway you like; all I want is the money and a quick start."

"Which you shall have, Paul," replied the other, hoping that his little scheme would not be suspected by Mrs. Kingston, and thereby proving that that lady's fears were quite groundless.

The next morning while Paul was telling his delighted mother about Mr. Marvin and the syndicate he was going to form, the millionaire went down to the telegraph office and wired the Manager of the Bank of California to have half a million dollars on deposit payable to the order of Mr. Paul Kingston of Lake City, Colorado, and to send him a certificate to that effect and a cheque-book. He also sent a lengthy telegram to his Grace of Romney telling him that he could have no better centre from which to make his proposed excursions than Lake City, where he would himself be located for some time, and

where he had a friend who knew every rood of the country for fifty miles round and would probably be delighted to join the exploring party. If his Grace would reply as to the date of his arrival he would have everything arranged for him.

Then he went back to his hotel and wrote letters and looked at the papers until the replies were brought to him. From the bank came a telegram to say that his instructions should be immediately attended to, and from the Duke a word of thanks and an intimation that he and Lady Margaret would arrive on the third day. He went to the clerk and said:

"See here, Mr. Sellers, you are going to have a duke and his daughter, British mind, stopping here for a few weeks from Thursday, and I want you to understand that the best of everything isn't any too good for them. If your west front verandah suite, I mean the one at the south-west corner, is occupied, you'll have to fix it up with the people somehow to change or leave. I'll pay."

"That's all right, Mr. Marvin," said the clerk; "they are occupied just now. Senator Schuyler and his wife and daughter have had them ten days, but they will be away by the first train in the morning up to Denver, so I reckon we will be able to get them fixed up all right, and, duke or not, you know we will do our best for any friend of yours. Anyhow, it's not his fault being a duke, I guess."

"You won't say so when you see him," was the somewhat curt reply as Marvin turned from the counter and walked out of the office.

When he got back to Lake View, Mrs. Kingston's house, he met her on the verandah and told her half

of what he had done, which, of course, was the half containing the coming of the Duke and his daughter.

"Why, that will be just lovely!" she exclaimed, flushing and clapping her hands like a girl of twenty. "It's no very high-toned place for them to come to, but the Rockies don't beat it for scenery, and if they're out here looking for mining property, ranches and that sort of thing, why, what's the matter with making ourselves into an exploring party and doing the thing up in the good old style?"

"I see what you mean," he interrupted, his eyes lighting up, and the tan on his face deepening. "As an inspiration, Mrs. Kingston, that's just splendid, and I'm sure nothing would delight the Duke and Lady Margaret more. It's just their sort. I'll start out on the equipment right away. We can get all we want either here or at Guneston, and we'll just have a royal time. Besides," he added, looking her straight in the eyes, "there is nothing better than roughing it a bit like that in the mountains to get people better acquainted; something like being on board ship, only better, if anything."

"Yes, perhaps it is," she said, smiling and turning her head away. "There is only one thing I'm afraid of, Mr. Marvin. What about Paul? You know, after all, he's only a lad, not twenty yet. He's hardly seen any society at all, and nothing on earth like this Lady Margaret, as you describe her. Suppose now—and you know things like that have happened before—he was to fall madly in love with her, having the very best opportunities for doing so? It would be a terrible thing for him. Why, it might ruin the poor boy's whole life. He'd never forgive us—I mean me."

"I quite understand you, Mrs. Kingston, and nobody could sympathise with him better than I could; but don't you worry about the storm before the clouds come along. Paul's got an old head on him, though it's on young shoulders, and, remember, he has got another love already—that invention of his, and, what's more, if that materializes, I don't think he'll have to ask even a duke's daughter twice a couple of years or so hence."

"Ah, yes," she said, "if—I know what you mean; that dream of conquering the world with air-ships and the other things he was telling me about. I'm afraid, Mr. Marvin, that there is a very big capital 'I' to that if."

"I'm not so dead sure on that, M'am," he replied, his nature instantly changing as he thought of the bond which her son had agreed to give. "I've been through those plans and figures, and I'm gambling considerable money on the game myself, and you know I'm not much of a man on wild-cat schemes."

CHAPTER III

NEVER on any continent did five people pass a more delightful time than the little party of picnickers and explorers who had set out from Lake City. A few days after the Duke and Lady Margaret arrived, Marvin, who had taken charge of the expedition, with Paul as guide, had got together a lavish equipment of riding and baggage mules, tents, commissariat in liquid and solid form, and cooking apparatus. They had a couple of peons to look after the animals and pitch and strike the tents, but, on Lady Margaret's suggestion, they had decided to "do for" themselves in the way of cooking and purely domestic arrangements.

They avoided the towns as much as possible, save when it was necessary to make enquiries as to mining prospects or to replenish provisions, and so the greater part of their month's journey lay by choice through the wildest parts of the country. Their turning-point was the summit of Pikes Peak, and when Paul, who was roped in front of Lady Margaret, had helped her up the last few feet their eyes met and their hands remained clasped for a few moments while she steadied herself on the ice.

The world with all its little social distinctions was far away below them. About them was only the magnificent severity, the unchanging solemnity, and the everlasting silence of sky and mountain. It was

only a moment, but it was enough. If they had been alone—who knows what they might have whispered to each other when they found breath in that thin, dry air?

But Marvin got his breath first and began to congratulate Lady Margaret, who had already made two very respectable Alpine climbs, and Mrs. Kingston on their pluck and endurance. That broke the spell, and then everyone surrendered to another, the spell which falls upon every human being who possesses a soul—the spell of the awful solitude and the utter silence which wrap the crest of every mountain giant.

When they got back to Lake City, both what Marvin hoped and Mrs. Kingston had half-feared yet half-wished had taken place. He had made short but ardent work of his wooing, for his love had given him his youth back, and he wooed like a youth of twenty, and the end was that Shiela Kingston capitulated during a stroll under the pine-trees on the evening that their camp was pitched for the last time.

But, as a set-off to this good happening, Paul came back irrevocably and, apparently in the most literal sense of the word, hopelessly in love with Lady Margaret. It seemed to him that he was something more than in love with her; but it was his first experience, and so he was quite ignorant of the real heights and depths, the brightness and the gloom of all that is meant by that most-meaning of all words. Of her social altitude he thought nothing. He was too genuinely American for that, in spite of his English blood. Moreover his love seemed to him so vast, so all-embracing that the social difference between them was the tiniest of little spaces in com-

parison with it. It may also have been that he was so utterly blinded by her beauty, her girlish grace, and the indescribable charm of her manner, that he simply couldn't see anything else.

Naturally he kept his secret—which he loved next to Lady Margaret herself—deep-buried in the bottom of his heart, inclosed within the inmost recesses of his soul. Of course now and then their eyes met in moments of delicious torture to him. To her they were moments of vague, awakening wonder as to what was happening or was going to happen within that magic fortress which is never entered save by the human soul that dwells in it. Still she remembered those moments and the dim, unshaped thoughts which came after them; and when they said 'good-bye' the memory of them dwelt with her, inseparable somehow from the delightful experiences of the trip from Lake City to Pikes Peak.

That evening Marvin called Paul into the workshop, and Paul came down with a run from the seventh heaven of Dreamland, to the hard realities of earth when he said to him in his hard, business voice:

"Now, young man, we've had a good time, and I guess we'd better get down to work. Have you got that bond drawn out?"

"Yes, I have," replied Paul, taking a paper out of his breast pocket, "I've dated it from the first of the month, the day before yesterday, as I guessed we should be getting to business some time about now."

It might seem curious at first sight that Paul should have given his attention to such a grim bargain as this in the midst of the ardent dreams and the glowing fancies of his first love, and yet the very intensity of his love was the reason for his doing so. The terms

of the bond gave him the only possible chance he could ever have of reaching a position which he could ask Lady Margaret to share with him without being laughed to scorn by everyone who heard of his foolishness. If that chance didn't come off, his life was forfeit in two years. That suited his mood exactly, since, if he failed, he could never have any hope of winning her, and if he hadn't that he didn't want to live. Wherefore as soon as he had got back after seeing her off he had gone straight to his room, drawn it up in the terms which Marvin had dictated, and signed it with unshaking hand.

"That's business," said Marvin, taking the paper, opening it and running his eye over it. "Yes, I guess there's nothing the matter with that."

He folded the paper up and put it into his pocket and took out a long envelope and went on "Now here's my part of the contract. There is a certificate from the Bank of California that they hold five hundred thousand dollars to your order, and there's your cheque book. You can take your money and use it as soon as you are ready. Have you got anything fixed up yet in the way of plans, I mean for construction?"

"Yes," replied Paul, "I shall send complete specifications of different parts and, for the matter of that, parts of parts to the best engineering firms in the States, pretty well far apart, and take care that none of them know any more than that they are just making certain cranks and shafts and wheels, bed-sockets, and so on of steel and aluminium and iridium of certain shapes and sizes, and I shall have these sent to Lake City."

"Well, that is all right so far," said Marvin, "you can

leave the choice of the firms to me. I know them all and they all know me, and I reckon I can drive a harder bargain with them than you can. Besides, they won't do any scrap work for me, although they might for you. And now what about assembling the parts when you've got them?"

"I think I can fix that up all right," said Paul. "Over yonder under that spur on the other side of the lake there is what is left of a big mine that petered out about five years ago. When it bust up the people went away and left things standing. There weren't dollars enough left to shift them. There's machinery there, though I don't calculate much on that, but there are a lot of big sheds and work-shops that will suit my work down to the ground. Five hundred dollars will buy the whole outfit, another five or less will repair the place and put the sheds and shops in proper repair. Then I should say, just to choke off curiosity, that I had bought the mine for a trifle from the trustees and was putting down more machinery just to have another go at it."

"That's O.K. as far as I can see," said Marvin, "but what about workmen. You'll want some pretty skilled mechanics, won't you?"

"Oh no. If the manufacturers do their work properly, as of course they will, half a dozen men with the machinery I shall put down will do that easily. In fact, less. I shall get a couple of big Chinese labourers down from San Francisco to do the pulley-hauley part, then there's a big peon down here, José Montez, who worked for my father and has done several things for me. He'll be very useful. He is as strong as a horse, faithful as a dog, and, curiously enough, though he hasn't got the wit of a mule, he's

as good a mechanic as ever held a hammer. You've got to tell him just exactly what to do. When he's done that he just comes and asks you what to do next. You see, none of these fellows will have any notion what they're doing, and, to make quite sure, when we've got the heavy work done and the hull put together, I shall send the Chinamen away one by one and finish up with José. He will be perfectly safe. He wouldn't know the difference between an air-ship and a prairie schooner if he studied them for a month. In fact, I think I shall be quite safe in making him engineer of the ship. She'll only need one man to work her and one to steer."

Marvin put out his hand and said with one of his swift changes of manner, one might almost say, nature:—

"Sonny, if you don't pull this thing through, no one can, and I believe you will. Now see here, I have another proposition to make. I'm a pretty good hand with the tools, though I haven't done an honest day's work for quite a while now; and a job like that would just fit me better than a Chicago girl's boots fit her feet. So, if you'll let me in I reckon we will be able to put that little job through without any more help and without letting too many people know what we are about."

"Why certainly!" exclaimed Paul, "I couldn't have anything I like better."

"Except some one with black hair and pansy-blue eyes and the prettiest face in the United States," laughed Marvin.

"Well," laughed Paul in reply, "you see, to get her. I've got to get this, and if I get this I guess I'll have her if I have to wreck the British Constitution to do it."

Now that everything was settled, Paul Kingston was feverishly anxious to get to work, and so was Gillette Marvin, wherefore the next day they set to in real earnest.

Paul devoted himself to a minute and intricate division of the plans and specifications in duplicate, arranging them so that it would be quite impossible for any maker of a part to form any idea as to what the whole was going to be like. Marvin went over to the old mine, made a thorough examination of the works, and, finding them just what Paul had said, went quietly to work through one of his agents to buy up the whole concern, which the agent did within a month for the modest sum of two thousand dollars.

He also communicated with twenty of the best engineering firms in the United States, informing them that he had certain mechanical constructions in hand which must be done by their most skilled workmen sworn to secrecy. Money was no particular object, but the work must be of the very highest class and nothing said about it. The specifications were then sent off one by one as completed, and when the parts were all in hand Paul set to work on the submarines which were to be constructed in similar fashion.

In a month everything was ready at the work-shop in the misnamed Cañon de la Plata in which the played-out mine was situated, and within six weeks the parts began to arrive, packed, of course, as machinery, at the depôt and were carted across to the Cañon on mule waggons. At first Lake City seemed to be a little curious about the new inventions, but Paul managed to satisfy the questioners by saying that he had been commissioned by a syndicate that

had bought the mine to put down fresh machinery and get everything ready for the new workings.

After this Lake City contented itself with saying that "as long as he could get fool-people to sling their dollars down the old mine with his hands it was bully for him," and there Lake City's interest in the great enterprise began and ended.

When the working plant was in place it consisted mostly of cranes and slings for carrying purposes. As the parts began to arrive the work of construction started and the farther it went on the greater was the change that developed itself in the two men to whom its completion meant so much.

Paul's nature hardened and became more masterful. He knew perfectly well that he had gambled his life upon the success of his labour; but Marvin's keenest glance never detected the slightest sign of nervousness in him. The hard, logical determination to do or die, the English side of his character, was coming out more and more strongly every day, while the keenness of wit, quickness of criticism, and readiness of resource which formed his mother's legacy to him were also brought out in stronger relief. In fact Marvin spoke neither more nor less than the truth when he said to Mrs. Kingston one evening as they were walking back alone from the works to their private ferry on the lake.

"Shiela, that son of yours is going to be a big man. Yes, he is going to bring this thing off. What he told you that night in his workroom is true, every word of it. He'll do this thing, and when its done—well the world is going to hear something drop, and it won't be that air-ship."

As for Marvin himself, the change in him was, if

anything, more wonderful still. The business side of his nature seemed to have receded indefinitely into the background. The sterner, sharper, and more masterful Paul grew, the more boyish and enthusiastic he became. He worked like a coolie, and allowed Paul, as he put it, to boss him around as though he had been a nigger. If he made suggestions in anticipation of difficulties he foresaw he was met with a polite rebuff "Oh, that's all fixed" or "don't worry, that'll come all right," and he took it as quietly as a school-boy would have done—perhaps more quietly.

With the exception of keeping his agents up to the mark by mail, and wire, he paid no personal attention to his own business. He was wholly engrossed by his part of the task in bringing to completion the marvellous creation which every day grew bit by bit towards perfection under his eyes and hands; and when his day's toil was over his nights were gorgeous with splendid dreams of the World-Empire of which this marvellous thing which he was helping to make was to be the aerial throne.

At Marvin's request nothing had been said to Paul about Mrs. Kingston's promise to marry him. He wouldn't give any definite reason. He just asked it as a favour and backed it up with the suggestion that the best place to announce it would be on the deck of the air-ship when she was proving her title to the dominion of the air. This, of course, appealed too strongly to her imagination for her to do more than insist on the condition that she was to be on board during the trial-trip, for, as she put it gently, but very firmly, if anything happened on that occasion to

Paul or her promised husband it was going to happen to her too.

At last, after nearly six months of incessant toil the *Shiela*, as Paul's mother was to christen her on the eve of her first flight, was very nearly completed. The Chinese labourers had been dismissed one by one, each with sufficient dollars to make it absolutely certain that he would at once return to the land of his ancestors. José stared uncomprehendingly at the shapely, glittering fabric, with its fans and propellers and air-planes, with no more admiration or curiosity than if it had been a factory boiler. Mrs. Kingston looked at it with loving pride and wonder as though it were, in some sort, an offspring of her own, as, indeed, it was in a certain sense, for was it not the mental offspring, the very creation, of her own flesh and blood? As a matter of fact she was wont afterwards to talk of the *Shiela* as "her steel grand-daughter."

Not even José was allowed to see the putting in and adjustment of the last of the mechanical and motive essentials which transformed the *Shiela* from an inert mass of machinery into an almost vital organism capable of motion swifter than a bird's flight, and yet docile as a well-trained dog under the hands of her captain and controller.

At last, one glorious, crisp morning in the brief Southern Autumn, Paul said to his mother at breakfast—Marvin had been sleeping for the last few weeks at the works with José, armed with a Colt repeating rifle, and a brace of seven shooters for the last month to receive any too curious callers:—

"Well, Mother, we finished her last night and now she's ready for you to make an official inspection. We tried the motors last night and everything worked like

a charm, though, of course, we didn't raise her, for we have to take the roof off the shed yet. We're going to do that to-day, and as soon as it is dark enough to-night you shall christen her, and we'll start on the trial trip."

"And do you really think, dear" she said, leaning back in her chair and looking at him with eyes glowing with love and pride, "do you really think that she will be a success—that she really will fly?"

"I don't think, mother," he said seriously, "I know. I'm gambling nothing on chance this time, there's too much on the game. She *will* fly, and to-night you shall take a midnight trip across the Sierra de la Plata and back before breakfast.

CHAPTER IV

MRS. KINGSTON'S heart was beating a good deal faster than her son's as they approached the huge shed from which Marvin and José were already removing the roof. The moon, though beginning to descend towards the saw-tooth ridges of the western hills, still gave ample light for what work remained to be done outside.

As Paul opened the door for her to go in she said:

"But my dear boy you will never get your ship out through this—"

And then as he looked round and laughed she went on:—

"Oh, of course, I forgot. If she goes out at all she will go through the roof."

"That is the way she is going, Mother," replied Paul, "as soon as we have got it off. Now suppose you go aboard and make yourself at home and I'll turn to and lend a hand."

He opened a door in the side of the long, grey-painted hull, which was shaped something like a flattened cigar save that it was almost as broad at the stern as amid-ships, and pulled down a light steel telescopic ladder. He went up first and turned a couple of switches in the wall. Instantly the whole interior was lighted by a bright glow which was everywhere and yet seemed to come from nowhere.

As he helped her up into the lower cabin, or general living-room, which was about fifteen feet long by ten broad, she glanced about her with a look of astonishment and said:—

“Why, Paul, I haven’t seen this before. Where do you get your light from; where are your lamps?”

“Oh, we don’t have any lamps,” he laughed, “besides this is not light in the way you mean. It’s my improvement on electricity—what I call illuminated air. This place is lit just as the atmosphere is lit by the sun, by vibrations set up through radiators, little suns, in fact. There they are,” he went on, pointing to ten little circles which his mother thought were mirrors. There were two of them at each end, and three on each side of the room. “But you must excuse me now Mam, I must get to work. You just make yourself comfortable and have a look round your aerial home. I guess you will find everything pretty spry and comfortable.”

The roof of the shed had been built so that the two slopes could be slid off to the ground in sections, running in grooves and operated by pulleys. These were nearly all off when he got outside. Then the roof-tree was taken down in sections and the inside supports removed. This left the *Shiela* open to the sky, and all was now ready for the start.

She had three movable air-planes on each side. The mid-ship ones measured fifteen feet by twelve, and the fore and after ones narrowed towards the bow and stern so that their whole outline corresponded to that of the hull. Under each of these was a lifting-fan ten feet in diameter driven by independent motors capable of a thousand revolutions a minute.

There were two ten-foot driving fans at the stern and one with a sweep of eight feet at the bow, each driven by its own motor at speeds varying from fifty to eight hundred revolutions a minute. Above the hull amid-ships rose a low, oval structure about thirty feet long by ten in its greatest width, panelled all round with plate glass and sliding windows. The middle portion of the roof was also made to slide fore and aft so that in fine weather the upper cabin could be used as an open-air promenade.

In front of this was a smaller oval chamber eight feet long and a little higher than the cabin. This was the conning-tower and instrument-room from which the motors could be started and stopped and every motion of the ship directed. In fact, as long as the supply of energy, which was derived from refined petroleum by a process of direct conversion, was kept up one man could manage the ship entirely. This process had been one of Paul Kingston's uncompleted discoveries which his son had completed and perfected. In front of the conning-tower rose a slender steel signal mast twenty feet high.

"Now I guess we are about ready. José, you can go home now and mind, on your faith, keep your mouth shut or you'll never open it again."

"Si Señor," replied the huge peon, thrusting his hands into his pockets and lumbering away down the path towards the ferry without even taking the trouble to look back at the miracle he was leaving behind him.

While his mother was making a tour of the various apartments of the ship, which she had had a considerable share in furnishing according to her own excellent taste, Paul and Marvin made a thorough

final inspection of the motors and driving machinery. There was no engine-room, for each motor stood in its own compartment connected by carrying cables of insulated copper strand with the main storage batteries on either side of the ship below the cabin. Nothing more was needed to start or stop them than the making or the breaking of the circuit.

When they were satisfied that everything was in perfect order Paul called to his mother.

"Now then Mam, come right along to the conning-tower and say good-bye to the earth for an hour or two. We're just off."

There was a little table at the fore end of the room and on this was an oblong rosewood board with three switches on it and in the centre of the table was a silver wheel with an upright handle and a pointer moving over a semi-circle marked out to a hundred and eighty degrees. This was the steering wheel and operated a triangular vertical fan which projected beyond the stern propellers.

Paul put his hand on the centre switch and said quite steadily: "This starts the discs. We've had one little struggle with gravity and came out top.

Now we will have a bigger one. Listen!"

He turned the switch and the next moment Mrs. Kingston heard a strange low, musical humming sound. As he moved the handle farther to the right the sound grew deeper and more intense and she began to feel an extraordinary sensation of lightness and exhilaration.

"What's the matter, Paul?" she said; "I'm beginning to feel if I could fly myself."

"So you will in another minute or so," laughed Marvin. "That's what spiritualists call levitation, or

taking the weight out of things so that they will float in air. They say that they do it by spiritual force. Paul here does it by pure mechanics. I don't understand it, and I don't think he does. We've got two hundred toughened glass discs three feet in diameter whizzing round underneath us, and they are getting up to three thousand revolutions a minute. You see, there isn't the slightest vibration. Well, it seems they set up some sort of mysterious force, maybe electrical or something else, that seems to drive the weight out of the ship. See, there's the indicator," he continued, pointing to a little clock-hand moving on a dial; "they're getting on. One, fifteen, two, twenty-five, that is twenty-five hundred, yes, three thousand. Now see here!"

He took Paul by the elbows and lifted him from the floor and set him down again. "He doesn't weigh a quarter what he did ten minutes ago."

"May I try, Paul?" exclaimed his mother, half-laughing and half-frightened. "It's a long time since I carried you."

She put her arms round him and, to her amazement, lifted him quite easily.

"My!" she exclaimed with a little gasp, "why, this ship of yours must be a piece of Wonderland, Paul."

"You will see more wonders than that soon, Mother," he laughed, putting his hand on the top switch and moving it slightly to the left.

Instantly a low whirring sound pierced through the hum of the discs.

"Those are the lifting fans making that noise," he said.

He put the switch over a little more and the

whirring grew shriller. Then, to his mother's marvel and delight, she saw the walls of the shed begin to sink below them. She didn't say anything. Her mother-heart was too full of joy and pride for speech. She put her arms round Paul's neck and kissed him, and then with a murmured "Thank God!" she burst into tears. Paul's eyes were wet too, and, as a matter of fact, so were Marvin's. He turned the switch back and the ship sank slowly into the shed.

Tears of joy soon pass, and smiles come quickly after them as the sun after a summer shower, and ten minutes afterwards the three were standing outside the shed beside the bow. Mrs. Kingston had in her hand a bottle of champagne slung by a cord to the upper rail. Paul and Marvin stood on either side of her bare-headed. She drew the bottle towards her and said in a low voice which trembled with emotion:

"You were created by the genius of my husband and my son. Take the name of their wife and mother and bear it stainless to the skies!"

"Amen!" said Paul and Marvin with one breath.

She let go the bottle and the golden wine streamed down the *Shiela's* side, and so, with such simple ceremony, was the first conqueror of the air christened.

"Now I think it is about dark enough to make a start," said Marvin, when they got back into the upper cabin. "The moon will be down in ten minutes. It's nearly twelve o'clock, and I guess there aren't many people looking this way now."

"Start it is!" said Paul. "Come along, Mother, we're going to fly in real earnest this time."

"Fly!" she echoed as she followed them into the conning-tower; "why, it's like a dream—and so it is, the dream of ages, and *you've* made it real. If

there's another woman in the world happier to-night than I am, I don't envy her."

"I should guess not," said Marvin, looking at her with frank fondness. "It isn't every woman who has a son that can make her mistress of the air."

Paul went back to the switch-board. The discs were still running three thousand revolutions a minute. He turned the upper switch again this time more quickly. The whirring sound broke out louder and shriller than before. The walls of the shed again sank below them, but this time out of sight. The tops of the cliffs round the Cañon came nearer to them; then these too sank down. Presently the lake and Lake City came into view. The water shone bluish-white under the stars, and the white-painted houses of the town showed grey against the dusky gloom of the pines around it. The *Shiela* mounted swiftly, higher and higher in a direct vertical line until the hills also began to sink and the snowy peaks of the Sierra Blanca began to show above them.

No one spoke. It wasn't a time for talking; but just for looking and wondering; and so for nearly half an hour there was silence in the conning-tower, until Paul said in a low tone:

"I think we might try the propellers now. Keep your eye on the speed-gauge Mr. Marvin, please, and we'll see what she can do."

The speed-gauge was an apparatus almost exactly like the one used for measuring the force of wind, and it communicated with a dial inside the room. Paul put his hand on the lower switch and turned it slowly towards the right. Mrs. Kingston saw the forward propeller begin to revolve. It spun faster and faster until it became a dim circle, almost invisible

in the star-light. She looked astern and saw that the after propellers had also disappeared. Then Marvin began counting off the miles on the dial. "Twenty—thirty—forty—fifty," he read out in quick succession. Lake City had vanished and they were within a few miles of the Eastern hills, ever rising.

"I'll try the planes now," said Paul, taking hold of a lever to the right of the table which worked in a graduated ratchet. He pulled it slightly towards him and the ridge of the hills instantly sank lower.

"That's all right," he said. "Now I think we can do without the fans. He turned back the top switch and put the propellers on three-quarter power.

"Sixty—seventy-five—ninety—a hundred! Good! Bully for you, Paul. You've won. Shake?"

Paul let go the lever and gripped his hand and, as they shook, Mrs. Kingston exclaimed:

"What! not a hundred miles an hour, surely! That can't be possible. We don't seem to be moving at all."

"Yes," said Paul, "that's it. Look down at the earth and those hills. See, now! I'm going to jump them."

He pulled the lever a few degrees towards him. The hills rushed towards them and sank down. The next minute they were far astern, almost out of sight. The lofty peaks of the Sierra Blanca rose in front of them for an instant, then they too sank down and fell astern. Paul looked at the barometer and said:

"Eight thousand five hundred. I guess that will do for to-night. If she can soar that, fifteen or twenty won't trouble her much. Now we'll see how she steers."

He turned the wheel ever so slightly and the

Shiela swept round in a swift and splendid curve. He slowed her down to fifty miles and began to put her through her paces, turning and curving and circling round the peaks with bewildering rapidity until he was satisfied that he had her under complete control.

"Magnificent!" said Marvin at the end of half an hour of wondering silence. "But look here, Paul, it's after two o'clock. I think we had better be getting home."

"Yes, dear, I think we had," said Mrs. Kingston. "I've seen wonders enough for one night. I'm nearly dizzy with them, and I shall be glad to get to bed and dream of them."

"O.K.," said Paul with a glance at the compass in front of him. "North-west by north is the course from here, and full-speed it is. We'll be home inside the hour. Mother, you're mistress here; suppose you go and find us a bottle of wine and a cold pie. I'm getting hungry."

There was nothing to be seen of the earth except a dim blur as the *Shiela* rushed through the air at her full-speed of a hundred and fifty miles an hour. After fifty minutes' run Paul slowed down to twenty-five and started the fans. In five minutes the lake came in sight and in ten more the *Shiela* was resting on the stocks in the shed, and they were walking to the ferry.

The next morning after breakfast Marvin asked Paul to come into the work-room, and said to him as he took the Bond of Death out of his pocket:

"Paul, sonny, you've done it, and I haven't got any more use for this. He tore the bond into two pieces and gave them to Paul. "Of course I didn't

mean anything about that life-clause except that, of course, I meant to see that you were in dead earnest, and had the proper sort of grit in you before I gambled my money on your ideas. And now I'll tell you why, and I hope the news won't be unpleasant to you. I've loved your mother ever since I met her first. Naturally I kept my head shut as any gentleman would, but when I came down here seven months ago it was with her permission to win her if I could. Well, I've done it, but she won't say yes unless you do. Now, what do you say?"

"‘Yes,’ with all my heart!" said Paul, putting out his hand; "but you're the only man I would say ‘yes’ to and I guess she wouldn't say it either, to any one else."

"Thank you, lad," said Marvin simply, as he gripped his hand. "Well, now we're partners for good and all—partners against the world if need be. Come along and tell her and we'll have a wedding next week."

Nothing was of course more natural or even inevitable than that the honeymoon trip should be taken in the *Shiela* under the care of Captain Paul, as Marvin had now dubbed him. The air-ship had made several night voyages since her trial trip for the purpose of testing her machinery thoroughly and proving her speed and soaring powers, as well as her fuel consumption. It was found that, using both fans and air-planes, she could rise comfortably to twenty thousand feet. Her utmost speed in calm, dense air was a hundred and sixty miles an hour, and her fuel consumption averaged fifty pounds weight of refined petroleum per thousand miles, which about verified

Professor Cayley's calculations that if all the solar energy that is stored up in coal could be extracted and applied directly as Paul's petroleum-energy was, a clothes-basket full of coal-dust would suffice to drive the Scotch Express at full-speed from London to Edinburgh.

A start was made on the third midnight after the wedding. José was left in charge of the works with orders to say nothing, save that Paul and his mother had gone on a trip to Europe. There was no moon, and the *Shiela* soared into space and darted away southward without being seen. By day she travelled either well out to sea or at a sufficiently high altitude to make it impossible to see her. The course of the trip was naturally left to the choice of the bride, and she chose a run along the great mountain chain of Central and South America from the luxuriance of the Montaña Region of the Eastern Andes down to the desolation of Tierra del le Fuego. Never was a woman's choice of more moment to the fortunes of humanity.

They made a run of five thousand miles in about ten days, and were skirting the mountains of Patagonia between the forty-fifth and fiftieth parallels of south latitude one brilliantly moonlit night in the middle of the far southern summer when Mrs. Marvin, who was standing with her husband in the upper cabin watching the sombre shapes of the mountains as they flitted past a few hundred feet below them, suddenly pointed forward and downward to the right hand side and said:

"Look, Gillette, isn't that a lake yonder? See, right in the top of that mountain—and, why, yes, it's smoking! It must be a volcano."

Her husband looked, but he didn't speak for a few minutes. There was something very extraordinary about the surface of the lake which had already begun to puzzle him. It was not the light, steamy vapour that was rising from it, but a strange metallic glint which the surface showed where the moonlight fell upon it.

"I see," he said rather jerkily; "a lake in the crater of a volcano. Curious, though. They don't have lakes in the craters of active volcanoes. I'll go and tell Paul. I reckon this is a bit of a curiosity which is worth investigating."

But Paul had already noticed the strange appearance of the lake and he had slowed the *Shiela* down and headed her towards the mysterious mountain. He put his head through the door of the conning-tower and said:

"See that lake there—what is it? Doesn't look like water to me; something more like metal. I guess we had better go and prospect."

"By thunder you've got it!" exclaimed Marvin. "That volcano is active. How could it have water in it? Why, certainly, we'll prospect. I'm on metals every time—hot or cold."

Paul brought the *Shiela* to a rest on a little sandy level beside the crater wall, but they found it impossible to descend the other side towards the lake. The acrid, suffocating fumes compelled them to go back at once. It was impossible to breathe within twenty yards of the edge of the lake.

"No mistake what that smell is," said Paul. "That's chlorine and the lake is metallic; no doubt about that. Now how are we going to get some of

it? Ah, yes, I guess I've got it. Come back into the ship."

He found a small iron bucket and a thin wire cord about a hundred feet long; made one end fast to the bucket and the other to the rail by the gangway door. Then they closed up the *Shiela* until she was practically air-tight, rose and passed over the lake. The air-ship dropped till the bucket fell on to the surface. It lay there as if it had fallen on a rock. Paul made the *Shiela* take a little jump forward. The lip of the bucket caught in the fluid and the vessel was dragged under.

"Got it!" said Paul as he turned the switch and the *Shiela* rose up out of the hot steaming vapours.

When they got back into pure air Marvin opened the door and hauled the bucket up about three parts full of a greenish yellowish fluid, which was rapidly turning into yellowish-white powder.

"It's mighty heavy!" he said, as he brought the bucket on board. "Why, darn it, it has gone solid into a powder! Here, Paul, you're a better chemist than I am; take a look at it."

Paul smelt it, picked some out in a spoon, and when it was cool rubbed it with his finger. Then he said rather unsteadily:

"Mother, go and get me some boiling water and a basin."

"What's the matter?" said Marvin. "Do you think it's worth anything?"

"Think so, can't say yet," he replied shortly.

Mrs. Marvin came back from the kitchen with a kettle of boiling water and a china basin. He tipped out several spoonfuls into the basin, poured the water on the powder, stirred it up for two or three minutes,

and strained the water off. The powder had now changed to a deep red crystalline colour and form. His hand trembled a little as he scraped this aside with the spoon. Underneath it lay a layer of what looked like dull yellow mud.

"I thought so!" he said. "That lake is full of aurous chlorine, and that," he went on, stirring the yellow mud, "is pure, finely divided gold and water. There's enough in that lake to buy the earth!"

CHAPTER V

NO one said anything for over a minute. They just looked at each other and the few spoonfuls of liquid gold—for it was so extremely finely divided that it seemed almost as if it were dissolved in the water—which lay in the bottom of the basin after Paul had scraped the red crystals away. He had put in less than a handful of the whitey-yellow powder, and yet there was quite half an ounce of gold in the basin.

"Are you sure, Paul?" said his mother. "Gold! That can't be possible can it? No one ever saw gold in such quantities as there must be there."

"You've just got there in once, Shiela," said her husband. "No one ever did see it before, and that is just where our luck, our wonderful, amazing, incredible luck comes in. Why, Cæsar's ghost, there must be hundreds of tons of it in that lake! What do you say, Paul—when you've come out of your trance?"

"Yes, it's gold," he replied in a half-dreaming tone, "and there's gold in this too," he went on, taking up a spoonful of the red crystals. "Not so much, but still, plenty. This is the tri-chloride, auric chloride as the chemist call it, with one part of gold to three of chlorine. It will melt away of itself soon and then we can evaporate the gold out. And about the quantity—oh, yes, I beg your pardon. Of course

there must be thousands and thousands of tons of it there, and the proportion of gold will be about eighty-five per cent. by weight, perhaps more. Well, Mother, you remember I asked you if you would like to be Mistress of the World. Now you are, for if we go third shares you'll have plenty to buy it if you want it."

"Well, Shiela," said Marvin in his practical voice, "I guess we've got to congratulate you on the first result of your name-child's maiden voyage so far. We three are the richest people on earth now. In fact, we're so rich that money hasn't got any more meaning for us. We can just play with it, and raise such a high-toned sort of Cain in the financial world that I guess the Gold Bugs will be glad to let us do what we like. Why, Dumont Lawson and his steel trust—I always spelt it with an A—is a small tradesman compared with us now. I owe that gentleman one and John D. Rockefeller another, and now they shall have it where the turkey got the axe—right in the neck. Now, suppose we turn to and see how much gold we've got here in this bucket. We'll take it down to the kitchen and wash it out there. Great Scott, what would the old Forty-Niners have thought of washing gold out like this—half an ounce out of a handful!"

There was plenty of hot water in the boiler of the electric stove on which Mrs. Marvin did her cooking. She got out two large basins and they proceeded to wash out the contents of the bucket. When they had separated out the suspended gold from the red crystals Paul asked his mother for a saucepan, tipped the gold into it, and said as he gave it back to her:

"There, Mother, put that on the stove. I guess you never had a more valuable stew than that. You've got about two pounds and a half of pure gold there—twenty-four carat. Say you've got eighty ounces at twenty-one dollars an ounce, you see that pot's worth over eight hundred dollars. Just steam the water off, and you will have it in powder."

"I could go on cooking like this all day," laughed his mother. "Fancy eight hundred dollars in about five minutes!"

"Yes, and we've got this stuff now," said Paul, stirring up the red crystals. "We can't treat this here though because we'll have to rig up a furnace with a flue to carry off the chlorine gas. That's what stopped us getting into the crater, and if anyone else has found this lake out before us I reckon it would have driven them off too."

"And a mighty good thing for us," added Marvin. "But anyhow, they hadn't a genius with them, and I reckon they didn't come exploring in an air-ship. If it hadn't have been for the *Shiela*, we'd never have known what was in that lake even if we had found it. How do you feel like as a billionaire?"

"Mighty hungry," said Paul. "Mother, I guess that stew of yours is about cooked and supper or breakfast, or whatever it is, wouldn't be a bad thing just now."

All the water had been driven off, and the bottom of the saucepan was covered with a thick layer of yellow powder almost impalpably fine. In fact, when he poured it gently out into a soup-plate some of it rose in the air. It was gold, chemically divided and absolutely pure. Marvin had already weighed the plate accurately, and when he put it on the scale

again the indicator of the balance showed that it contained very nearly two pounds seven ounces of the precious powder and this, at the English price of pure gold, worked out at nearly one hundred and twenty-two pounds sterling."

"I think that should pay for a supper with a bottle of the best thrown in," said Marvin as he took the plate off the scale. "Now suppose we go and fix up a little cocktail while our dear house-keeper gets the supper ready."

In half an hour the table in the parlour, as they called the lower cabin, was spread with a very dainty little feast, for the mistress of the ship was as good a cook as could be found westward of Delmonico's, and when Marvin had opened the bottle and filled the glasses with the very finest champagne that money could buy he raised his own and said:

"Well, here's to the three richest people on earth—our noble selves—and the somebody else who, I hope, will be sitting one day at the end of this table opposite to her lord, the Conqueror of the Air."

"Thank you," said Paul, laughing and blushing like a girl, "I hope she will. Anyhow, I can give her a bigger place in the world now than any of their old British dukes can."

"Paul," said his mother, "I'm afraid you are forgetting that you are half British yourself. You know your father was an aristocrat—in fact, he was only two lives off an earldom."

"That is all right, Mother. Anyone could see that Dad was a gentleman, and as good as the best, or I reckon you wouldn't have married him; but I reckon it was the American in me that spoke that time. Still, we needn't worry about titles now, sitting here

on the throne of the kingdom of the air. And now, Mr. Marvin, as you are going to be Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Lord High Everything Else—what do you propose in the way of opening operations?”

“Well, you see,” replied Marvin slowly, “the discovery of this gold naturally alters everything. The few million dollars that I had to begin work with on the old basis look mighty like a dirty deuce in a new deck of cards now. And that means that all our plans will have to be altered.”

“It’s a terrible responsibility!” said Mrs. Marvin with half a sigh in her voice. “A power greater than all the rulers of the world could wield, even if they worked together for the same end. Do you know I’m beginning to get a little bit frightened of it already?”

“No need for that, Mother—not yet, at any rate,” said Paul, speaking more seriously than before. “It might be in worse hands, I think. Now, if a European Jew Syndicate or a few of our Trust Monarchs had got hold of it it might be different. The earth wouldn’t be fit to live in in twelve months except for their slaves; but we’re not going to make slaves, we’re just going to try and stop other people making them. Isn’t that so, Mr. Chancellor of the Empire of the Air?”

“It is, your Majesty,” laughed Marvin, nodding at him over his glass. You know my theory that mankind can only be ruled properly by a benevolent and intellectual despotism. Democracy is only a makeshift, and a pretty poor one at that. It’s just what Bismarck called it—ruling a household from the nursery. On the other hand a political or military

despotism is even worse. Anyhow, they've ruined every country that has tried them. Now there is only one other possible, and that is the despotism of money."

"But surely, Gillette," said his wife, "our experience of the despotism of money in the States hasn't been very encouraging. The worst of the European or Asiatic despots hasn't a blacker history than the Standard Oil Trust, for instance, and you must know as well as anyone, and better than most, that the most soulless tyrant on earth is the man that rules by money power."

He flushed slightly at this very decided home-thrust, for he had done a little of this same ruling himself, and when he replied, he spoke slowly, as though he were weighing every word before he said it.

"You're quite right there, Shiela, as far as your argument goes. I know I've sinned a bit that way myself. I had to, to keep my end up. It was just a matter of competition, and, you see, these money kings of ours have to compete among themselves for their millions just as small store-keepers have to for a few dollars, and where competition comes in at the front door justice and mercy get out at the back, and make good time going.

"These money despotisms are cruel and pitiless, because they're only partial, because they've to fight one another, and, of course, in the scrimmage, smaller people get badly hurt. I grant that if it hadn't been for finding this lake we should have been forced to fight on the same lines, though we should have had a big pull with the air-ships and submarines. But now, you see, we can't compete with them for money. It would be like a man with a hundred million dollars

playing poker for five cents and opening a pot with a million. We don't want their money. We can't get covetous any more than a man living near an everlasting spring can get thirsty. What we've got to do is to stop these people from making other folk thirsty."

"Then," said Paul with a smile, "My Lord Chancellor evidently believes that all human ills can be cured by gold, that is to say, golden salve properly applied?"

"I'm not saying quite that, Paul," he laughed in reply, "but it can do a lot, properly applied as you say, and I reckon the world is going to see some pretty strange things when we begin to flood these gentlemen out with the golden tide of their own prosperity."

"You're getting almost poetical, Gillette," said his wife. "That somehow reminds me of the old story about King Midas who wanted everything he touched to turn to gold and then found that he had to eat and drink it."

"You've got it first time there, Shiela," he replied. "That's just what I mean. These men, myself among them I confess, have in their time sacrificed every human consideration to the lust of gold-getting. Now, with his Majesty's approval and yours, they shall have gold. They shall have it until it is as common as the dirt in the gutter, till the monarch's crown is worth no more than the tramp's hat. They shall—but I guess I've done enough preaching for to-night. Suppose we get down to business."

"Well, if we do that," said Paul, "we shall still want to listen to you, so I shall put the proposition. Say we three form ourselves into a Trust for the

protection and social material redemption of mankind from tyrannies of all sorts and the inauguration of a new Golden Age. Our present assets are—the *Shiela*, your millions in coin and securities, and a practically unlimited supply of gold which can be worked at no expense and by a couple of men till the markets of the world are flooded out with it. Now, what does the Lord High Chancellor propose?"

"The first thing to do," replied Marvin, "is to get the charts and find exactly where this mountain is. By its nearness to the sea I reckon it's in Chili, but anyhow, it's a sort of no-man's-land that people don't come to once in ten years unless they get shipwrecked, so we've got to do a bit of surveying and, if we find it is in Chili, get a lease, say for a hundred years, of a twenty-mile strip from the border down to the sea with Mount Kingston, as I think we had better call it, in the middle.

"We are sure to find some snug little inlet where we can build a port and put our submarines together after we have brought the parts round the Horn. That would be a handier place, too, to build the other air-ships in. There won't be so many curious eyes about. When we've got our lease—and it won't take very much bribery and corruption in Santiago to get us that and something like sovereign rights as well—we'll start mining operations, just as an excuse to put up our work-shops and build our quays.

"You see, we just want the world to take us for a couple of cranks who are boring holes in these god-forsaken mountains for the fun of throwing good American dollars down them. When the world once thinks that it will take no further trouble with us and Wall Street will just wait until Gillette Marvin,

ex-millionaire, comes round looking for a clerking job."

"You've got it! Excellent!" said Paul. "Couldn't have been better! Still, we can't go to Santiago with an air-ship, can we, to ask for a mining concession?"

"I guess not," said Marvin with a smile. "They might want her and ask for her with a maxim gun. No, the *Shiela* must lie pretty low just now, and the best place for her is the old shed at Lake City. No one there will be looking there for a miracle like this unless José gives the show away, and I guess there is not much fear of that. Then when we get back we'll just go to work on our concession and at the same time place orders for parts enough to build two more air-ships and half a dozen of the biggest submarines to be delivered at San Francisco. We'll charter a steamer there, take our machinery and building materials down to Port Kingston, when we find it, and bring along a crowd of coolie labourers and get to work on our machine-shops and building docks. Meanwhile we'll bore a hole in the side of this crater, put a pipe through and run the stuff out into tanks as if it were crude petroleum, mould the gold into ingots and load up the steamer with them."

"Excuse me," said Paul, interrupting him, "but doesn't it strike you that a steamer laden with gold would raise rather awkward suspicions? What about the customs' examination? Of course there is no duty on gold either in England or America, and I suppose we shall operate from both countries, but if some smart customs' officer happened on one box of gold and then insisted on having the others opened, what's to become of our secret? They will begin

to ask questions at once and a ship load of gold, say a thousand tons, would be a mighty difficult thing to account for."

"You're right, Paul," said Marvin after a pause, "I didn't think of that. Guess I was letting my imagination run away with me. What do you propose?"

"It strikes me it would be very much easier and safer to make the boring as you say, run the stuff out into tanks or ditches, and when the fused chloride has cooled and turned to powder just dig it out, head it up in casks and ship it as fertiliser or something of that sort. There isn't a customs' officer on earth who would guess what it is. We could easily hire some of those old wharves and work-shops down the Thames and up New York River and in half a dozen other places, and do our separation and melting out right on the spot. We could do the same thing in France and Spain, and of course, the more distributing centres we have running under different names the less chance there is of people finding out what we really are."

"Paul!" exclaimed Marvin, filling his glass, "I'll take a back seat there. I drink to that idea of yours; it's just masterful in its simplicity—we'll do it."

"And now," said Mrs. Marvin, "that you've settled up everything for the present, suppose I give you some coffee and we all go to bed and dream about more marvels."

CHAPTER VI

NEARLY eight months of silence and strenuous activity on the part of the Gold Kings, as they afterwards came to be known, followed the return of the *Shiela* from Mount Kingston. The survey had proved, first that the Mount of the Golden Lake was just a few leagues within Chilian territory, and, secondly, the fact, which was of much more importance, that it was situated on an island severed from the mainland by a very deep but narrow channel varying from three to five miles wide.

Between it and the open sea was a cluster of a dozen or more smaller islands, all barren and uninhabited, and showing no traces of human occupation. A perfect natural harbour had been found less than five miles from the base of the crater-wall which a comparatively small expenditure would turn into a perfect basin for the submarines.

Marvin's agents at Valparaiso and Santiago had done their work well and spent a few thousand dollars very judiciously, with the result that the expenditure of a few more thousands secured to the Kingston-Marvin Mining and Prospecting Syndicate a lease for one hundred years of all the lands, islands, and territories from the Argentine border to the Pacific Ocean between the forty-fifth and forty-sixth degrees of south latitude, with "rights to all metals, mineral and oil deposits, and so forth, found in the said

territory; the right to build all docks, work-shops, stamp-batteries, furnaces, and such other works as might be necessary to the carrying out of the enterprise in view."

Further, the Sovereign Republic of Chili undertook to protect the said Syndicate against all comers in the peaceful possession of the said territory, and further to permit the Syndicate and its officers to take all reasonable measures for self-defence against natives, pirates, etc., etc., in the usual terms of such concessions—all of which privileges were subject to a payment by the Syndicate of ten thousand dollars gold a year into the treasury of the Chilian Republic.

Four new twelve-knot steamers of 1000 tons register had been bought and fitted out immediately the concession was obtained and had been carrying men and materials from San Francisco and Panama to Port Kingston, and the *Shiela* had made several rushes southward through the night and the upper regions of the air, carrying Paul, or Marvin, or both on voyages of inspection, which they took very good care should not be suspected by anyone on the works.

At the end of eight months three more air-ships of the type of the *Shiela*, one of them a magnificent vessel nearly twice her size, at present without name, but which Paul hoped one day to call the Lady Margaret, had been built and tested without the knowledge of anyone except the three partners and José, and six submarines, each two hundred feet long, with a capacity of twenty thousand horse-power and a speed of forty knots, were lying in the basin at Port Kingston ready for action.

Twenty of the biggest engineering firms in the United States had been working night and day to

turn out the parts, and the moment the steamers delivered them at Port Kingston an army of coolie mechanics had set to work under the supervision of Paul and Marvin to get them together. No white man was allowed in the territory. Not even the officers and crew of the steamers were permitted to land, and the moment that a Chinaman or a Jap showed any signs of understanding what he was doing, he was shipped off with a pocket full of dollars and a draft to cash a few hundreds more at San Francisco. So, by good luck and good management, the great secret was kept almost to the last.

Toward the end of the eighth month, however, it very nearly got out, and only an accident, just a moment's indiscretion on the part of the person most nearly concerned saved what might have been a catastrophe.

Of course many rumours concerning this extraordinary Syndicate had already begun to fly about the States; but so far the keenest-witted of the newspaper men had been baffled in every attempt to get at the facts. At length one James K. Hacker, the smartest reporter on the San Francisco *Examiner*, took a five thousand-dollar commission from his proprietors to get through the mystery, or, as he put it, to get out on the other side of it. His features lent themselves to Chinese disguise, and he had several friends in China town, and these helped him, for a consideration, to ship as a Chinese labourer on one of Marvin's ships for Port Kingston.

He happened to arrive just when both Marvin and Paul were there superintending the final operations of ship-building and boring through the crater wall. They were having a stroll round the dock one night,

talking over immediate plans for the future, and were just turning a corner of the sheds when Paul put his hand on his companion's shoulder and pulled him back.

"What's the matter, Paul?" whispered Marvin. "Seen anything?"

"Look down there in the dark," whispered Paul in reply. "See? There is a man swimming. He's been on board one of the submarines. It's after hours and no one can get into the dock-yards but ourselves. That means treason or something like it."

"Mighty like it," said Marvin, putting his hand back to his hip pocket, "I don't like taking human life, but that chap's either got to give a good account of himself or take a single ticket to the other side of Jordan. We're not going to have this show given away just when we're ready to start."

"Not much," whispered Paul in reply, "but I don't think there will be any need for shooting. He's got to come this way, and we can easily cover him. He must mean something serious or he wouldn't face water as cold as that."

They waited and watched, straining their eyes in the moonlight to find out whether the swimmer was alone or not. He swam to the slip down which the submarines had been launched, and as he came out of the water Marvin and Paul whipped out their revolvers and ran down to meet him. At the same moment the moon came out bright and clear from behind a cloud and they saw a naked shivering man with face and neck stained the correct Chinese yellow and the rest of his body perfectly white, in fact almost blue-white with the cold.

"And who might you be?" said Marvin, covering him with his revolver, "Chinamen don't count for much down here, you know, so you better speak up and tell us how you lost your pigtail."

"Gentlemen," he began speaking as well as he could through his chattering teeth.

"That will do," said Marvin, "You're no Chinaman, and therefore you must know that white men are not allowed down here. Where are your clothes?"

"Up there in the shed, sir, just inside the gate."

"Come along and get them, and no fooling, mind," said Marvin, and so they drove him up before them and watched him dress in his Chinese clothes. Then they took him to their private office and the explanations began in the course of which Mr. James P. Hacker had to make a clean breast plate of it. When he had finished Marvin said—

"You've got sand in you, young man, and you deserve to get on; but you struck a particularly hard streak when you came down here. You're a brave man and you believe you have been doing your duty to your proprietors, and so we don't want to abolish you as a Chinese coolie unless it is absolutely necessary. What have you found out?"

"Well, sir," said Hacker, "I know you can do as you like with me so I may as well open up. I've been through that submarine and I think I know all about her. It's the fourth visit I've paid and I've gone through her pretty thoroughly."

"What were you to get for this trip if you put it through all right?"

"Five thousand dollars and a life assurance for ten thousand for my mother in case I didn't get back."

"Well, Paul," said Marvin, "I reckon we could do

with a nervy man like this. He looks honest in spite of his paint, and a man who takes on a proposition like that has the right sort of grit in him. What do you think?"

"Same thing," said Paul. "If he's faithful he might be a lot of use to us, and if he isn't he'll just have to disappear, that's all. We don't want to frighten you, Mr. Hacker" he went on, turning to the reporter, "but you've got to understand that you've struck a very much bigger thing here than you had any idea of; how big you may learn later on if you don't betray our trust—which is the same thing as saying if you live."

James Hacker was a brave man or he wouldn't have been where he was just then, but the passionless coldness of Paul's voice struck a chill through him such as he had never felt before."

"Yes, sir," he replied, "it seems as though I had, and as I am pretty obviously bottom dog in this scrap perhaps the closer I keep my head shut the better."

"That's just it" said Marvin, "the closer you keep it the safer your life and the better your fortune will be. You will now, please, consider yourself and also allow the *Examiner* people to consider you dead. Later on you can come to life again, perhaps, meanwhile your wife can draw the insurance money. That won't hurt the *Examiner* much, but anyhow I own half of it and propose to buy the other half shortly. You will get your five thousand dollars as soon as you sign an undertaking which I shall give you, and you'll get a thousand dollars extra every year as long as you remain faithful. When you cease to be that you will have no further use for dollars. Does that suit you Mr. Hacker?"

"Down to the ground, sir," replied the reporter. "I don't know what you're driving at, but it isn't my business to know. Anyhow that is a fair proposition and I'll gamble my life on my honesty all the time."

Paul looked across at Marvin as he said this, and smiled remembering that other bargain which Marvin had made with him."

"That's good enough, I think," he said, "Mr. Hacker will, I presume, sign the undertaking and after that will become the confidential agent of the Syndicate. The undertaking will state, Mr. Hacker, that your life is forfeit, and that you have sold us your right to live for certain cash payments which will be stated in the bond, and the rest, I suppose, he continued, turning to Marvin, "will be as we arrange."

"Yes," said Marvin, "that's so. Now, Mr. Hacker, the work that you've got to do is just this. When you've signed the bond you are going to New York to-night—"

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Hacker, half rising to his feet in astonishment, "did you say New York? But how? There isn't a steamer in port now, and New York is over eight thousand miles from here. How am I going to start to-night?"

"That is not a question which concerns you at present, Mr. Hacker," replied Marvin coldly, "I told you just now that you had struck a much bigger thing here than you expected to find. You have your choice between blind, unquestioning, obedience, and—disappearance. We didn't ask you to come here, but those are the only terms you can get away on."

"And as I have already agreed to them, sir," said Hacker, quietly, "perhaps I may be allowed to ask what sort of work you want me to do?"

"There's no harm in telling you that," replied Marvin," in fact the sooner you know it the better. When you land in New York as you will do in forty hours from now—"

"In forty hours from here!" exclaimed Hacker, jumping to his feet in uncontrollable wonder," what, eight thousand miles! Say, gentlemen, what are you trying to give me?"

"The cold truth, Mr. Hacker. Sit down and don't worry. It is now half-past eleven on Wednesday evening. Allowing for necessary preparations for the journey you will find yourself with me pretty adjacent to New York at midnight on Friday. How you will get there is not at present any business of yours, but I hope that the fact that you will get there will be enough to convince you that your best hold with us is to go straight."

"I guess if you can do that, sir," said Mr. Hacker, speaking for the first time in his life with something like a note of fear in his voice, "you don't want to worry any more about my fidelity. When I find myself on the side of the gods, as they used to say, I reckon I shall know enough to stop there. And when I get to New York?"

"When you get to New York," continued Marvin, "You will find yourself alone with your own intelligence and twenty thousand dollars in gold. You will also have a copy of the bond which I will give you to sign before you go, and your business will be just to go around and find a hundred or so other men like yourself or as nearly like as may be, who are willing to sign that bond on the same terms as you will sign it. The pay for faithful service will be five thousand

dollars a year in gold, paid monthly. The penalty for the slightest act of dishonesty will be death.

"They must all be white men, Americans or English, and none of them must be over thirty or at the outside thirty-five. That is, allowing you a margin for experienced men. You have two months from now to do the work in. The way of doing it will be suggested by your own intelligence and discretion. You will be watched, but you will not be interfered with unless you make a bad break, and then you will be pulled up pretty short. At the end of the two months you will take your men, dressed as labourers, to Panama and there you will find one of our steamers ready to take them on board. I shall be there to receive them and go through them, and you will be responsible for any errors of judgment that you may have made."

"It's a pretty tough job, sir, I must say," said Hacker with a look of undisguised admiration at the two masters of his fate, "but I'm on it. It's the first show I've had to do something worth doing, and I reckon it's going to get done, or I don't want to come out alive at the other end."

"Well, we don't want anything better than that Mr. Hacker," said Paul. "You've just got to serve us faithfully, and you will have no more worries for the rest of your natural days. If you don't—well, as my friend gave you to understand just now, those days won't be very long in the land—and now suppose we go and have some supper."

James P. Hacker had a better supper that night than he had had for some considerable time, living as he had been doing, on coolie rations. His new masters treated him royally, and after the coffee and

cognac he went to sleep. When he woke he was in a sleeping berth in a train running into the New York Central Station. He didn't know, of course, that he had been hurled through the air at the rate of two hundred miles an hour in a bee-line from Port Kingston to Albany, landed in the dead of night in a lonely little road a couple of miles outside the city with Mr. Marvin properly equipped with gripsacks and other impedimenta, or that while he was sleeping peacefully on a bank by the road-side, his companion had gone to the town and fetched a carriage in which he had been taken as drunk and incapable to the depôt—the driver holding his tongue for golden consideration—and there put on board the train.

They put up at the Murray Hill Hotel that night and the next morning after breakfast Marvin fulfilled his part of the contract, and started Mr. Hacker out to do his work while he after a few brief but pregnant interviews with agents summoned by telephone, called a carriage and drove off to Wall Street to have a look round and see and hear for himself how the financial world had been wagging during his absence in the far South.

CHAPTER VII

A FEW weeks after the arrival of Marvin and Hacker in New York Lady Margaret and her father were sitting over their toast and coffee in the breakfast-room at Romney Abbey, one of the stateliest of the stately homes of England, a composite structure of Norman stone and Tudor brick which had grown up wing by wing through the centuries since the days when Sir Ralph de Romney had built the old keep whose broken, ivy-topped walls still overlooked the peaked and gabled roofs of the Abbey. The mansion stood on the southern slopes of the Dorsetshire Downs, backed and flanked by broad woodlands, and fronted by an open stretch of Down sloping away to the distant sea between Portland Bill and St. Alban's Head.

"Well, Papa, any news in your letters?" said Lady Margaret, looking up from a pile of her own beside her plate, "What is the matter; you look as if someone had asked you a riddle you couldn't answer."

"My dear Madge you really seem to have made me a special subject for your studies in physiogomy" laughed her father, "You are quite right. I have not only had one riddle asked me but many, and I can't answer any of them."

"Nothing serious I hope, Dad. What is it—finance, or high politics?"

"To tell you the truth, dear, it's both," replied the Duke, who was beginning to make quite a confidante

of his brilliant, quick-witted daughter. In the first place, St. John Morton, the Under Secretary—this, of course, is strictly between ourselves—tells me that France and Russia are both in reality quite exasperated over the Japanese Alliance and are intriguing desperately to detach Italy from the Triple Alliance so as to deprive us of our only friend in the Mediterranean. If they succeed it would almost inevitably mean a European conflagration. Then, again, Germany is so furious at the practically barren results of Prince Henry's visit to the States that she is more bitterly Anglophobe than ever. Of course the German press puts the failure down to English influence, and it is doubtful if even the Kaiser's influence would be strong enough to bring Germany into line with us if the trouble really became serious."

"I think after the abominable way they have behaved about the South African War and all the lies they have told about our brave fellows in the field," exclaimed Lady Margaret, the angry tears rising to her eyes as she thought of her gallant brother falling dead with his body torn by a Boer expanding bullet, "we should be very much better without such allies. In fact I don't believe for a moment our men would fight beside them. I believe they would very much rather fight against them."

"I shouldn't be at all surprised if you were right, Madge," said the Duke, "Germany or at any rate the Press and the people have shown up very badly over this war. They have been worse even than the French, for, of course, one would naturally expect them to go into hysterics over a thing like this. Then, it seems that General Mentchikoff, the new governor of Manchuria, has been given a practically

free hand in the far East, and is using it by intriguing for what seems to be neither more nor less than an informal alliance with that precious old Empress Dowageress as a set off to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. That, means, of course, more trouble with China in the near future, for the old wretche's influence is stronger than ever since the Powers made the terrible mistake of permitting the Legations to recognise her again. Altogether I'm afraid things are looking decidedly black."

"If that's the case they certainly do," said Lady Margaret, who under her father's training was rapidly arriving at a comprehensive grip of International politics. "And now what about the high finance? You said you were troubled about that too. I hope there's nothing that will effect your properties?"

"Oh, no," replied her father, "except that for some reason or other I appear to have been making a great deal of money lately. Of course as you know the Stock Markets are the barometers of the political world, and almost infallibly foretell any depression or disturbance. But for the last week or two there have been some extraordinary movements which are not to be accounted for in this way. For instance I hear, not only from London and New York, but also from Berlin and Paris, that there has been a steady and almost phenomenal rise in railways and steamboats and also in the shares of the big construction companies; I mean ship and locomotive builders."

"Well, that ought to be good news for you, Dad. You hold a good many of them don't you, I've noticed, for instance, that American rails have been going up very fast. For instance, Aitchison's have been rising nearly a point a day during the last week,

and so have the Central, the Southern, and the Union Pacific; and all the Transatlantic lines are up too.

"That's curious reasoning for a girl of your age, Madge," said her father smiling at her, not without a feeling of pride, "but still I must say I would rather see you taking an interest in serious things of this sort than the fooleries that the modern young woman seems to think so much of."

"I am only going in the ways you taught me, Dad," she laughed, "and they're infinitely more interesting. Still as for the fooleries, you know no one loves a good dance better than I do, and you also know I can ride and golf and skate and steer a boat against most of the butterflies, and I'm sure I am quite as well dressed as any of them. But to return to the muttons. You say you've made a lot of money out of these rises, why aren't you quite satisfied with them?"

"Because, my dear Madge, they do not appear to be what one may call natural rises. There is no economic reason for them. You know the prices of stocks rise and fall in accordance with definite laws, unless of course a particular market is being manipulated for a given purpose. But this is a general rise over a very wide field, and none of my brokers appear able to give any reason for it. That is what puzzles me."

"And yet," said Lady Margaret, after a little pause, "don't you notice, Dad, that this wide field as you call it is, after all, only one field. Railways, steamers, ship-yards, and locomotive construction works, all of which are practically engaged in the same work—transportation."

"Good heavens, I never thought of that Madge. Why yes, and, now I come to think of it cable shares

have gone up too and so have Marconis. It almost looks as if somebody were trying to corner the world's communications. But, no, that is out of the question. Even Dumont Lawson's so called billion-dollar Trust would be a mere flea-bite to that. It would be impossible for a sufficient amount of money to get into the hands of one syndicate or even a group, to accomplish such a colossal piece of work as that. However, I suppose we shall learn in time. Meanwhile I shall buy Lord Densmore's yacht for you out of the winnings. Poor fellow, he's come sadly to grief, but she is a beautiful craft and will just suit us for our next cruise to the Mediterranean. And now, Madge, what is your news?"

"Well for one thing," replied Lady Margaret turning over her letters, "Mrs. Marvin, you know that charming woman who went with us on that delightful trip in Colorado, and who afterwards married the millionaire, has taken Grafton House in Park Lane for the season, so she will be quite near us. She writes to say that she is coming over in about a fortnight and means to have a real good time, as she puts it. Her husband is coming, too, but only as a sort of bird of passage. She says that he is very busy with the usual number of irons in the fire, and will be constantly flitting between New York and London and Paris, and oh, Dad," she went on after a little pause, "an idea has just struck me. Do you think it would be possible to get her presented when I am? She is a delightful woman, quite a lady, and you know she is connected by marriage with the Winegraves."

"H'm, yes," replied the Duke slowly, "and—why, yes, of course—that son of hers, a remarkably nice, smart young fellow he was too. There are only

really two lives between him and the earldom. Certainly, Madge, I don't see why there should be any difficulty in the way. I'll speak to the Lord Chamberlain about it as soon as I get back to Town. By the way, does she say anything about her son."

"Only," said Lady Margaret, wondering why she felt so pleased at her father's words, "only that he's down in some outlandish place in South America looking after some mining work and she says doing very well indeed."

Ah, "replied her father, "I'm very glad to hear it. I think he deserves to get on. He seemed to me to have all the best of both races in him. It never struck me before that he was a Winegrave. It's a fine old stock. Well, well, its just another proof that blood will tell after all."

Somehow Lady Margaret seemed to feel more and more pleased as her father went on. She had not seen Paul Kingston for nearly two years now, but the memory of that moment when he had held her hands and looked into her eyes on the summit of Pikes Peak was still as fresh as it had been the day after.

"Well Madge," said the Duke "anything else interesting?"

"Not much I think that would interest you, Dad," she replied turning her letters over again. "Oh yes, here's one from Mrs. Franklin Deventer. They've taken that big corner house in Grosvenor Place for the season and I suppose they are going to make quite a considerable splurge, as they say in Chicago. I suppose they're more disgustingly wealthy than ever."

"But, my dear Madge, why disgustingly rich? There are other rich people in the world whom you

don't describe in that way. Your own father, for instance, is not exactly a pauper and I should think Gillette Marvin is worth his two millions sterling at the very least."

"And these people are worth their twenty millions, I suppose, and they work with the Standard Oil Trust and Dumont Lawson and people like that, at least, I mean, I don't like their methods, and really, I think it is quite possible to have too much money."

"H'm," smiled the Duke, "I think, my dear Madge, that most of us would find a little difficulty in drawing the line between just enough money and too much. You know, when I was a comparatively poor second son, I used to look forward to five thousand a year as an almost impossible dream of wealth. I don't think I do now—and if two millions why not twenty or forty? However, that's a very big subject I presume young Franklin is coming with the family."

"Oh yes," replied Lady Margaret with a little flush, "he's coming."

"I thought he wouldn't be left behind," smiled her father. "Did it strike you Madge that he was remarkably attentive to you last time we were in New York? It certainly struck others, myself among them."

"Did it?" said Lady Margaret carelessly but still flushing, "well, yes, I suppose he was; but so were a good many others. In fact I wasn't at all sorry to get away before things got embarrassing. I must confess that one evening during the dance at the British Embassy, I was rather afraid that Master Franklin was going to commit himself."

"Commit himself—what do you mean Madge?"

"Oh, the usual thing," she replied with an admir-

able imitation for eighteen of the blasée woman of twenty-five. I do think men might leave one alone, at any rate till one has come out properly."

"Dear me!" laughed her father, "what a grievance! I was under the impression that being left alone was exactly what young ladies of your age didn't want. But seriously, you know, Madge, I don't suppose there are many girls in England, even Duke's daughters, who would be inclined to turn up their nose at young Deventer. He comes of the best old Knickerbocker stock and his people, quite apart from their money, are as proud as Lucifer."

"My dear Dad, for goodness sake don't begin match-making, if you please!" she laughed, "it really doesn't suit you, and it isn't half as interesting as politics or finance. At least it isn't to me at present. Franklin Deventer is a very nice fellow and I quite like him—all the better that he had the sense at the last moment not to propose on the strength of a six weeks' acquaintance. If he had done that I should have hated him or perhaps laughed at him which would have been worse, "and now, she went on, gathering up her letters, "I think it's time I went about my household duties, and if you're going to catch your train to Town I'd better ring and order the horses." When am I to have the yacht?"

"Ah, you're not going to let me off that, I see. Well, I'll buy her to-day, and she can be sent round to Weymouth for your ladyship's inspection."

When the Duke got up to Town that afternoon and took his seat in his favourite corner of the smoking room at the Carlton, waiting for his friend the Under Secretary and two or three other members of the Government with whom he was to dine,

a waiter brought him a somewhat bulky letter bearing the New York post-mark. He recognised the handwriting of the address as Marvin's.

"Dear me—Mr. Marvin—how curious! Funny we should just have been talking about him this morning. Very good of him, I'm sure, to take the trouble to write such a budget as this—sure to be something good in it, too. Marvin doesn't waste his words, especially in writing. I wonder the extravagant fellow didn't cable. Well, it has come very conveniently and will help to pass the time until those fellows turn up."

But before he had read half way through the first page His Grace of Romney found that the letter was going to do a great deal more than merely pass the time for him, and as he read on he became more and more deeply interested. True he was somewhat at a loss to guess why Gillette Marvin, a man of millions who was under no obligation whatever to him should have taken the trouble, to do this, or should have been so gratuitously generous, as to send to him the almost priceless information which the letter contained. He would, however, have been considerably enlightened on this subject if he had been present on board the *Shiela* the last time that Mr. and Mrs. Marvin and Paul had supped together in the lower cabin.

These are some of the most pregnant paragraphs of Gillette Marvin's letter:—

"You will have noticed some remarkable movements in the Stock Markets both on this side and in England and Europe, and it will not have escaped your attention that these movements are practically confined to descriptions of stock connected with trans-

portation and communication. I can assure your Grace on the very best authority, that, however unaccountable the rise may seem, it will be steadily maintained for the next four months at least. You may therefore invest with perfect confidence, even at present prices, to any amount, especially in Transatlantic lines. This information is, of course, confidential; but it is at your Grace's disposal as far as your personal friends are concerned."

"Within the next few weeks a steady inset of the best European securities, especially National and State credits may be expected in the direction of London and New York, especially the latter."

"The New Russian Loan which will be offered two months hence in Berlin, Paris, and London, will be a failure. Ample measures are already being taken to insure that event. On the other hand, the Japanese loan of forty million yen will be subscribed in gold at least twice over."

"In the course of the year it is probable that the United States Government will approach His Majesty's Government with proposals for a preferential tariff in favour of Great Britain and her dependencies as against the impending Customs Union of Europe. Your Grace may take this information as practically definite, and it is left to your judgment to approach His Majesty's Ministers on the subject in any way that you may think best."

"In the event, which is not at all likely, of the troubles which are now brewing in the Far East coming to a head, Great Britain may depend with perfect confidence, not only on the moral, but, if necessary, on the material support of the United States, provided that she does not entangle herself in any European

alliance, and more especially refrains from entering into any understanding with Germany. Such a course as this would be practically fatal to any rapprochement between the two branches of the Anglo-Saxon race. I would suggest that this is a point of the most vital importance for the consideration of His Majesty's Ministers."*

"Bless my soul!" said the Duke as he folded the letter up after reading it twice over "that's very extraordinary; and yet Marvin is certainly not the man to write like that unless he had the best of reasons for doing so. He couldn't have the smallest possible object in misleading me; but why should he favour me with information evidently exclusive and about as valuable to a private individual as a secret State Paper might be? Why there's enough in this letter to set all the chancelleries of Eurpoe agog and perhaps start a European war in a week. Fortunately there are no outsiders coming to-night, and so I shouldn't wonder if our little gathering resolved itself into something like an informal Cabinet Council."

*This was published in the United States twelve months before the deplorable Anglo-German arrangement for the coercion of Venezuela came within the area of practical politics.—G.G.

CHAPTER VIII

THE little dinner at the Carlton proved, as the Duke had expected, a function of almost international importance, but the following day there was another little dinner, an even smaller one as regards numbers, held in a private room at the Walldorf-Astoria, which subsequent event proved to be of a greater moment.

There were only three men present. One was Gillette Marvin, blue-eyed golden-bearded, and more boyish-looking than ever. The man sitting opposite to him was a big, burly man, slightly inclined to corpulence, with the face of a bull-dog and the head of a prize fighter. His eyes were small and grey and intensely bright, his nose thick and prominent, his lips full but not loose, the upper covered with a thick grey moustache. The lower jaw was heavy and massive and slightly protruding. It was essentially the face of a fighter, the face of a man who would take all he could get by any means and hold on to it, bull-dog like, till a greater strength forced his jaws apart, or his grip loosed in death.

This was Henry Dumont Lawson, head of the great Steel and Iron Corporations which had by this time practically absorbed the whole of the hardware industries of the United States and was rapidly invading the industrial markets of Europe. It had a capital of more than a thousand million dollars and its net profits for the last year had been over a hundred

and twenty millions. It had also just concluded a sort of offensive and defensive alliance with the Rockefeller group of companies; and the great combine was rapidly reaching a position from which it would be able to control, not only the principal railway systems of the United States, but also all the transatlantic traffic, with the exception of the North German Lloyd and the Cunard lines. There were, indeed, already rumours to the effect that the North German Lloyd were on the point of surrender under threat of a rate-war, with regard to the end of which the vast resources of the Corporations left very little doubt.

The third man who was sitting on Marvin's right was a square-built, well set-up, fair-haired, clean shaven man of a distinctly Teutonic type. His face was almost expressionless save for the inflexible determination of the thin, sharp-cut lips, and the steady brightness of the steel blue eyes. This was Augustus L. Schmidt, Manager of the Corporation, and Dumont Lawson's right-hand man.

The dessert was still on the table, but the time of cigars and coffee had come, and also of business. It was avowedly a business dinner, for Marvin had invited his brother millionaires for the purpose of a friendly discussion over certain matters closely affecting their mutual interests. The great Dumont Lawson would perhaps have declined such an invitation even from Gillette Marvin on some plea or other, had it not been for the fact that he and his associates were getting a little uneasy at the steady, and yet unaccountable rise in the very class of securities that they themselves had been quietly buying for some weeks past.

For over a month now the moment any of their agents had attempted to buy railroad or steamer stock large buyings had begun in various unknown quarters and prices had gone up. It was the same with shares and debentures in construction companies such as Baldwin's and Cramps and the Schenectady Works, and only the day before a disquieting rumour had reached them to the effect that options were being bought at fancy figures on the output of all the principle shipyards and locomotive factories for the next twelve months to come.

Evidently there was some big movement going on under the surface which, in the circumstances, must be in some sense more or less hostile to the interests of the Corporation. Gillette Marvin was not a man to invite his financial rivals out to dinner for nothing, and so Dumont Lawson and his lieutenant had decided to accept.

Their host had opened the subject with an almost boyish frankness which immediately aroused their deepest suspicions. They both knew him only as the financial brigand, an operator in a smaller way than themselves, but every whit as pitiless and unscrupulous.

They were well aware, too, that when he once took hold of a thing he had never been known to let go until he had twisted it into the shape he wanted, and so they felt that if a fight was coming it was going to be a stiff one, safe and all as they felt behind the golden rampart of their heaped-up millions.

The calm assurance of his first proposition almost staggered them. It was just this—that he, Gillette Marvin, should be admitted into the inner councils of the Corporation with one third interest and sole control

of that section of its operations which had to deal with railways, shipping, and cables.

"That is what I want, Mr. Lawson," he said, "and so I thought I would ask you gentlemen to have a bit of dinner with me to-night, to see if we could hit upon any way of my getting there."

If anybody else but a man who had made himself both famous and feared by the daring and splendour of his operations during the past two years had put forward such a proposition they would have looked upon it as merely the babbling of a madman, but the quiet, even tone in which he made it, the smile under his moustache, and the cold, clear glint in his eyes made it quite clear that he was perfectly in earnest.

Dumont Lawson's face flushed from red to purple, and a pinky tinge crept up over the sallow face of Mr. Schmidt until it reached his now slightly dilated eyes.

"Good heavens, sir?" spluttered the President at last, "I can hardly believe that Mr. Gillette Marvin would ask us here to waste our time listening to propositions like that. Are you aware, sir, how much it would take to buy a third share in the Iron and Steel Corporation if it were for sale—which it is not?"

"Somewhere around four hundred millions would be about a fair figure, I reckon," replied Marvin, as carelessly as if he had been talking about ten cents.

"Well, Mr. Marvin, that might be a fair figure if the shares were in the market. But you know as well as I do that they are not. In short I may as well say, and I think Mr. Schmidt will agree with me, that there is no part of the stock of the Iron and Steel Corporation for sale."

"No," said Mr. Schmidt, in perfectly good

American and without a trace of German accent, "I reckon that's so. You see, Mr. Marvin, we have our own capital fully subscribed among ourselves; we have certain plans for the future which that capital will enable us to put through and, well, without wishing to say anything discourteous we propose to put them through without any assistance from outside."

"And there's another thing, Mr. Marvin," said Dumont Lawson, leaning back in his chair and taking a voluminous puff at his cigar, "since we're getting to hard business, you will just excuse me suggesting that four hundred million dollars is a pretty big figure even for Mr. Gillette Marvin to talk about as though he had it right in his wallet."

"My dear sir," replied Marvin still smiling, but still looking into the President's eyes as though he could see through the back of his head, "if it was four thousand millions, or forty thousand millions it would be equally a matter of the most perfect unconcern to me."

Never had such astounding words been spoken in such a calmly careless voice within the confines of the United States, and these two men, accustomed as they were to think in millions and tens of millions, were for the moment paralyzed by the mention of such immeasurable sums. They stared at each other, bit pieces off the ends of their cigars, spat them on the floor, took sips of coffee and looked at each other again and then at Marvin, wondering whether they had to deal with a madman or a twentieth century Croesus.

"I see, gentlemen, that you don't believe me," said Marvin, breaking the silence with one of his tormentingly boyish laughs. "Well, of course, if you don't,

you don't, and that is all there is to it. I asked you to meet me here to-night, hoping that we might be able to join our forces on a reasonable basis and work together for the good of humanity in general and the American people in particular. I'm sorry. I'd sooner be a friend than an enemy, but, as I am a good American too, if you want a fight I reckon I can put one up for you—that is, of course, if you can't see your way to reconsider my proposition—which is just four hundred million dollars gold for a third share in your Corporation and sole control of railroads, steamboats, and cables.

"Great Scott, sir," exclaimed Dumont Lawson biting half an inch off his cigar and leaning forward with his big arms on the table. "Do you want us to believe that you are talking seriously about fighting the Iron and Steel Corporation, to say nothing of the other trusts which you must know are allied with it? Why, there aren't dollars enough in the United States to do it. I hope you will excuse my being a little warm on the subject, but really your proposition is so utterly beyond all bounds of common sense, if you will allow me to say so, that I find considerable difficulty in treating it at all seriously. What do you say, Mr. Schmidt?"

"With every courtesy to our worthy host, Mr. President," replied the Manager, "I'm bound to say that I see right with you eye to eye there. The thing is just impossible, and that's just about all there is to say, even if Mr. Marvin just for the sake of argument, was actually prepared to put the four hundred millions down in hard money."

"I think I said forty thousand millions afterwards, Mr. Schmidt, didn't I?" said Marvin softly, shifting

his eyes from Lawson's and looking into his as though he wanted to see into his soul. "Suppose we say forty thousand millions? No, I'm not joking."

"But, damn it, sir!" Dumont Lawson burst out in a passion of anger and amazement, "have you found the Philosopher's Stone or have you the world's gold reserve at your back? Forty thousand millions—forty thousand millions!—oh, say, I guess we had better change the subject before we lose our tempers."

"Well, you'll excuse me, Mr. Lawson, but I can't see any reason for losing one's temper over an ordinary business proposition. The question is whether I am to take that as your last word—that there is none of the Corporation stock for sale and that you are not going to let me in at any price."

"That's so, Mr. Marvin," replied the President more calmly. "You see, we have our business and our own plans, and we propose to run them in our own way. If it should ever happen that we want outside help, why, we should ask for it, and one of the first men we should ask would be yourself."

"I see," laughed Marvin; "that's straight, anyhow. In other words, you don't want me and you won't have me."

He picked up a fresh cigar from the table and went on rather more seriously:

"Well, gentlemen, I'm sorry; but I suppose I'll have to take that refusal as a declaration of war. I would rather have worked with you, but as I mean to work anyhow, I reckon I'll have to work against you. But as I carry a heavier metal than you do—don't laugh, you'll find it true some day—I'll give you a month's truce to think it over in. At the end of that month my terms will be one-half share,

and the position which is now so ably filled by yourself, Mr. President. And now, as you suggest, we will change the subject."

"Say, Schmidt," said Dumont Lawson to his manager in his private room, "what's Marvin on to; to what sort of a game is he playing? He's not mad. He is one of the hardest-headed, hardest-hearted operators between here and Golden Gate; he's made ten millions if he's made a dollar in the last two years, and I've heard on pretty good authority that he has had something to do with this ridiculous rise in railroads, steamboats, and cables, and if that's so he has got a lot more than ten millions behind him. But four hundred million—four thousand millions—why the man must be mad after all, talking through the back of his head like that. What do you think?"

"To tell you the straight truth, Mr. President, I don't know what to think," replied Mr. Schmidt in a somewhat uneasy tone. "For my part, I wish he was mad, but he isn't, not by a lot—and yet the thing is unbelievable. No, sir, I believe it's just a bluff. It can't be anything else, and it's just the bluff that Gillette Marvin would try to play."

"I guess you're right, Schmidt; it's just a bluff, and I reckon we'll see it."

When Mr. Dumont Lawson received his first tape messages the next morning he found to his amazement that nearly all the stocks in which the Corporation was interested were being bought up freely on over-night deals at an appreciation of from fifteen to twenty per cent.

He telephoned to Mr. Schmidt and told him to have

the most searching inquiries made as to the buying, and the answer came back:

"I have had men on it all night, but they've nothing to report. The buyers are small firms scattered all over the States and in Canada, and they pay cash every time. The public is also coming in on the rise. Everyone seems to have good information. If we don't buy now we shall lose control. Wall Street will very likely go mad to-day when the markets open."

"Very well," said Lawson, "we've got to have them; buy!"

When the market opened the first news that flew from lip to lip was that a five-million dollar buying order for Transportations, as the railway and steamboat group had now begun to be called, had been placed with three of the biggest broking firms in New York, and that instructions were to buy quickly and at any price. Whoever the foes of the Corporation were, they not only meant business, but they meant putting it through quickly. Adolphus Schmidt had scarcely arrived, pale and perspiring, on 'Change when he heard the alarming news that every available share of the descriptions he wanted had been optioned the night before and was being taken up for cash as fast as the transfers could be completed. There was not a single share on the market, and owners were holding on, waiting for further development, well knowing that the enormous prices gave them an ample margin for profit even if the market broke, and of that there was not the slightest sign.

Towards the middle of the morning Mr. Marvin strolled into the street and met Mr. Schmidt talking

very anxiously to one of the biggest railway operators on the street.

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Schmidt; good morning Mr. Sprigge. What's the matter with the market? Here I've been trying to buy a few Lake Views, Centrals and Western Unions, just for investment, but some one has been and knocked the darned things kite high for some fool-reason or other. Why, none of them would pay an eighth interest at these prices. What's got the market, anyhow?"

"That's what everyone on the street would like to know, Mr. Marvin," snarled Schmidt with a look of angry suspicion at him. "Perhaps you could tell us something about it." He was on the point of blurting out something about a four hundred million dollar share in the Corporation when Marvin interrupted him with a laugh and said:

"My dear Mr. Schmidt, what in thunder should I know about it? Nearly all my interests are down West and South, you know. Besides, you will admit that I know enough to come out of the wet, and if I wanted rails seriously I should bear them first, not boost them up to the zenith as someone with more dollars than sense seems to be doing. Well, so-long; I'm going down South to-night. I guess there will be an almighty slump when someone begins unloading."

"Lawson," said Mr. Schmidt that day to the President at lunch, "I don't know who or what that fellow Marvin has got behind him, but I'm absolutely certain that he's the man who is working this boost. Five million dollars' worth of transportations changed hands this morning, and every darned stock was

opted. I couldn't get five cents' worth. I'd give fifty thousand to know the facts."

"I'd give a million," growled Lawson. "Why, if that's so, the control's gone. Whether it's Marvin or anyone else, he's got up a bit earlier than we have and just walked round us. Yes, sir, round us—the Iron and Steel Corporation of America. Look here, Schmidt, this is getting serious. Call a board meeting for this afternoon and we'll go into the matter thoroughly. The board has got to know about Marvin's offer some time, and they may as well know about it now."

While the meeting was being held Gillette Marvin was speeding away South to New Orleans as fast as a special could carry him to join his yacht which was waiting there to convey him to Aspinwall, where, as he had already been advised by wire Mr. James P. Hacker was waiting for him with his recruits.

CHAPTER IX

THE month of grace went by without any further startling development.

Transportations stuck at the figure they had reached on that fatal morning in Wall Street when the Iron and Steel Corporation had found itself practically frozen out.

Towards the end of the month, however, the invisible power which had then paralyzed the market began to make itself felt again in new and ominous fashion. The New York Central and Pennsylvania Railroads sent out orders for certain new express and freight locomotives, and their managers and presidents were astounded by receiving an intimation to the effect that no locomotives were available; that all those under construction had been bought, and that the total output of the works for the next three years had been pre-empted by certain firms whose names the Baldwin Company were not at liberty to disclose.

Within the same week the American Line wanted to place an order with Cramp for a new fifteen thousand ton liner. The manager was informed that it would be impossible to accommodate them, as the yards were working to their full capacity and would not be in a position to accept any more orders for two years to come.

Here, again, the company was not at liberty to disclose the names of the firms to whose order it was working.

Inquiries from other yards produced almost exactly the same replies. Even in England the great building firms had been laid under the same mysterious embargo.

Meanwhile the true secret of these tremendous operations lay headed up in barrels, packed tight in the holds of ocean tramps, one of which left Port Kingston almost every day, bound northward to San Francisco, or southward through the Strait of Magellan, en route for New York and London.

From San Francisco the barrels of yellow grey powder—certified to be mineral fertilizers—were shipped across to New York, consigned to John K. Norton and Co., Hudson Wharf, Hoboken.

The steamers for London discharged at Esperance Wharf, Rotherhythe, a tumble-down, forlorn-looking structure, backed by a group of dilapidated, smoke-blackened sheds and factories which had been for sale or to let for about twenty years.

It had been taken at length by the Mineral Fertilizer Company, Limited, of whom no one could tell anything save that it had not offered any shares for subscription, and that its list of signatories did not contain a single name known to commerce.

The day that the first of the Kingston-Marvin freight ships tied up alongside the Esperance Wharf, the Duke of Romney received an envelope posted eight days before in New York. It contained a single sheet of note-paper on which were written the pregnant words:

"YOUR GRACE,

"I write in haste to tell you, on the very best information, that the market in Transportations will break badly in forty-eight hours after you receive this and have cabled me to the effect that you have sold all you hold. You had better tell your friends to get out, too.

"Faithfully yours,

"GILLETTE P. MARVIN."

The same morning, allowing for difference of time, Mr. Dumont Lawson received a telegram from San Francisco worded thus:

"Month of grace is up six to-night, your time. My terms are now half share and full control of transports and cables. If I do not receive acceptance within four hours, trouble begins to-morrow.

"GILLETTE MARVIN."

Dumont Lawson held a brief and anxious conference with Mr. Schmidt and a few other leading men of the Corporation who happened to be in town, and the result was that a couple of hours later Marvin received the following wire:

"Offer declined; do as you please.

"DUMONT LAWSON."

Still, there was yet another lull of forty-eight hours—forty-eight hours of silent, oppressive suspense.

The Transportation market was absolutely stagnant; holders wouldn't sell, and buyers didn't dare buy. Hundreds of millions of dollars had been locked up for several weeks, and in London hundreds of thousands of pounds were lying idle.

The magnates of the Corporation and the Oil Trust, still confident in their millions, looked upon the non-fulfilment of Marvin's threat as evidence that his bluff had failed.

"I told you that we ought to see him," said Dumont Lawson to the Oil President after the market had closed on the second day. "Well, we've seen him, and he has gone out like a scared rabbit. I guess that's about the last we'll hear of Gillette Marvin. He's been working this little game, and I reckon it's cost him about every cent he's got!"

"He's a nervy chap though, and it wasn't a bad bluff while it lasted," said the other President. "He's just the sort of man I would like to have in our company, and if he wants a billet now, I guess he has only got to ask for it."

The moment he received Lawson's telegram, Marvin went to the telegraph bureau in Market Street with three clerks, and for a couple of hours he kept the wires of America and the Atlantic cables hot with quick succeeding messages.

Then he took a special train for Lake City, put up at his old rooms at the hotel, and walked down to the lake.

At the ferry steps he found José waiting for him in a boat, and within an hour he was shaking hands with Paul outside the gangway door of the *Shiela* lying as snugly in her shed as though she had never left it.

"Well, Paul, how are things going down south? Everything fixed up for a start, eh?"

"Yes," replied Paul. "There is not much more to do now. All the men have settled down to their work

very nicely, and I have been able to pick out some excellent officers."

"You feel pretty sure of them, I hope? It will be an awkward thing if any of them turn crooked after the operations begin in dead earnest."

"No, I think you weeded out all the suspicious ones at Panama. They all signed the declaration quite readily, and so of course every man is responsible for every one else. Besides, why should they risk their lives to play us false when they all have the prospect of unlimited pay as long as they behave themselves?"

"Oh, no, I think we are quite safe on that score. But come on board. Chin Su, my new Chinese cook, will have supper ready in a few minutes, and then we'll make a start. Have you heard anything from England? I suppose you fixed it up all right for the Duke?"

"Oh, yes, I had a cable from him just before I left San Francisco, to thank me for the hint to get out. I reckon he's made a pretty good pile by this time. The slump starts in New York to-morrow morning. The agents have started paying in gold in London and New York, this week, and I have opened up another conversion place at Antwerp. I thought that would be handier than Paris."

"That sounds all right," said Paul. "I've been shipping the stuff off at the rate of about two thousand tons a week, and the old lake is as full as ever. I reckon it just bubbles up out of the volcano as fast as ever we take it out. By the time we get to London there will be about ten thousand tons on the way."

"Ten thousand tons—say seven thousand tons net gold! Well I reckon that will do to go on with. It's enough to flood out all the markets in the world."

By the way, you're a nice sort of boy—you haven't asked anything about your mother yet."

"Just going to," said Paul. "Why didn't she come with you?"

"Well, there wasn't any point in hustling her down and back again in such an almighty hurry when she's got lots more important things to attend to in New York. You see, she's got the house in Madison Square to fix up; then there's her fit out for Europe, and all the arrangements to make about the London house as well, and you bet she's just revelling in it."

"Well, that's good hearing," laughed Paul. "As long as she is enjoying herself, that is all right. And now, when do you want to get back to New York?"

"Eight days from now will just do me," replied Marvin. "*Express I.* is ready and taking in freight, and she is about booked up full, I believe, although we haven't advertised yet. The notices will be out to-morrow. She sails on the fifteenth, the same day as the *Deutschland*."

"We are guaranteeing a hundred hour passage from Sandy Hook to Southampton, passage money returned if we don't do it. I guess the Shipping Trust is going to sit up and scratch its head pretty hard to-morrow morning, though of course no one will believe us until we have done it."

"Sorry you can't come with us, Paul, we'll have quite a sport with the old *Deutschland*. Oh, by the way, that reminds me; the Franklin Deventers are going over by the *Deutschland*. They've taken a big house in Grosvenor Place, and mean to make a considerable splash, by all accounts."

"Oh, yes," said Paul, suddenly becoming grave, "and of course young Franklin is going with them?"

"Well, you don't suppose he is going to stay around New York while his people are over in London renewing the acquaintance of His Grace of Romney and Lady Margaret. Well, never mind, Paul; you will only be out of the running for a bit, and, remember you will have your mother there, and you couldn't have any better ally than she will be.

"Then don't forget that it won't be very long before your Majesty makes his royal entry into Europe as Lord Paramount of the Air; and when you do that, I reckon Master Franklin Deventer will find a back seat more suitable to his diminished dignity."

"I'm not so sure about that," said Paul rather gloomily. "I don't believe air-ships, or tons of gold, or anything else, would have the slightest influence with Lady Margaret if she preferred one man to another. She's not that sort.

"However, that's not the subject at present. It's as likely as not she has forgotten all about me. Suppose we get to supper and make a start?"

"I hardly think, somehow, she has forgotten you, Paul," replied Marvin as they moved towards the table, "but anyhow, you'll soon have a mighty big show for bringing yourself back to her ladyship's recollection. You see, when we're once fairly started, there is no need for any further concealment about the air-ships. The only things we want to keep out of sight for the present are the submarines. I hope you are quite sure that you can trust your captains with them."

"Absolutely," said Paul, as they sat down. "They have no interest in going anything but straight, and if they had, they couldn't do it, simply because no one knows the secret of the converters but our two selves,

and therefore, when they came to the end of their present stock of fuel, they would just have to come to the top and lie there until some one picked them up. They all know that, so I think we can depend upon them turning up at the depôt at the proper time."

Immediately after supper the *Shiela* rose from the shed and began her southward journey at full speed. On the afternoon of the following day she came to rest in her quarters under the crater wall.

The last of the cargo ships was just ready to sail for the Thames, and she was sent off the next day.

Marvin and Paul then made a final inspection of the hundred men under the command of James P. Hacker, now the most devoted and enthusiastic of all the servants of the Syndicate. They were as likely looking a lot of men as could have been picked off the three continents.

Adventurers to a man, they had embarked on this extraordinary campaign with a whole-souled enthusiasm which was perhaps a better guarantee of their trustworthiness than the death-bond which they had signed and sworn to.

About half were English, and half American. Each submarine carried a captain, lieutenant, a chief engineer, and six men. The largest and most powerful of them was commanded by Commodore Hacker himself.

Paul commanded the *Anonyma*, as he had named the magnificent craft which was to be the flag-ship of the air. He had a captain, two lieutenants, two engineers, and six men to work the pneumatic guns and aerial torpedoes in case it became necessary in the last extremity to resort to force.

The other three air-ships were left at Port Kingston,

under the charge of their captains, and the remainder of the men, with orders to hold the port and prevent any access to the Mount of the Golden Lake at all hazards.

On the morning of the fifth day the submarines started with orders to rendezvous at an island off Nova Scotia, which Marvin had leased for fifty years from the Canadian government.

The same night, after a farewell supper to the temporary exiles, the *Anonyma* rose into the air and headed direct for New York at a hundred and fifty miles an hour. Forty-eight hours later she deposited Marvin in a lonely valley in the Catskills, whence, with Paul, he walked to a station on the West Shore line and took train for New York.

As he fully expected, he found the Empire City in a state of almost frantic excitement.

The slump had been running a week now, and panic reigned supreme. The bottom had fallen out of Transportations, and they were not saleable at any price.

On the first day of the slump there had not been a very great reaction until it was known that London and Paris were selling heavily. Then came the rush. For the moment the Iron and Steel Corporation, the Oil, the Shipping Trust, and the Vanderbilt group did their utmost to stop the downward run, and on the second day succeeded in achieving a slight rally; but after that blocks of shares of five hundred, a thousand, and two thousand each were flung upon the markets as though the scrip was only so much waste paper.

Other stocks, even the most heavily gilt-edged, went down in the universal panic, and yet—strangest

feature of the situation—the gold reserves at the banks kept on rising, fed from unknown sources.

Gold bullion was pouring into the Washington mint by the hundred-weight at a time all through office hours, and the assay office was kept busy testing and stamping bars of gold to the amount of nearly a ton a day.

Meanwhile the same thing was happening in London, Paris, and Brussels. The money markets of the world were in a state of absolute demoralization.

The most experienced and best informed operators were as utterly bewildered as the merest amateurs. Confidence, even in the most firmly established firms, was shaken.

No one knew which class of security would be attacked next. Hundreds of thousands of pounds had been lost in a few weeks—vanished no one knew whither.

And yet, to set against all this, there were other features, absolutely contradictory, which made the situation all the more bewildering.

In the first place, the gold reserves in England, the United States, and in Canada were rising with a steadiness and rapidity unparalleled even in the golden days of Forty-Nine and Fifty-One, when California and Australia gave up the secrets of their treasure-houses.

But this gold did not get into circulation. It was simply held to the order of certain firms acting for principals whose names they were not permitted to disclose.

At the same time, while industrials, steam lines, and railways were in a state of chaos, British consols, United States stock, India four per cents, and all

British and Colonial inscribed stock had been climbing steadily since the panic began.

Consols had jumped in a week from ninety-four and seven sixteenths to a hundred and ten and a half, and other government securities had risen in proportion to almost prohibitive prices.

Then on Monday, the twenty-fifth of May, another bombshell fell on the commercial world of New York. It took the form of a very simple and brief announcement in the papers which ran thus:

"The Atlantic Express Company's *Express I.* will leave the Company's wharf at 4 p.m. to-morrow. All berths are now taken, and no more freight can be received; but other ships of the Company, *Express II.* and *Express III.* are now completed, and passages and freights may be booked at the office and cabins secured at all principal hotels and through Messrs. Cook and Gaze.

"These vessels are guaranteed to do the trip from Sandy Hook to the Needles in one hundred hours. Passage rates the same as by other first-class lines. Money returned in full if the guarantee is not kept.

"*Express II.* will sail at noon Saturday, and *Express III.* at noon Tuesday, and the Company will maintain a tri-weekly service until the completion of vessels now building makes a daily service practicable."

To say that consternation reigned supreme in the shipping offices that night would be only a feeble description of the actual state of affairs. All sorts of rumours had been flying about since it had become known that three magnificently appointed vessels of twenty thousand tons had been launched from Cramp's yard; but when *Express I.* had come round

from Philadelphia to take her place at the Express Wharf, and it was found that she was not driven by steam, since she had no funnels, amazement became mingled with dismay, and ship owners and managers of lines began to ask themselves and each other:

"What if this mysterious company had come into possession of some new motive force which would end the era of steam and make every steamship that floated worthless except for freight carrying?"

CHAPTER X

THE memorable morning of Tuesday, the 26th of May, broke in a swift flood of sunlight over the stately Empire City.

Alongside the Hamburg-American wharf on the Hoboken side lay the huge *Deutschland*, the greyhound of the Atlantic, the smoke curling in light wreaths from her four gigantic funnels. She was to sail at nine o'clock. Almost exactly opposite to her on the New York shore lay the long, white, yacht-like shape of *Express I*. She was built somewhat after the same model as the Empress boats of the Canadian Pacific Line, with overhanging prow and very fine lines fore and aft.

She carried four tall masts, and, save for the absence of funnels, her appearance was that of an ordinary steamer.

The announcement of the day before had, of course, been taken as a direct challenge to the great record-breaker, hitherto undisputed queen of the Western Ocean, and sporting New York was rapidly losing its head over the excitement of the event.

The *Deutschland* had just lowered her own record to a hundred and thirty hours, and here was this mysterious stranger, driven no one knew how, lying smokeless and silent at her berth, ready, according to the advertisement, to cut even that record down by no less than thirty hours.

On the whole, the betting was strongly in favour of the ship which had proved what she could do; but there was a distinct reaction when Gillette Marvin strolled into the Union Club about ten o'clock on the Monday night, and, after casually remarking that he was taking his wife to Europe in the *Express*, began raking in all the bets he could get against the mysterious craft.

At the end he stood to win nearly two hundred thousand dollars or to lose fifty thousand.

The next morning the odds had shortened to two to one on the *Deutschland*, and Marvin had asked the whole crowd to lunch at one o'clock the next day on board the *Express*.

Soon after eight the next morning he turned up on the *Deutschland* to say good-bye to the Deventers and several other friends and acquaintances who were going over on her.

There is perhaps nothing more exciting than a frankly declared ocean race, for in no other form of racing are such large numbers of people personally concerned. Consequently the excitement on board the *Deutschland* far exceeded that of an ordinary departure.

The challenge of the Express Company had been tacitly accepted. During the night extra quantities of the finest steaming coal had been taken on board, and the Captain had shipped as additional hands twenty-four of the best stokers that could be found in New York.

"And so you really think, my dear Mrs. Marvin," said Mrs. Deventer, "that you are going to cross the Atlantic in a hundred hours and get into Southampton

thirty hours ahead of the fastest liner afloat? Really, it seems a bit incredible, doesn't it?"

"More like impossible, I should be inclined to say," chimed in Miss Eirene Deventer, with ever so slight a curl of her beautiful lips. "For my own part, I shall be inclined to believe it when I see the *Express* waiting for us alongside Southampton quay. A steamer that isn't a steamer, and has no funnels and doesn't go by steam, is just a little bit too Jules Verney for me. How do you drive her, anyhow?"

"With screws, I believe," replied Mrs. Marvin, "but how the engines work I really can't tell you."

"And I guess if you could, you wouldn't, would you?" laughed Miss Deventer not over pleasantly. "Well, if you get across to Southampton safely, I suppose we shall meet some time."

"We shall meet before then, I hope," said Marvin. "We are taking the same track as the *Deutschland*, and we hope to be somewhere alongside about sunrise on Saturday off the Lizard. You see, we are giving you a pretty long start—over thirty hours out of a hundred and thirty—so I reckon we will do pretty well if we overhaul you there by daybreak Saturday morning."

"Well, Mr. Marvin, I must say you seem to have pretty considerable confidence in this new craft of yours, if it is yours, as people seem to say," observed Franklin Deventer, "and if you haven't got your book full——"

"That is all right, Mr. Deventer," rejoined Marvin quickly, taking out his pocket-book. "The *Express* is not my boat, but I don't mind saying that I have shares in the company, and as for bets—well, I am just taking all that come along. What is yours?"

"I'll lay you twenty-five thousand dollars to ten thousand that you don't get over in a hundred hours, and another twenty thousand to fifteen that you don't see the *Deutschland* till you find her alongside Ocean Quay, Southampton."

"I'll take them both, Mr. Deventer," said Marvin, jotting the figures down, "and I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll hold the *Express* special for you at Southampton and land you in London two hours ahead of the Hamburg-American train. Well, now, there's the bell, and we'll have to be getting ashore.

"Hope you will have a pleasant voyage and a quick one. I hear Captain Adler has laid himself out for another record run, so I guess we may have quite an exciting time between the Lizard and the Needles.

"Hallo, Mr. Schmidt! Good morning, I didn't know you were going across. Little pleasure trip, eh—after the trying times we have been having lately?"

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Marvin," replied the other with a fairly successful assumption of cordiality. "Why, yes, I only made up my mind last night. Partly a little business, partly a pleasure trip as you say. Some of our interests on the other side want looking up, as they do every now and then, you know, and its best to see after that sort of thing yourself."

"Quite so, quite so," replied Marvin, shaking hands with him. "Now then, my dear, there's the second bell. If you will finish your farewells we had better hurry. We don't want to cross in the *Deutschland* this time."

"Not exactly," said his wife as she finished her hand shakings.

Ten minutes later the *Deutschland's* whistle sent a hoarse booming roar across the river. It sounded like a blast of defiance hurled at the silent *Express*.

At five minutes past ten a message was received from Sandy Hook to say that the *Deutschland* had passed, and the news was immediately flashed over the wires of the American continent and under the ocean to England and Germany.

After that all interest centred in the beautiful challenger, who was now rapidly taking the last of her freight. At nine o'clock the next morning the *Express* was thrown open to her passengers and their friends, and Marvin also invited several of his business acquaintances to inspect the new marvel of the sea.

The first thing that struck all the visitors was the immense amount of room devoted to passenger accommodation.

The staterooms were twice as large as those on the biggest liners. Only first class passengers were carried, and there was ample accommodation for a thousand of them.

There were no engines or boilers visible, and no smoke or steam or smell of oil and grease. There was not even a trace of smoke from the kitchen.

In fact from stem to stern there was not a coal fire or an oil stove on board her.

From the promenade deck to the lower the visitors were at liberty to wander where they would, but the secrets which the lower deck covered remained secrets.

In fact, Marvin had caused it to be quite distinctly understood that no questions with regard to the motive power of the ship were expected, and that, if asked, they would not be answered.

Precisely at fifteen minutes to three a deep, mellow boom sounded from the huge whistle on the foremast, high up above the navigation bridge.

People looked up for the steam, but there was none—only a blast of invisible air. The guests at once began to file down the gangway on to the wharf.

Presently a bell tinkled in the depths of the great ship, a broad stream of foam rushed from under her stern, and the *Express*, driven by her invisible energy, glided away down stream. At four o'clock precisely a message was received announcing that she had passed Sandy Hook.

Meanwhile, far away on the summer sea, the *Deutschland* was flinging the ocean leagues behind her, as even she had never done before. Although no one on board her, and least of all her captain and officers, believed for a moment that her mysterious rival would really accomplish the unparalleled feat of crossing the ocean in a hundred hours, still every one clearly understood that a serious and determined effort was to be made to depose the great German liner from the queenship of the seas.

Moreover, the glamour of the unknown was about the *Express*. She was a floating mystery, and, after all, there was no telling what she really could do.

Added to this, a considerable number of the anxious millionaires on board had an uncomfortable consciousness that Gillette Marvin was hardly the man to put his millions, as he must have done, into such a venture as this without feeling pretty confident of at least some definite measure of success.

Never was so much money gambled and spent on an Atlantic voyage before. The ship had scarcely

started before a committee of millionaires was formed in the smoking room which resolved to send a thousand dollars a day down to the engine-room for every knot over six hundred covered in the twenty-four hours, and a final bonus of five thousand if the *Deutschland* passed the Needles ahead of the *Express*.

At noon on Wednesday the captain announced amid a scene of enthusiasm that the total run was seven hundred and forty-two miles for the twenty-seven hours, and this gave a speed of very nearly twenty-four knots an hour, allowing for the necessary slowing down in the river and while passing through the Narrows.

The weather was absolutely perfect—smooth sea and clear sky, and light westerly breezes, which, of course, became head winds for the great liner, rushing eastward as she was doing at a speed of nearly thirty statute miles an hour.

Everything worked with perfect smoothness. The engine-room staff toiled day and night to keep every portion of the great engines in perfect condition, for the slightest mishap would mean either a stoppage or a loss at best of two or three knots an hour.

The stokers laboured incessantly in shifts of three hours each, hurling coal into the insatiable furnaces, and raking out the grates so that every possible unit of heat could be got out of the fuel.

Day and night the passengers stood round the engineroom skylights and watched the giant piston rods leaping up and down like the shining arms of steel Titans. Some of the more anxious timed them with stop watches, and looked personally aggrieved

if they seemed to fall behind by a fraction of a second.

Every minute the surplus steam hissed from the safety valves, and on the second day out a deputation actually waited upon the captain with the suggestion that they should be lashed down in the old Mississippi style; but this proposition Captain Adler, keen as he was upon the record, was obliged to decline.

Twenty-four knots were all he could promise, and that she was making consistently, and if the *Express* had really given them thirty hours start it would be impossible for her to overtake the *Deutschland* unless her propellers drove her through the water at a speed of at least thirty-five knots an hour.

Morning after morning dawned bright and clear over the calm sea, and still the telescopes and long-ranged binoculars which were so anxiously directed astern failed to show the threatened white shape looming up out of the west.

A hundred and fifty miles from Land's End a wireless message was picked up which stated that *Express I.* had left New York punctually at three on the Wednesday, and had passed Sandy Hook inside the hour.

"That doesn't cut any ice," said Franklin Deventer to Mr. Schmidt as they met on deck in the early dawn of the fifth day; "I reckon he's got to quicken up a lot on that before he overhauls us now."

"Why, yes," replied Mr. Schmidt, "he'll have to do some pretty smart steaming, or whatever it is that he does, to get in to-morrow. As for to-day, why, it's just ridiculous. Another of Marvin's bluffs and I reckon our money is on the right horse this time."

But breakfast was scarcely over when the Marconi

receiver in the Captain's room began to buzz and click again, and the operator spelt out the ominous message:

"Marvin on board *Express I.*, a hundred miles west, desires compliments to Captain and passengers and hopes to join *Deutschland* off the Lizard."

CHAPTER XI

"I DON'T believe a word of it. I guess those Marconi people are working off a bit of a racket on us!" exclaimed Mr. Franklin Deventer as he went with Mr. Schmidt into the smoking room, where there was already quite a crowd of anxious-looking men discussing the ominous news.

"That is just what I think about it," said Mr. Schmidt angrily. "Why, the thing is impossible—outside all reason. If one part of the message is true, the other can't be. If this thing left the wharf on Wednesday at three o'clock, and she is now a hundred miles astern of us, it seems that she's steamed about two thousand knots in, say, ninety hours.

"Well, if that message is right, he must have been moving through the water at, at least, thirty-six knots an hour, and, so far as I am concerned, I'll believe the darned thing possible when I see it."

"That's so!" exclaimed a grave looking United States Senator, who was in the gamble for ten thousand dollars.

"Just what I think," added a well known Wall Street plunger, who stood to win over a hundred thousand if the news was false, or to lose nearly half a million if it was true. "I reckon that is about the size of it. Why, the fastest destroyer afloat couldn't do it on a river."

All the same the plunger looked over his book with somewhat anxious eyes, and his fingers trembled a little as he turned the pages.

"What does the Skipper say about it?" exclaimed Franklin Deventer, Jr., who had also plunged very considerably against the apparent impossibility; "and are they whooping her up all she is worth? She don't seem to me to be shivering quite as much as she was yesterday. Oh, here he is. Well, Captain, what sort of a rag are the Marconi people working off on us?"

There was an instant hush in the chorus of half angry, half incredulous exclamations as Captain Adler entered the smoking room.

He was looking very grave.

The smoking room crowd at once shaped itself in a semi-circle round him to listen to the words of fate which were about to fall from his lips:

"Gentlemen," he began slowly and even a little huskily, "I regret very much to be obliged to say that I see no reason for disbelieving the message from Land's End."

He was interrupted by a loud and prolonged "phew" of amazement from the crowd, followed by several much more definite expressions of anger and disgust which may well be left to the imagination of the reader.

"Yes," gentlemen," Captain Adler continued, "I can well understand your feelings, and I know that you can sympathize with mine. Immediately after receiving the message I asked for confirmation. I have just had an answer confirming the message, and further informing me that the station has been in communication with the *Express* for nearly an hour.

"It deeply grieves me, gentlemen, I can assure you, but still, it seems plain that this extraordinary craft must have travelled from New York at a speed of nearly forty knots an hour, which is more than one and a half to our one, and at that rate—unless something happens to her—I'm afraid it is only too certain that she will keep her appointment with us off the Lizard."

The Captain's little speech was followed by a silence of blank dismay. In the saloon alone something like two million dollars had been laid against the *Express* even getting in first, and quite another million against her catching the *Deutschland* at the Lizard; and the second cabin would be heavily hit in proportion.

But there were infinitely greater interests than the individual bets at stake. A hundred hour passage from Sandy Hook to the Lizard meant the loss of tens of millions of capital on both sides of the Atlantic, and that, to many a man on board the *Deutschland*, meant absolute ruin.

Meanwhile, the unbeaten Greyhound was doing her best, and doing it gallantly. The saloon had already paid over thirty thousand dollars to the engine-room, and now another message was sent down, raising it to fifty thousand if the *Deutschland* passed the Lizard first, and a hundred thousand if she won the race at the Needles.

She was still a hundred miles westward of the Land's End, and now, for the first time, she met the heavy cross roll coming northward from the Bay of Biscay. The great ship hardly felt it, and no one on board even noticed it, so intense was the excitement which possessed every one from the saloon deck to

the steerage ; and in an hour she had swirled through it and entered the smooth waters of the Channel.

Land's End was still some miles distant when the Marconi receiver began to buzz again ; and then the instrument clicked out the ominous message :

" *Express* reports she can see your smoke ; you will probably sight her in half an hour."

It seemed incredible, and yet there was now no real reason to doubt that the Blue Riband of the Atlantic Ferry was within measurable distance of being lost. Still, a stern chase is a long chase, and only two hours and a half of steaming lay between the *Deutschland* and the Lizard lighthouses.

Every man who could get his work in at the furnace was slaving away as though his life depended on it.

A few minutes after she had settled down into the smooth water of the Channel, the Chief Engineer came up to announce that she had reached the twenty-fifth knot.

More by way of relieving their feelings than anything else, several of the passengers raised a cheer at this, but it had hardly died away when Young Franklin Deventer, who was up in the mizzen shrouds with a powerful binocular telescope, screamed out in a voice shrill with passion :

" There she comes, damn and sink her ! "

Something like a groan rose from the deck.

Women turned white, and some found relief in tears. Others began to laugh hysterically.

Men went pale and looked at each other with fiercely questioning eyes. Some shouted out wild oaths which they would never have dreamed of uttering in the presence of women ; others turned away alone and cursed everything that floated on the waters in softly-

spoken anathemas; and some of the hardest sportsmen walked off stolidly to the smoking room and ordered drinks.

Then there was a general rush aft, and every point of 'vantage was crowded with men and women, and bristling with telescopes and field glasses.

Yes—it was only too true. Far away astern, a tiny white speck gleamed out every now and then in the brilliant sunshine, rising and falling on the cross-channel swell.

If it had been a steamer they would, of course, have seen its smoke long ago; but now at the most it was only twenty miles away. Still it was over seventy-five miles to the Lizard yet, and a vessel travelling nearly thirty miles an hour through the water takes a lot of overhauling in such a distance; so there was hope still.

But the next twenty minutes showed that the *Express* must be travelling at a tremendous speed, for at the end of that time she was plainly visible to the naked eye. In half an hour they could see her masts and the sun-gleams on the windows of her deck cabins. Then her beautiful, white-gleaming hull came distinctly into view.

Five and twenty miles ahead the twin lighthouses of the Lizard twinkled white in the sun, high above the blue, lake-like water. It was almost a matter of minutes now, and every minute told against the throbbing, panting giant that was making her last struggle for the supremacy of the sea.

Higher and higher the Lizard lighthouses rose ahead, and plainer and bigger the white shape showed astern.

There was no talking on board the *Deutschland* now. It was all agonized suspense, hard thinking, and, if possible, harder work.

Within fifteen miles of the first goal the *Express* has crept up to the *Deutschland's* starboard quarter, and was now scarcely three miles astern.

The exquisite beauty of her shape and the marvellous smoothness of her motion extorted admiration ever from those to whom her almost miraculous performance spelt something like ruin.

Yard by yard she crept up, sweeping smoothly and swiftly through the water, carying no "bone in her teeth," as sailors call the foam under a ship's bows, but dividing the calm waters almost without a ripple, as a razor's edge might have done.

Only two huge, glassy swathes of water rolled away from either side of her forward, and astern there swirled three long lines of curling eddies, but never a bubble of foam.

"*Ach, Gott!*" whispered the Captain to a few of the more distinguished passengers whom he had allowed on the bridge, "it is a miracle, but it is true. Gentlemen, we are beaten. The *Deutschland* is no longer queen of the sea. That infernal, beautiful craft is travelling forty knots if she is doing a yard.

"See, there is not a single person to be seen on deck. What does that mean? It means that a wind of fifty miles is sweeping over her, and that no human being could stand against it."

No one answered him. Every mind was strung too tense for words. The men on the bridge watched, as all the other passengers did, with frowning eyes and tight shut lips.

The Lizard was very near now, only two or three

miles away, a distance that the *Deutschland* would devour in a few minutes; but they were enough to decide the fate of the great ocean race.

The *Express* suddenly jumped ahead at a quite incredible speed. Her forward-sloping prow and short bowsprit came in line with the German liner's stern. Only five hundred yards away now, it crept up and up, yard by yard, along her huge, black painted side.

From stern to midships— from midships to the bridge—and from the bridge to the high, straight stem which was flinging up the water in a vast curling, foaming wreath of spray on either side. It crept on and on, remorseless as Fate—until, within half a mile of the Lizard, a throng of watchers on the headland saw the white prow forge ahead of the black one.

Then a quarter, then a half, and then the whole of the white shape came in front. A gun boomed from the shore, and at the same instant three flags broke out from the staff and Mast-heads of the *Express*.

The Stars and Stripes at the flagstaff, the Red Ensign at the fore, and at the main a great yellow golden flag, emblazoned in the centre with the Stars and Stripes and Union Jack corner to corner, with a crimson £ and \$ sign between them.

So great was her speed that the flags stood out straight and stiff as boards. The German ensign was flying from the *Deutschland's* flagstaff, and Captain Adler, bitterly chagrined as he was at such an amazing defeat, still did not forget his sea manners, and ordered it to be dipped in acknowledgment of the *Express's* victory.

The *Express* immediately dipped the Stars and Stripes three times in answer, and slowed down till

she and the *Deutschland* were travelling at exactly the same speed.

Then the officers appeared on the bridge and saluted as the White Queen of the Atlantic swerved quickly up to within a hundred yards. A moment afterwards the saloon doors opened and her passengers came out on to the broad deck.

Captain Adler and his officers returned the salute with true German precision and politeness. They were beaten, but for all that the *Deutschland* had even excelled herself, and that was something.

As soon as the two racers came within speaking distance, Marvin went up on to the bridge of the *Express*, raised his cap, and shouted across the fifty yards of swirling water which ran like a mill race between the two ships:

"Good morning, Captain Adler! You see we're just on time. I congratulate you on a magnificent passage!"

"And I congratulate you, sir, on an absolutely miraculous one!" Captain Adler shouted back, all his other feelings overcome for the moment by an honestly sailor-like admiration for his beautiful rival and the marvellous feat she had just accomplished.

He was a gentleman and a sportsman, and he knew how to take a handsome beating handsomely.

There were many other gentlemen and good sportsmen on board the *Deutschland*, and now that the terrible suspense was over, and the great issue decided, they forgot all about the lost dollars and the imperilled interests, and waved their hats and cheered and flung catch cries and greetings across the water in answer to their friends and fellow countrymen on board the *Express*.

Then Captain Adler bethought him of something which had better be said now than afterwards, and as the *Express* edged nearer and nearer to the *Deutschland* he put his hands to his mouth and shouted:

"Mr. Marvin!"

"Hallo!"

"In the name of my company I want to thank you for not crossing my bows, as you could have done."

"Never thought of it, Captain. This ship is run by gentlemen, just as yours is!"

The two greetings were hailed with cheers and wavings of handkerchiefs from both decks, and the only men and women who did not join it were Franklin Deventer, his wife, daughter, and son, and Mr. Schmidt.

The men were all a little too hard hit for cheering just then, and the women were not the sort who take defeat in a hard fight as something only a little less than victory. Mrs. Deventer and Miss Eirene kept the rancour of it in their hearts and used it afterwards with what might have been world-shaking effect.

Now that the contest was practically decided, bar a break down on either side, the *Express* moderated her pace to that of the *Deutschland*, and the two splendid craft swept up the Channel side by side at about thirty statute miles an hour.

But as the two racers passed Durlleston Head, twenty miles from the Needles, Marvin mounted the bridge again, accompanied by his wife, and took off his cap to the Captain of the *Deutschland*.

Captain Adler returned the salute, and Marvin shouted:

"Well, so long, Captain and ladies and gentlemen ;

we will have to be getting along now. See you in Southampton."

There was more cheering and fluttering of handkerchiefs, and then every one on board the *Express* disappeared under cover.

A mellow blast sounded from her whistle, answered by an angry snort from the *Deutschland's* steam horn, and then the white flier began to creep ahead again.

Minute by minute she gained speed, until the astounded spectators saw a clear length of swirling water between the two hulls. In half an hour she was almost out of sight, and in forty minutes she was flying up the Solent.

Then happened the most marvellous of all miracles of that day of wonders.

As the *Express* moved slowly up towards Ocean Quay a mighty shout went up from the thousands of spectators who had thronged down to the shores to see the end of the great race. Thousands of arms were pointed towards the western sky. Tens of thousands of eyes from shore, docks, and city looked up at the same moment.

Something, glittering brilliantly in the sunlight, was dropping down, apparently from the midmost heaven. A few minutes more and the wondering eyes saw a winged shape swoop down in a magnificent slanting curve, make the complete circuit of the ancient City of the Waters, and drop as lightly as a bird on the vacant ground behind the sheds of Ocean Quay.

Instantly there was a rush of every one to the dock gates to see the new miracle; but before they could approach, the air-ship rose again to a height of about thirty feet. The Stars and Stripes ran up the flag-staff head, dipped three times in greeting to the White

Ensign on the guard-ship, and then came down to be replaced by the golden banner of the Lords of Sea and Air.

The crowd took the hint, and, with the help of the dock police, remained at a respectful distance while the *Anonyma* sank back to earth just as the *Express* came to her moorings alongside the quay.

The door in her side opened, the gangway ladder dropped, and Paul Kingston jumped down it and walked quickly towards the *Express'* berth. A gangway was thrown out for him, and he ran on board, and the next minute he had his arms around his mother's neck.

"Somehow I thought you would come, Paul!" she said when the embracing was over.

"Well," he said as he gripped Marvin's hand, "you didn't think I was going to let the other fellow do all the running?"

"Ah, there they are!" exclaimed his mother.

Then he looked round and saw the Duke and Lady Margaret walking quickly down the quay.

CHAPTER XII

"AND how many more miracles are we to see to-day?" asked the Duke when the first greetings were over and the five were sitting in Marvin's private saloon. "Really, my dear Marvin, I must say that you and Mr. Kingston here are just a little too generous with your wonders. Surely a rush across the Atlantic in ninety-six hours, which, by the way, all England is talking about already, should be enough for ordinary mortals to go on with—and now, just as you have completed your triumph, Mr. Kingston drops from the skies like the old Greek god in the machine and utterly eclipses even your splendid performance. Seriously, you know, we steady-going Britishers can't stand too much of that sort of thing all at once."

"I guess you will get accustomed to it in time, Duke," laughed Marvin, "but anyhow, you see I didn't plan this other little surprise. Master Paul has done this on his own account, for some reason or other."

"And may I ask, Mr. Kingston," added Lady Margaret with a bewildering smile, "how long you have been crossing the Atlantic in that other miracle of yours?"

Paul did his best to return her glance steadily, succeeded for a moment, and then his eyes dropped and he replied, blushing and stammering like an embarrassed school-boy:

"I—well—we didn't make a very fast passage for the *Anonyma*——"

"For the what, Mr. Kingston?" interrupted Lady Margaret, with just a little deepening of the colour in her cheeks. "Surely you don't mean to say that that wonderful air ship of yours that has just flown across the Atlantic hasn't even got a name?"

"No—she hasn't got any proper permanent name yet," said Mrs. Marvin, coming to his rescue, for the Conqueror of the Air was looking very much as if he would like to get outside the cabin and take refuge in the clouds; "we've not been able yet to decide what she is to be called. To tell you the truth, quite among ourselves, we have a little fleet of these aërial cruisers.

"The first one that Paul built I was name-mother to, and she is called the *Shiela*. There are two others, the same size, which we have called the *Britannia* and the *Columbia*, and this one, the flag-ship of the squadron, is about twice the size and far more swift and splendid than the others; but we couldn't hit on quite a satisfactory name for her, and so Paul just called her the *Anonyma* provisionally. Perhaps he will find a better name for her some day."

"But, say, Paul," put in Marvin, "you haven't answered her ladyship's question yet. When did you leave the other side, and what sort of time did you make?"

"Let me see," answered Paul, taking out his watch; "it's half-past ten now. I left the Catskills twenty-one hours ago, say half-past seven yesterday morning, English time, or twenty-five minutes past two New York time."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Duke. "Why, you

landed here more than half an hour ago—and you really mean to say that you have travelled, say, roughly, three thousand miles in twenty hours! That is about a hundred and fifty miles an hour. You will pardon my saying so, but really it seems quite incredible.”

“Yes, I suppose it does to you, Sir,” replied Paul, quite at his ease now that he was talking to a man on the subject that was dearest of all to him save one.

“You see, aërial navigation is quite different from sea navigation. At sea the faster you go the more resistance you get. In the air it’s the other way about. The higher your speed, the less power you have to use for support, and the more you have to give for driving.

“But I’m really quite serious as to the passage. Our average speed was a hundred and fifty miles an hour; still, that wasn’t our best, for the *Anonyma* can do two hundred easily if we are in a hurry.”

“Two hundred miles an hour!” said Lady Margaret, with something like a gasp. “Oh!—and did you make her, Mr. Kingston?”

“Well no, not exactly,” he replied, flushing again. “You see, Lady Margaret, my father was an engineer, before me, and he had almost solved the problem just when he died. I just finished his work, and was lucky enough to get at the correct solution. Then I found what my father didn’t find—a millionaire who believed in me. If it hadn’t been for Mr. Marvin, neither the *Express* nor the *Anonyma* would have existed, except, perhaps, on paper.”

“Ah, said the Duke, turning quickly to Marvin, “and so now the murder is out; This is why transportation stocks have gone down with such a rush

Naturally, a man who practically held the command of the sea and the air, and had a few loose millions to play with, could do what he liked with the ordinary means of communication."

"Well, Sir, that is about the size of it," replied Marvin. "Only it isn't quite big enough. I will tell you the rest later on. Just now I think it wouldn't be a bad thing if we started out for a little trip through the clouds. It will be rather a new experience for Lady Margaret and yourself."

"A journey through the air!" exclaimed Lady Margaret, clapping her hands in sheer girlish delight. "Wouldn't that be altogether too glorious! Dad, we will go, won't we? Oh, we must!"

"Certainly, my dear Madge, if you wish it, and if Mr. Kingston is kind enough to bestow such a very great privilege on us," replied the Duke rather gravely, "though I am almost afraid to think what some of my noble and reverend colleagues in the House would say to my beginning aërial navigation at my time of life."

"That is all right, sir," said Paul; "you will be even safer on the *Anonyma* than you would be on the *Express* special to London, for we don't get off the track, and we don't have collisions; so if you are agreeable, what I propose is this—Ah, there's the *Deutschland's* whistle!"

"Mr. Marvin, I believe you promised the Deventers a trip to London in your special; now, suppose instead of that the *Express's* passengers go up to Town in the train, and, as Lady Margaret and his Grace know the Deventers already, let us invite them on board the *Anonyma*, take a trip round the Isle of Wight, and then run them up to London in half an hour?"

They've got to know all about the air-ship some time, and they may as well learn now."

"Oh, that would be quite too delightful Dad," exclaimed Lady Margaret. "Do let us go."

"Your Ladyship has spoken," laughed the Duke, "and therefore we will go."

"Very well," said Marvin; "that's settled. Now, if you will excuse me, I will see the people off by the train, and meanwhile Paul will take you round to the *Anonyma* and show you over her, and I will send a launch down for the Deventers. Their baggage can go on by rail."

They found the *Anonyma* hovering about thirty feet from the ground to avoid the pressing attentions of two or three thousand people who had got somehow into the docks.

Her commander, Harry Vinton, a young English engineer who had been associated with Paul in some of his mining ventures in Colorado, saluted from the conning-tower as they approached, and the air-ship sank slowly to ground.

As she did so a dozen newspaper correspondents slipped through the ring of police who were keeping the crowd in some sort of order, and Mr. Vincent, the *Times*' special correspondent, asked for a few words for himself and his colleagues on the new wonder that had just been revealed to the world.

"Well, gentlemen," replied Paul, "I'm afraid I haven't time for much talk just now; but you are quite welcome to come on board and have a little run round before we start for London. That will help you to form your own impressions of the craft, and if you like to meet me at the Carlton this afternoon, say four o'clock, I shall be glad to give you any par-

ticalars you want, as long as you don't ask me how I drive the ship. It will be no use asking that, for I shan't answer it truthfully, and I don't want to tell you any lies."

The delighted pressmen followed Paul up the companion ladder and into the lower cabin under the envious gaze of thousands of eyes. Then the ladder was drawn up, the door swung to, the hum of the discs deepened, the fans whirled and whistled, and the great air-ship rose slowly to a height of a couple of hundred feet.

Then the propellers began to revolve, and the golden flag was run up to the top of the signal mast. She swung round to the southward, the whirling propellers became two interlacing circles of light, and, with one tremendous leap up into the blue distance, she passed out of sight behind the hills of the Isle of Wight.

A quarter of an hour later she rose again over Spithead, sped across the Solent and Southampton Water, and dropped to earth again on exactly the spot she had started from.

The door opened, the ladder was thrown out, and the guests came out, looking very solemn and important, and, as some of the spectators said afterwards, also just a trifle scared.

By this time the launch which Marvin had sent down to the *Deutschland* had returned, and he was already standing with the Deventers near the sheds when the *Anonyma* came down.

They had, of course, seen the marvellous flight round the island and back, and when they realized the fact that they were actually invited guests for a trip to London in the first air-ship that had been seen in

British skies, they accepted the priceless invitation with very mixed feelings.

Both Franklin Deventer and his son knew perfectly well that a million dollars apiece would not have bought them the privilege, and they knew equally well by this time that Gillette Marvin had no particular reason for inviting them out of pure friendship.

It was perfectly plain to them now, as it was to Mr. Schmidt and other passengers on board the *Deutschland*, that Marvin had engineered the slump in transportation stocks after making several millions out of the unnatural rise which had preceded it.

The brilliant triumph of the *Express* made that certain beyond question, but the voyage of the airship from America to England in twenty hours was simply a stunning blow, and both father and son were keen enough to see how tremendous was the power that these two almost miraculous achievements placed in the hands of those who controlled them.

It was impossible for them to refuse the invitation—for one thing, Mrs. Deventer and Miss Eirene would never have permitted it—but all the same they accepted it with the distinctly uncomfortable sensation of defeat and humiliation.

To a certain extent Mrs. Deventer and her daughter shared the same feelings, but in their minds these sensations were entirely dwarfed by the splendour of their triumph over all the other lady passengers of the *Deutschland* and the *Express*. It was all very well to cross the ocean on record-breakers and complete the journey in special saloon trains; but to finish the journey through the air was a very different matter.

The fame of such a trip would encircle them as a halo during the whole of the coming season, and the

fact that they had made the extraordinary journey in company with the Duke of Romney and his daughter would scarcely detract from the glory of the achievement.

The gentlemen of the press had already made their thankful and wondering adieux to Paul, and had also accepted Marvin's invitation to use a compartment in the *Express* special back to Town. As soon as the party were on board, Paul said to his mother:

"Well, now, mam, you're mistress of the ship, and I'm going back with you to London. There isn't room for all of us in the conning tower; but you can really see just as well from the upper cabin, so I'm going to take two of the ladies with me and leave you to entertain the rest of the company. I'll leave it to the ladies to say who are coming in."

A swift glance passed between Eirene Deventer and her mother, not altogether unnoticed by Mrs. Marvin.

"I must confess that I am just a little nervous," said Mrs. Deventer. "You see it is a very novel experience for us, my dear Mrs. Marvin, but I can see that Eirene is just dying to go. May she?"

"Why certainly," was the reply; "and, if I can read faces at all, I think Lady Margaret would like to make the third."

"I should just think I would!" laughed Lady Margaret, with a very direct glance at the almost perfect face and big, blue, melting eyes of the girl whom she was most incomprehensibly beginning to dislike as far as it was in her thoroughly healthy, sweet nature to dislike any one. "I want to see how this wonderful thing is worked. Don't you, Miss Deventer? Just fancy such a miracle! Here we are in the middle of

Southampton Docks, and we are going to fly—actually fly—through the air to London!”

“Why, yes,” said Miss Eirene, rather coldly, as Lady Margaret thought, “it’s just so wonderful that I have hardly thoughts enough to think about it properly.”

“And therefore,” laughed Paul, moving towards the door of the conning-tower, “in order to produce the full dramatic effect we’ll make a start before you have time to get accustomed to what will be commonplace to you in less than an hour. This way, please. Captain Vinton, will you be good enough to see that the motors and fuel supply are all right. We’re going to make this trip at full speed.”

He followed them into the conning-tower, and, after showing them the switches, the steering machine and the lever which controlled the air-planes, he told them very briefly about the lifting and driving part of the ship, and ended by saying:

“I am afraid that is about all you will be able to see of the works. The rest, if you will excuse my saying so, is a secret, and I am not at liberty to answer any questions regarding them — and now we will get away.”

He turned the lower switch and the discs began to hum. Then he touched the upper one, and the fans commenced to whistle and then to scream.

His guests saw the docks and Southampton Water sink away below them, although they were conscious of no movement. Then Paul turned the centre switch half over.

“Hold tight,” he cried; “we’re off!”

They both gripped the silver rail running round

the walls of the conning-tower. Still there was no perceptible jar.

Then the forward propeller began to whirl into a circle of light, and they felt a swift backward motion. They gave a simultaneous gasp, looked down towards the earth, and exclaimed in one breath:

"Oh, where is Southampton?"

"Five miles behind us!" laughed Paul. "You will be in Hyde Park in less than an hour."

CHAPTER XIII

THE next half hour or so the guests on board the *Anonyma* were all eyes. Their wonder at their strange surroundings left them no time for speech, and even if their thoughts had been translatable into words, they could hardly have made themselves heard through the deep roar of the air and the shrill whistle of the propellers.

They could see nothing of the earth immediately below and around them save a confused blur; for towns and villages, woodlands and meadows, all seemed to rush together into an indistinguishable mass.

Lady Margaret afterwards compared the landscape to an oil painting which had been rubbed from end to end with a cloth before it was dry, and she was about right.

Far away to right and left of them, however, they could make out hills and woods and towns which seemed to be circling round the ship in the maddest of dances.

Twenty minutes after the start Paul pointed ahead and nodded to his two companions. They looked ahead and saw a vast gray-brown patch, with a bright thread running through it, lying in front and below.

"London already?" cried Lady Margaret.

Paul put his hand on the centre switch and turned it back three quarters of a half circle.

Instantly the roar outside died away as the speed of the propellers slackened. He turned the upper switch to forty-five degrees and the fans began to sing.

"Yes," he said, taking out his watch, "that's London. We've travelled eighty miles in twenty-five minutes; but, of course, we haven't been going at full speed all the time. Now, as we have plenty of time to spare, and as I, at any rate, haven't seen London since I was a boy, suppose we take a trip round the little village, as you Londoners call it, and then I will drop you in Hyde Park."

Details of the amazing occurrences at Southampton had already been telegraphed to all the London clubs and newspaper offices. The papers had rushed out special editions containing further particulars of the great Atlantic race, and the astounding occurrence that had put the climax on that marvellous performance. As the *Anonyma* passed Croydon, the news had been flashed to London, and when she appeared over the crest of Greenwich Hill the steamers in the rivers began to hoot and the signal was taken up by the other ships in the docks of the Isle of Dogs, and from there it went booming and roaring up the river to London Bridge.

Every one knew as though by instinct what it meant, and millions of eyes were turned eastward and northward in the hope of catching a glimpse of the shining ship of the skies.

The *Anonyma* crossed the Isle of Dogs at an elevation of a thousand feet, so that it was quite easy to follow the passage without the help of glasses, although hundreds of telescopes were already pointed towards her.

From the Isle of Dogs she ran northward, hovered for a few minutes over the roof of the Alexandra Palace, then doubled southward and westward to Hampstead, made the circuit of the Heath, and then started in a straight line for Richmond Hill, across Hammersmith and Chiswick.

"Say, mother," said Paul, pushing open the door of the conning-tower, "what is the matter with coming down in Richmond Park and having a bit of lunch at the old Star and Garter Dad used to talk about?"

"A very good idea, Paul," she replied. "What do you think Gillette?" she added to her husband.

"There is nothing the matter with a proposition like that," said Marvin, "always supposing that our guests agree. Mrs. Deventer, what do you say?"

"Well, Mr. Marvin," replied that lady, with an unwonted touch of humility in her voice, "you have given us such a wonderful and magnificent experience, and got us so deep into your debt, that I think we can't do better than to leave ourselves in your hands entirely. For my part, I should think lunch on the terrace would be just too lovely a day like this; that is, if the people don't crowd up too much. You know if we came to lunch like this in America, they would just mob us, and we wouldn't have room to use a knife and fork."

"Oh, they won't do that here," said her husband. "I must say that the English have a bit better manners in that way than our people."

"Then lunch it is," rejoined Marvin. "The proposition has passed, Paul, and you can drop her in the park just near the hotel."

By this time they were within three miles of the

Park gates. Paul slowed down to twenty-five miles and started the fans at half-speed.

Hammersmith, Putney, Barnes, Chiswick, and Mortlake were already pouring forth endless streams of bicycles, tricycles, motors, carriages, and brakes toward Richmond; and Richmond itself, when it saw to its huge delight that the air-ship was slowing down with the apparent intention of stopping, simply turned out of doors to a man and a woman and swarmed up the hill towards the Park gates.

Shops and banks and offices were closed *pro. tem.*, or left in charge of a few unfortunate clerks whose detention exasperated them almost to mutiny.

It was no use trying to sell anything when there was no one to buy. Even the great spring sales at the drapery and millinery establishments failed to attract a single bargain-hunter during that hour of intense wonder and excitement.

The *Anonyma* skirted the slope of the hill, swung round past the terrace, and turned into the park about a hundred feet over the tree tops, and came to a standstill some fifty feet above the ground and a couple of hundred yards inside the gates.

Fortunately the chief constable of Richmond had risen very promptly to the occasion, and a considerable force of mounted and foot police was already on hand for the protection of the visitors from the skies against undue molestation.

He himself rode into the park with half a dozen men, and as he got under the air-ship one of the side doors opened and Marvin said in a most matter of fact tone:

"Good morning, sir. We want to come down and have lunch at the hotel, but we can't do it if the crowd

is not kept off. If you can keep the people from coming within fifty yards of the ship we will alight; if not, we'll have to be off again."

"That will be all right, sir," replied the constable, touching his cap in answer to Marvin's salute. "We'll see to it. I suppose this is the air-ship that has come across from New York?"

"Yes," assented Marvin; "but just now we are only from Southampton."

The police at once made a wide circle round the air-ship as she sank to the ground, and as the wondering crowd poured in through the gates, all were given to understand that if any one went near she would simply rise again and disappear, and thus Richmond would lose the honour of entertaining the conquerors of the air.

The people saw the logic of this at once and so the police had very little difficulty in keeping the charmed circle round the air-ship. A few moments later, amidst a roar of cheers, the Stars and Stripes and the Union Jack went up to the top of the flag staff and the *Anonyma* sank gently down to the turf.

The crowd had expected her to be manned only by men, hard featured engineers and possibly sailors, and so their amazement became, if possible, even greater when they saw the four beautifully dressed women come down the companion ladder with as little concern as though they were landing from an ordinary yacht.

Again the cheering broke out as the crowd parted of its own accord and made a broad lane to the gate through which the ladies from the sky walked to the hotel.

Never had there been such a lunch at the Star and

Garter. Marvin and Paul, with their royally American hospitality, had up the manager and bought the hotel for the rest of the day.

It was thrown open to everybody who had a decently respectable appearance on the condition that the terrace was reserved for the American party; and the payment for that and the lunch was a cheque for a thousand pounds on the Bank of England, signed Gillette P. Marvin, for the Kingston-Marvin Atlantic Express Company.

After lunch they boarded the *Anonyma* again, and she rose from the ground, borne up as it were on a mighty wave of cheering, made a graceful sweep round, dipping her flags in answer to the shouts, and then she sprang forward and upward, darted like a flash of light through the sunlit air, and vanished to the north-eastward.

In ten minutes she was circling over Hyde Park and came to rest just behind the Achilles statue.

Before the crowd had time to gather, her passengers had landed. Captain Vinton assumed command, after taking his instructions from Paul, the discs began to hum and the fans to scream, and she sped away back to Southampton to wait for her next trip in the fenced-in area which the South-Western Company were already preparing for her reception.

Her passengers walked to the gates, and the Deventers took cabs to the Carlton, where they had engaged rooms while their house in Grosvenor Place was being made ready for them.

Mr. and Mrs. Marvin and Paul walked across the park with the Duke and Lady Margaret to Romney House, and soon afterwards a somewhat important conversation took place in the duke's study. When

it was over, his Grace was the most astounded man in London.

After some considerable discussion, Paul and his partner had decided to take him entirely into their confidence, and also into their partnership. Paul's personal feelings had, of course, a good deal to do with this decision, but at the same time he had not had much difficulty in convincing Marvin that it would also be a stroke of sound practical policy.

The Duke's name, and his vast social and political influence, would give them a certain amount of advantage which no amount of money could buy, and his intimate knowledge and wide experience of the highest and most intricate development of English social life would also be of priceless advantage to them.

Wherefore His Grace of Romney, having bound himself to absolute secrecy even as regarded Lady Margaret herself, for this was a point which Paul insisted upon most urgently, came forth from his study joint master of illimitable millions, and drove off in his barouche with his two partners, to take part in the most momentous press interview that had ever been held since newspapers were first printed.

CHAPTER XIV

THE pressmen were received in Marvin's private sitting-room, a large apartment on the first floor overlooking Cockspur Street. A table, covered with a deep red cloth, stood at the top of the room. The Duke sat behind it and Marvin and Paul at each end. Half a dozen bottles of the best champagne in the hotel stood on the sideboard in charge of a waiter, and two rows of ten chairs each were standing in a semi-circle in front of the table. Promptly at four o'clock a footman opened the door and the gentlemen of the press came in.

The first thing, of course, was a glass of wine drunk to the health of the man who had made possible the miracle which the eager correspondents were about to describe to the world. Then, when Paul had made a modest little reply, they took their seats, and notebooks and pencils came out. Somewhat to their surprise, however, the Duke rose and opened the interview more after the fashion of a formal board meeting. They were a good deal more surprised when he sat down:

"Gentlemen," His Grace began in the low, clear, far-reaching tones which were so well-known in the Upper House, as well as in all the big political centres of the kingdom. "I daresay you will be a little astonished at seeing me here this afternoon with my friends Mr. Marvin and Mr. Kingston. You will

naturally ask yourselves what I have to do with ocean racers, record-breakers, and aërial cruisers such as that marvellous vessel in which some of you, like myself, had the very great privilege of taking a trip this morning.

"Well, Gentlemen, you will perhaps be still more surprised when I tell you that up to a couple of hours ago I had no business connection whatever with either of the gentlemen sitting at this table. During that time, however, they have been good enough to admit me into partnership, and a share of their councils. That is a very commonplace announcement which will not interest you very much until you learn from my friend, Mr. Gillette Marvin, how vast are the operations with which I have identified myself, and how heavy are the responsibilities which I have undertaken to share with him and his partner. It is for this reason that we have thought it well to give our meeting with you somewhat of a formal character, and that is also the reason why, instead of giving isolated interviews, we have considered it our duty to our fellow countrymen in England, America, and the Colonies, and, in another sense, to Europe as well, to make this meeting as representative and as cosmopolitan as possible.

"Gentlemen, you came here at my friends' invitation to learn from Mr. Marvin the particulars of the maiden trip of that wonderful vessel *Express* number I, which has just accomplished the apparently impossible feat of crossing the Atlantic in ninety-six hours. That you will hear from him in due course, as you will hear also, from the lips of her inventor and creator, the story of the first cruiser of the air that has visited English shores, or, perhaps, I should rather

say English skies, from that modern wonderland the United States of America.

"But Gentlemen," the Duke went on with an added note of gravity in his voice, "you have been asked here to hear something more important than that."

At this his hearers, who, so far, had been listening with respectful attention, but without any signs of eager interest, suddenly pricked up their ears and their pencils and stylographs, began to run rapidly over the leaves of their note-books.

"The fact is," the Duke went on, "that we have asked you here with the partial object of making you our ambassadors to the Powers of the world."

If any one else but the Duke of Romney, a man who, in addition to bearing one of the noblest names and most ancient titles of the kingdom, was also one of his Sovereign's personal friends and most trusted councillors, had uttered such words as these the correspondents would perhaps have felt inclined to smile; but they knew that the Duke did not use weighty words without weighty reasons, and it was here that the first fruits of Gillette Marvin's wisdom in asking him to join Paul and himself were made manifest. There was no lack of interest now among the cosmopolitan company of pressmen who sat on the two semi-circles of chairs. They waited for what was coming next in such absolute silence that the scratching of the pencils and pens on the paper could be distinctly heard.

"And now, Gentlemen," said the Duke, "I have said so much that I must needs say more, although I shall not much longer stand between you and the men whom you have really come to listen to. What I have yet to say is this, and strange, perhaps, even incredible,

as it may seem to you at first hearing, I wish you to understand that I say it in all seriousness and with a full knowledge of all the circumstances.

"Within the last twelve months a new power has been born into the world. It is neither an empire nor a republic, neither an aristocracy nor a democracy. It has neither politics nor traditions; neither has it laws, nor countries, nor frontiers. It owes no allegiance to the constituted Powers of earth. I have said that it has neither country nor frontiers, and yet its possible dominions are as wide as the world, as deep as the sea, and as universal as the atmosphere.

"Those, I admit, are weighty words to say, and you will, I hope, believe me when I tell you that I do not speak them without very good reason. The plain truth is that these two men sitting here to the right and left of me have conquered the air and the sea—realms infinitely wider than those which any earthly monarch has yet reigned over—and behind the power which this conquest gives them there is another power, the nature of which I am not, at present, at liberty to reveal. All I can say about it that, of its kind, it is illimitable and practically irresistible.

"Now, Gentlemen, that is all I have to say at present, saving only to ask you, as representatives of the world's Press, to put quite plainly to the world the appalling consequences which must have befallen humanity if this tremendous power had been acquired by men who might have used it, as it most certainly could be used, for purposes hostile to the best interests of the human race. The imagination shudders at the conception of fleets of aërial cruisers and sea-going ships capable of their forty knots an hour controlled by men who would be willing to use them for the pur-

poses of terrorism and plunder. Armies and fleets and fortresses would alike be at their mercy, and if their powers were only equalled by their unscrupulousness, civilization itself might fall to pieces under the stress of a universal reign of terror.

"Therefore, Gentlemen, the pleasantest part of my duty this afternoon has yet to come—it is to ask you to congratulate the world upon the fact that this power has fallen into the hands of men who, as I have every reason to believe, are the friends and not the enemies of civilized Society; men who will use it, not as pirates and terrorists, but just as ordinary citizens of the world for the greatest good of the greatest number. That's all I have to say; and now I shall ask Mr. Paul Kingston to tell you something about these marvellous inventions of his which have practically placed him on the double throne of the realms of air and sea."

The pencils and pens had been scratching most industriously during the latter part of the Duke's speech, and as he sat down the correspondents looked at each other with eyes full of wonder, not unmixed with apprehension.

Those twenty men represented every newspaper and news agency of importance in the world, and they were well aware of their own power and responsibility; but the Duke's words had pointed very clearly to possibilities hitherto quite beyond their ken, as well as to facts which had never been described or hinted at in the columns of newspapers before.

When Paul got up a low hum of intense expectancy ran round the two semi-circles, but at his first word it was instantly hushed and the pencils began to scratch again. He had a little pile of drawings on cardboard

before him, and beside these several photographs which, as he modestly put it, he hoped would enable his hearers to follow more easily descriptions which must of necessity be more or less technical. He would hand them round first, and meanwhile he proposed to take a glass of wine with his guests and thank them for their kindness in drinking his health. Copies of all the drawings and photographs would be at the disposal of the correspondents during the course of the evening.

Then, when the wine had gone round again, and the note-books were once more out he began at the beginning and told his entranced hearers in very simple, and, therefore, in very graphic words the story of his father's attempted conquest of the sea and the air and his own successful accomplishment of the tremendous task. He described everything in most minute detail and with perfect frankness, until he came to the secret of the motive power and there he stopped, saying quite openly and with an almost boyish smile:—

"You see, Gentlemen, I can hardly give that away. After what I have told you any one can build an air-ship or a forty-knot cruiser, but they will have to come to me, or rather to the Kingston-Marvin Syndicate, of which His Grace the Duke of Romney has just been good enough to accept the chairmanship, to get the driving power. That is my father's legacy to me, and I wish to say quite frankly that I intend to keep it. Now, I think I have told you everything else. Some of you have had a trip on the air-ship, during which, I may tell you, you travelled for a few minutes at a speed of two hundred miles an hour, and anyone who wishes photographs or plans for purposes of illustration will be heartily welcome to them. I think

that is about all I have to say, and so I will ask my friend President Marvin to put before you a sketch of the practical results which we hope to obtain by the use of the inventions which I have been fortunate enough to make as perfect as the present limits of our mechanical knowledge will permit."

There was absolute silence in the room as he sat down. It was not a time for applause or any of the common-places of ordinary speech-making. The correspondents were far too busy thinking of the work in hand and of the tremendous effect which the plainly-spoken words they had listened to, and those others which they had yet to hear from the President, would produce upon the world the next day, to give any attention to mere personal considerations. A few of them sharpened their pencils or took out new ones as Gillette Marvin rose; and then they looked at him with glances of eager, silent questioning, knowing, as they did, after what they had heard, that it was from his lips that the words of fate would fall.

The moment he began to speak Paul recognised that it was not his friend and partner, not his mother's lover and husband, who was speaking, but the man who had compelled him to gamble his life on the success of his inventions—the man who, as he still believed, would have exacted the death-penalty if he had failed. The correspondents appeared to feel something of the same sort. They had never heard a man speak quite so much like a machine as he did. There was not the slightest trace or feeling of emotion in his tone as he spoke the words which, for all they knew, were pregnant with the fate of humanity.

"Gentlemen," he began, "after what you have heard from His Grace the Duke of Romney and from my

friend and partner Mr. Paul Kingston, all that is left for me to do is to tell you, and through you, the world, what we propose to do, that is to say what use we intend to make of those powers which the genius of Mr. Kingston's father and himself have placed in our hands.

"You are, of course, perfectly well aware that for the last two or three years a determined effort has been made by certain combinations of American and British capitalists to control the most important lines of communication by sea and land throughout the world. We have practically broken up that combination, and we did it because we came to the conclusion that these combinations were beginning to get more power into their hands than it was right for such persons to hold.

"I don't know whether the idea has ever presented itself to you in this form before; but we believe that, for all practical purposes, communication means civilisation. For instance, we have it in our power now to starve this country to death inside a month. Your politicians have made no provision against anything like an effective blockade of your ports. You have allowed your wheat-producing lands to go out of cultivation. You depend for the bread you eat on foreign supplies. We could stop those supplies in a week, and in a month a thousand pounds would not buy a decent-sized loaf of bread in the United Kingdom. I am not asking you to believe this now, because within a short time we propose to give a practical demonstration of our power to do what I say; and this demonstration will not be confined to the British Islands."

He paused for a moment and his hearers began to

look at each other as though they were wondering whether they were listening to the words of a maniac, or to the utterances of a man who, as he, to all intents and purposes had said, held the fate of civilized humanity in the hollow of his hand. Then they remembered the voyage of the *Express*, and the miracle of the air-ship, and looked down at their notebooks again.

"What we propose to do is just this," he went on, speaking with no more feeling in his voice than if he had been proposing an ordinary resolution at a board-meeting, "We are going to take charge of the world's communications. We shall offer a fair price to the steam-ship and railway companies, and also to the cable companies. We have already concluded an agreement with the Marconi Company which will enable us to send messages across the Atlantic, or round the world, for the matter of that, at the rate of a penny a word, therefore if the cable companies don't like purchase they can have competition. They will take the same choice as the Shipping Combine; but, as His Grace told you just now, we do not propose to use the facilities at our disposal for the ordinary purposes of commercial profit or financial tyranny.

"To be quite candid with you, we are too rich to worry about that. If we wanted the earth we could take it or buy it, but we don't want it. All we wish to do is to run it on more commonsense lines than it is at present. We propose, in short, to break the tyranny of money—the most heartless and soulless tyranny that ever enslaved humanity. We shall fight money with money, despotism with despotism, force with force, and we shall win."

Here the speaker made another pause. Some of

his hearers looked up in blank incredulity, others in dazed dismay, for never had such weighty words fallen from human lips before, and never had such a tremendous pronouncement been made in such passionless and utterly commonplace tones.

"You are, of course, as well aware as I am," he went on, picking up a piece of paper from the table, "that both in Europe and in the far East very serious international complications have arisen, complications which, in the ordinary course of affairs, would almost certainly lead to war, possibly to a general conflagration in comparison with which the Napoleonic wars would only seem an ordinary kind of bonfire. You may take it from me that that war will not happen. We shall not permit it to do so, and the way that we shall stop it is just this.

"The British Empire and America are solid for peace and they are going to have peace. If any other country attempts to break the peace of the world we shall just take their rulers, Kings or Queens or Emperors, as the case may be, together with an assortment of statesmen and political agitators, and plant them in some lonely spot where they will be free from all distractions of state-craft and have plenty of leisure to think the matter over quietly and come to a reasonable judgment. If they object—well—we may be compelled to take stronger measures, although we don't want to do so; but peace we will have, and at any price—saving only the price of surrender—a price which is too high to pay for any kind of peace. That, gentlemen, is all I have got to say at present. It is no concern of ours whether the readers of the papers that are represented here do or do not believe what has been said in this room. To those who do not

believe we shall be able to bring conviction by other means, and to those who do believe I shall ask you to convey the absolute assurance that, whatever measures we may find it necessary to take, they will be carried through by every means within our power in the interests of real Christianity and civilization, and those, gentlemen, are the interests of the man who can't help himself."

While this momentous conversation was taking place in Marvin's sitting-room another was taking place under the roof of the same hotel between Franklin Deventer and his sister, and this was the way it ended.

"In short, Eirene, to put it quite plainly between ourselves, it comes to this, I want Lady Margaret and the air-ship. You want the inventor and the air-ship, and our respected father wants air-ships and steamers, or whatever they are, with an option on Gillette Marvin's life and liberty. Well I don't see that under the circumstances our interests are so hostile and that we shouldn't be able to fix up a common plan of campaign and work together, at any rate, for the present."

"Certainly," said his sister, "we will have to work together and, what's more, we will have to work closely and carefully. It's a big thing to play for, and Gillette Marvin, mind, is a pretty bad man to play a game like this against, so we'll have to be ready to go to any lengths if necessary. You know, Franklin, if we do this we shall be playing for nothing less than the mastery of the world, and when you are gambling for stakes like that you've got to take big risks. But of course, you know that just as well as I do."

Franklin Deventer looked for a few moments in silence at the lovely face lying back on the cushion

at the other end of the long sofa. He had admired his beautiful sister with an honest brotherly devotion ever since they had been boy and girl together, but he did not admire her just now. Her expression was totally strange to him. She seemed to have become quite ten years older during the last few minutes; and her mouth somehow looked more like a man's than that of a girl of twenty. Her lower jaw had come forward, and through her slightly parted lips he could see the little white teeth set edge to edge. All the soft lights had gone out of her eyes, and the soul that was looking at him was that of a woman who had made up her mind as to what she wanted and was prepared to go any lengths to get it.

"Eriene," he said slowly after a pause, "I don't think I should give much for Gillette Marvin's life if you had the disposal of it just now."

"It wouldn't be worth five cents," she said with a snap of her teeth.

"I reckon that's so," he said, getting up and walking across to the other side of the room. "Well, I like your grit, and I'm there with you even to that extent."

CHAPTER XV

THERE was quite a delightful little dinner party that evening at an oval table, placed somewhat apart from the others, in the big dining room of the Carlton. Lady Margaret had voted for dinner in their own rooms, and both her father and Paul had agreed with her; but the Deventers, more especially Mrs. Deventer and Miss Eirene, were too full of the triumphs of the morning to forego the delight of shining in the reflected, if somewhat artificial light of the evening. They knew that the dining-room would be crowded—as it was—and that half the notoriety-hunters in London would be thronging to the great hotel to catch a glimpse of the creator of the famous air-ship and of those who possessed the distinction of having travelled in her from Southampton to London.

The evening papers had, of course, published special editions containing fairly full particulars of the momentous interview which had taken place during the afternoon. The Deventers had already learnt all the particulars of the press interview from their guests, and the conversation on the subject round the dinner-table had been perfectly frank. There was neither

need nor possibility for concealment and therefore the great project of cornering the world's communications was discussed, *pro. tem.*, with perfect candour.

Between the dinner and the dessert no small sensation was created in the crowded dining-room by the entrance of a Royal messenger accompanied by the Manager of the hotel, who had conducted him to the table at which Paul was sitting. The Duke smiled as he saw them approach and whispered:—

"From the King—Stand up."

Paul immediately did so, and the Messenger handed him a black-bordered envelope sealed with the Royal arms in black wax.

"Mr. Paul Kingston," said the Messenger with a note of interrogation in his voice:—

"This is Mr. Kingston," said the Duke.

"In His Majesty's name!" said the Messenger, presenting the letter, "I am commanded to await your verbal reply, and," he went on, turning to you, "I am also commanded, Your Grace, to request that you will present Mr. Kingston to His Majesty at Marlborough House to-morrow morning, at ten o'clock."

"His Majesty's commands shall be obeyed," replied the Duke.

Meanwhile Paul, still standing, opened the letter and read:—

"SIR,

"I am commanded by His Majesty the King to request your presence at Marlborough House to-morrow morning at ten o'clock in company with His Grace the

Duke of Romney for the purpose of a presentation with His Majesty. The presentation will be quite informal. I am further commanded to say that His Majesty is deeply interested in the extraordinary performances of the passenger ship *Express I.*, which arrived at Southampton from New York this morning and in the still more wonderful feat of the air-ship under your command which arrived from America about the same time. It will afford His Majesty much satisfaction to personally inspect these vessels at as early a date as may be suitable to your convenience.

"I have the honour to be your obedient servant,

"KNOLLYS."

Paul passed the letter to the Duke and said to the Messenger:—

"You will be good enough, sir, to present my respectful homage to His Majesty and also to express my deep appreciation of the honour he has done me. His commands shall be obeyed. The air-ship will be in St. James's Park at nine to-morrow, and I trust that His Majesty will still further honour me by allowing me to convey him in her to Southampton for his inspection of the *Express*."

"I have to thank you, Mr. Kingston, in his Majesty's name," replied the Messenger in his even official voice. I will convey your intimation to His Majesty at once. I trust that the nature of my mission will be of sufficient excuse for interrupting your dinner. Good evening! Your Grace. Good evening!"

Paul looked round in reply and the Royal Messenger, escorted by the Manager, moved towards the door followed by respectfully wondering glances, which, as soon as he disappeared, were concentrated with even greater wonder and admiration on the party at the oval table in the corner.

"Well, Mr. Kingston," said Mrs. Deventer, "that was quite a sort of surprise party wasn't it? You are already the most famous man in the world and now I suppose you will be the most envied as well."

"Why I should think so," said Miss Eirene looking at him with eyes whose very frank admiration was just a trifle embarrassing to him and, somehow, not at all pleasing to Lady Margaret.

"It is a very great honour," he said quietly, "and I hope that to-morrow we shall be able to give His Majesty a new experience. Do you think he will come for the trip, Your Grace," he went on, turning to the Duke."

"Come?" he replied with a laugh, "well, it sounds somewhat disrespectful, I'm afraid, but I'm perfectly certain that His Majesty will just jump at it. You know there isn't a better sportsman in the world than Edward the Seventh, and there certainly is not a man alive who would enjoy such an experience more than he would. It's the Bank of England to a bad penny that he will come; and I shouldn't be at all surprised if the Prince of Wales came with him."

"That is all right," said Paul. "Then I'll have a special down to Southampton to-night, and go through the *Anonyma* thoroughly, and meet you at nine in St. James's Park."

Of course all sorts of rumours had spread over London and through the provinces from the dining-room of the Carlton Hotel with reference to the visit of the Royal messenger, but the real facts did not leak out until the next morning when practically all the world was discussing the marvellous story which had been flashed over the wires to the uttermost ends of the earth within a few hours of the interview in Marvin's sitting-room. Shortly before eight o'clock the news was telegraphed in Southampton that the air-ship had risen from her berth and, after making a series of complicated evolutions in the air, apparently with the object of testing her efficiency, had started in the direction of London at an almost incredible speed which caused her to be lost sight of in a minute or two.

The keen-witted pressmen instantly put two and two together. The King had requested the presence of the air-ship in London. The King would personally inspect her and possibly take a trip in her—and so in the same hour special editions were rushed out and London's streets became vocal if not harmonious with yelling newsboys and brazen-throated newsmen, hurrying hither and thither with still wet placards which did great credit to the varying imaginations of rapid-thinking sub-editors.

Big Ben had just chimed the last quarter of nine when a shining shape flashed up, gleaming in the sun-light, out of the South-westward, swung round the Victoria Tower, passed over Parliament Street and Trafalgar Square, made the circle of Nelson's Column, swept over the houses of Pall Mall and came

to a stand-still fifty feet above the ground over the green sward of St. James's Park.

The Duke of Romney's carriage was waiting at the St. James's Palace entrance. A squad of cavalry was ready on the spot to keep the air-ship inviolate from the attentions of too curious sight-seers, and as they trotted into the Park the *Anonyma* came down close to the drive, and at the same moment the Duke's carriage drove up alongside her.

The presentation at Marlborough House was as informal as such a function could be, and did not occupy more than twenty minutes. His Majesty's first remark put Paul absolutely at his ease.

"My friend the Duke of Romney tells me," he said as he shook hands with the conqueror of an empire wider than his own, "that you are an Englishman as well as an American, Mr. Kingston, and that you are closely connected with one of our oldest families. I am delighted to hear it. We do not grudge America any of her splendid triumphs, but we English people are very glad that we are able to claim something like a half share in the greatest of them all. And now, before we go and see her, I want you to tell me something about this wonderful creation of yours."

Paul had been vaguely expecting the necessity of falling on one knee and kissing the royal hand and so forth, and so he was delightedly surprised when he found himself greeted just as a gentleman by the First Gentleman in the land; and the perfect frankness and cordiality of his reception, though, of course, absolutely honest and spontaneous on his Majesty's part, were afterwards referred to as one of the finest strokes

of policy that the Royal Diplomatist had ever achieved.

When Paul had finished his description of the *Anonyma* and the *Express* the King said:—

“Thank you very much, Mr. Kingston. Now I shall go aboard your wonderful craft with some sort of knowledge of her, and as you are good enough to offer me a trip through the air to Southampton to see your other record-breaker, I shall be very glad to accept. If the Duke will give me a lift in his brougham we will go at once. To be frank with you I am rather in a hurry to feel what this new sensation will be like.”

As the Duke's brougham drew up alongside the *Anonyma* the guard presented arms, the King alighted and looked with frank wonder and admiration at the graceful glittering shape of the air-ship. Before he went on board he walked round her attended by Paul and the Duke, and her creator pointed out and explained all the details of her exterior construction. Meanwhile the gangway door opened and the ladder dropped to the ground. Captain Vinton ran down the steps and stood bare-headed at the foot of them.

“I hope your Majesty will allow me to present the chief navigating officer of the air-ship, Captain Vinton, who brought her across the Atlantic,” said the Duke.

“With pleasure,” replied the King, smiling and holding out his hand, “Captain Vinton, I am glad to be able to congratulate you on the magnificent appearance of this aërial cruiser of yours and on her very amazing performance. And now I am going to trust myself to your care.”

Captain Vinton bowed his acknowledgments, and as the King mounted the companion-ladder the Royal Standard—a careful overnight-thought of the Duke's—broke out at the mast-head.

Nearly half an hour was spent in an inspection of the interior of the ship and then the Royal guest was taken to the conning-tower and Paul explained the use of the switches, the lever, and the steering wheel. Then for the first time in the world a crowned monarch rose into the realms of the air. Tens of thousands of people had already assembled in the Park and in the roadway leading past Buckingham Palace. A roar of cheers broke out as the flying of the Royal Standard told that His Majesty had gone on board, then, as the shining shape rose, apparently without effort, perpendicularly from the ground another roar went up.

"Would you have any objection, Mr. Kingston," said the King "to showing our good folk down there something of what this miraculous craft of yours can do? I'm sure they would like it very much."

"Anything your Majesty wishes," said Paul. "The vessel and all on board her are entirely at your disposal. We will show them a little manœuvring first."

He turned the upper switch and the propellers began to whirl. Then he pulled the lever over a few degrees and moved the pointer of the steering-wheel a couple of inches to the left. The earth began to spin round and sink again below them and the hundreds of thousands of eyes that were watching the air-ship saw it rise in a magnificent spiral curve, moving ever faster and faster till it looked almost like a ring of

light in the brilliant May sunshine. It soared up and up until it vanished in the blue distance and presently Paul said with a look at the barometer: —

"Your Majesty, we are now ten thousand feet above sea-level. Perhaps you would like to take a look around London on our way down."

"Ten thousand feet!" exclaimed the King, "bless my soul. Yes, so it is. Absolutely marvellous, my dear Duke, isn't it?" Yes, certainly, Mr. Kingston, anything you please, but how on earth—or in the air—have you managed to get so high in such a short time."

"We have been travelling over a hundred and fifty miles an hour, your Majesty, since we left the earth," replied Paul, "and we shall go back at about two hundred miles an hour."

"But with absolute safety," added the Duke, "we averaged that speed yesterday from Southampton."

"You must have done to have made the trip as you did."

Paul shut off the driving-power, started the lifting-fans at half speed, moved the lever back a couple of notches and the *Anonyma* rushed down with bewildering rapidity in a spiral course, but this time with very much extended curves. So wide were they, indeed, that the air-ship had twice made the circuit of London before her captain brought her once more to a standstill over the roof of Buckingham Palace.

"Magnificent, miraculous!" said the King as the roar of welcoming cheers reached them from the earth, "and now how long will it take us to get to Southampton and see the other miracle that you have accomplished?"

"Twenty minutes, your Majesty," replied Paul, taking out his watch with his left hand and with his right moving the steering wheel till the *Anonyma's* head pointed to the south-west. He turned the upper switch. The vast dark mass of London slipped away behind them, the wind whistled and shrieked past the super-structure, the shriek deepened into a roar, and the earth became a blurred smear beneath them. The King, seeing nothing and yet seeing much, sat down in an arm-chair which had been bought for him, and took out his watch. The momentous minutes passed, and when he had counted eighteen Paul, after a glance at the chart, turned the steering-wheel a couple of degrees to the right, switched off the driving-power and turned on the lifting-fans.

The air-ship made a swift swoop downward, rushed over Hurst Castle, crossed the Solent, swung over Osborne House, and, precisely as the long hand of the King's watch pointed to the twentieth minute, passed like a flash up the Southampton Water and came to a standstill fifty feet above Ocean Quay. Within another ten minutes Marvin was being presented to his Majesty at the gangway of the *Express*.

The new record-breaker immediately cast off her moorings and was slipping down the Water at about ten knots. It just happened that as she passed the Needles one of His Majesty's vessels, the *Falcon*, a craft of the new and larger destroyer type which had just been delivered by the Parsons' Company, was sauntering down the Solent on her way to do a three hours' steaming trial at her top speed of thirty-six knots an hour. The King had expressly requested

that the Royal Standard should not be hoisted, and he was, therefore, able to indulge in a quiet chuckle when the *Falcon* signalled."

"Will you race us to Plymouth and back."

The King nodded as he read the signal, and the *Express* replied—

"Yes," and give you half-an-hour."

The *Falcon* signalled back laconically—

"Thanks! Full speed from the Needles."

On a line due south between Hurst Castle and the Needles the *Falcon* blew her whistle and rushed away westward, losing herself under a dense cloud of smoke, at a speed of over forty statute miles an hour. For the next half hour the owners of the *Express* entertained their royal visitors at lunch. Then they went up into the navigation room and Kingston signalled for full speed ahead. The triple screws began to whirl at their utmost velocity, and the long white shape sprang forward like a living thing, a fourth of her length out of the water. Then she settled down to her work. The *Falcon* was out of sight by this time, nearly twenty miles ahead, but in ten minutes her smoke showed above the horizon. In twenty her signal-mast and funnels were visible, in half an hour her hull was raised, in an hour she was a-beam carrying the most infuriated crew that ever sailed under the White Ensign—and then the *Express* went racing away past her at forty-five knots or nearly sixty statute miles an hour. She covered the three hundred miles of the double journey inside six hours, rounding the Eddystone Lighthouse and passing the *Falcon* still on her way out, and within seven hours after

leaving London the King was sitting in the upper cabin of the air-ship speeding back to Marlborough House at a couple of hundred miles an hour.

CHAPTER XVI

NEVER had the newspapers of the world had so many topics of absorbing interest to deal with as they had on the day which followed His Majesty's cruises in the *Anonyma* and the *Express*.

The aërial trip would, of course, have sufficed in itself as a sufficient theme for many columns of descriptive matter and hundreds of articles on the revolution in travel which these wonderful voyages had initiated, but when, in addition to this the business world was faced with the grim, uncompromising pronouncement made by Marvin at the Carlton Hotel and already reproduced in every newspaper in the world, something like panic set in.

It was perfectly plain now that the Kingston-Marvin Syndicate really had the means of fulfilling the threat which he so plainly uttered.

A perfect tempest of criticism burst out from end to end of Europe, and the dominant note of alarm was sounded by the *Journal Des Débats* in a leading article which ended as follows:—

“ Having thus dispassionately reviewed all the circumstances, we find ourselves forced to the conclusion that the amazing developments which have been astonishing the world during the last few days, point to nothing less than a deliberate and organised attempt on the part of the Anglo-Saxon peoples to establish their absolute domination over the other nations of

the earth. It is perfectly plain, as the President of this astonishing Syndicate said in his astounding delivery to the representatives of the world's press, that those who control the world's communications have civilization at their mercy. This miraculous air-ship in which the King of England, obeying that infallible instinct which invariably causes him to do the right thing at the right time, has travelled from London to Southampton and back at the incredible speed of two hundred miles an hour is in itself sufficient evidence of the almost illimitable power possessed by these few men.

"Those who can build one such ship can build fifty, a hundred, a thousand if they wish to, and what more would be necessary to terrorise the earth into submission to any demands which they chose to make? With a perfectly full sense of our responsibility, we say deliberately that we are only voicing the opinion of the Continent when we state that it is now the duty of the nations of Europe to instantly combine for their common protection against a tyranny which in a few weeks or months may easily assume such giant proportions that the enslavement of humanity must of necessity follow.

"It is almost unnecessary to point to recent events such as the Spanish-American War and the merciless suppression of the two free Republics of South Africa to prove that the two branches of the Anglo-Saxon race, Great Britain and America, have recognised at last the tremendous fact of their common kinship and their ownership of nearly half the habitable globe. To this they have now added the unbounded and universal Empire of the Air, and if this tyranny is not broken instantly by the armed might of Europe, allied

in a common cause for its own preservation, nothing can save the world from a perpetual enslavement under the iron heel of Anglo-Saxon despotism."

Such words as these published in one of the soberest and most influential journals in Europe produced an instant and wide-spread effect and the next day the whole Continent was ringing with passionate appeals for a European alliance against the new tyranny.

"Europe," said the *Novoe Vremya* the next day in an obviously inspired article, "can within a week put ten millions of men in the field, and two thousand warships on the sea. Let us forget our own little quarrels, which sink into insignificance beside this tremendous calamity with which we are threatened. Let a conference of the Sovereigns and statesmen of Europe be immediately convened, and let that conference tell the Anglo-Saxon despots that their tyranny can only be established, if at all, at the cost of millions of lives and hundreds of millions of treasure, and that these few men, having, by their own diabolical inventions, placed themselves above human law, have also placed themselves outside its protection."

"Well," said Paul to his partner when he had read this extract out from the *Times*, "I reckon that's about as plain an incitement to assassination as ever appeared in a respectable semi-official newspaper. Now what's the matter with giving these people a little preliminary lesson in the new tactics? They seem to think that we want to enslave the world and that therefore we ought to get bullets or knives into us. Why shouldn't we show them that we could if we wanted to, but that we don't?"

"That's not half bad, Paul," said Marvin chewing

the end of his cigar. "Let me see now—France has been swaggering a bit over those submarines of hers, and Russia is only waiting for half a chance to tear up the treaty of Berlin and run her warships through the Bosphorous and the Dardanelles whether anyone else likes it or not. I reckon it's about time we got to work. If we don't we'll have trouble."

"I think so," said Paul. "These European people seem to me to be spoiling for a fight, and we have got to stop that, for I have promised my mother and Lady Margaret that, if I can help it our air-ships and submarines will never be the means of taking human life. I propose to keep that promise and make the rest of the world understand it too. Now look here, that hospital arrangement is all fixed up and the cash will be paid to-morrow. That will go some way towards showing that we are not quite the enemies of humanity that our friends the enemy on the other side of the Channel want to make us out. We ought to have by this time about five hundred million pounds in hard gold ready for operations and another hundred millions a week coming in here and over in the States. *Express II.* will bring five hundred tons from New York to-morrow.

"Now I propose," he went on, lighting a fresh cigar, "that you and I should get on board the *Anonyma* to-night, run over to Long Island and order the submarines into the English Channel to await further instructions. Then we'll run down to Port Kingston, see how they are getting on there, and bring up the *Shiela*, the *Britannia* and the *Columbia* leaving the *Ariel* and one submarine to guard the place, and give these European gentlemen what they would call a

demonstration in force. What is your opinion of that?"

"Pretty perfect, Paul," laughed his partner. "I see you are a general as well as a genius. Look here, though there's something more to do and you must leave that to me," he went on, taking out his stylographic pen and pulling a sheet of paper towards him. He covered it with his strong, characteristic handwriting and passed it over to Paul, saying:

"What is the matter with that for a sort of Royal proclamation?"

Paul took the paper and read:—

"The Kingston-Marvin Syndicate and Atlantic Express Company request the attention of the Governments of Europe to the following statements, which are made in the best interests of humanity and with the knowledge that, if necessary, the principles contained in them can be duly enforced.

1. The preparations which certain European nations appear to be making with a view to a war which can have no possible excuse must immediately cease, and pledges must be given to the Governments of Great Britain and the United States that no mobilisations of troops or fleets shall take place within the next six months.

2. Failing compliance with this request within a fortnight, communications by sea and cable will be stopped, and trains will not be permitted to cross the frontiers of European countries. Any warship attempting to leave the port in which she is stationed at the time this notice appears will be disabled. The submarines belonging to the French, Russian and the Spanish Governments must be confined to port for at least six months. If found at sea they will be either

captured or destroyed, and the Kingston-Marvin Syndicate will not be responsible for any loss of life or property that may result from non-compliance with this order.

3. Any Russian ships of war, whether belonging to the Regular or the Volunteer Fleet which attempt to leave the Black Sea, or the Baltic, within six months from this date will be either destroyed or disabled.

4. European journals are requested to at once cease misleading the peoples of the Continent by their Anti-British and American campaigns. The Anglo-Saxon race has no enmity against other inhabitants of the world; but, possessing the power, it has also the will to compel the rest of the world to behave itself in peaceful and orderly fashion. All European newspapers neglecting this warning will be suppressed.

"Signed for the Kingston-Marvin Syndicate,—

"GILLETTE P. MARVIN, President.

"ROMNEY, Chairman.

"PAUL KINGSTON, Managing Director."

"Pretty drastic," said Paul, "but I think it will do. Yes I'll sign that. Now we'll have the carriage and take it to the Duke, and when he has signed it we'll send it round to the News agencies. I guess the papers will have something to talk about to-morrow."

"Yes," laughed Marvin, "and I reckon that inside a fortnight things will be humming in Europe as they haven't done since Napoleon was spreading himself over the Continent."

The next day this amazing proclamation appeared

in the form of an ordinary advertisement in all the influential papers of Europe saving those of Russia, and the German semi-official journals, and again the tempest of political abuse burst out. The same issue of the English papers contained a brief announcement to the effect that His Majesty King Edward had been pleased to accept from the Kingston-Marvin Syndicate a cheque on the Bank of England for five millions sterling for the purpose of completing His Majesty's project for clearing off all the debts of the hospitals in the United Kingdom, and endowing with the sum of two millions institutions for the study and treatment of consumption and cancer in which the King had taken great interest for some years past.

Another paragraph, in its way not less interesting stated that the *Anonyma* had disappeared from her berth at Southampton Docks and that the sister ship to the now famous Atlantic record-breaker *Express I.* had been followed by her sister ship which had broken even her record and landed her passengers at Ocean Quay within ninety-two hours of leaving New York.

Then followed in a few words the amazing information that she had landed five hundred tons of bar-gold consigned to the Bank of England which had been conveyed to London in two special trains. The name of the consignors did not transpire, but the fact that the immense treasure coming from no one knew where had been carried in one of the mysterious vessels of the Atlantic Company, sent a shudder through the financial world which as Mr. Schmidt remarked when he read the news "looked mighty like a preliminary symptom of a financial earthquake."

Nothing more happened for the next ten days, although this time was fully occupied by the journal-

ists of Europe in raging furiously together over the pronouncement of the Syndicate, rending it to tatters and stamping them into the mire of the journalistic gutters.

On the morning of the eleventh day a very disquieting occurrence came to pass. The *Normandie*, one of the finest of the French Trans-Atlantic Steamers had started from Le Havre on her usual voyage to New York and unaccountably broke down a few miles to the northward of Barfleur. Her rudder disappeared and two of her propeller blades were wrenched off. She was rescued by tugs from Barfleur just in time to save her drifting on to the rocks. On the evening of the same day the *Ville de la Ciotat*, passing the Isle de Riou on her way to Port Said had her rudder torn off and immediately afterwards her head was pulled round until it pointed towards the port. She also was towed back and docked for repairs.

During the same night all the submarine telegraphs connecting France with the rest of the world ceased to act. Divers were sent down and found that the shore-ends of the cables had been cut cleanly through, and that lengths varying from one to three miles had been carried bodily away.

The following morning, as the *Calais-Douvres* was leaving Calais harbour she was stopped although her engines were working at full power and should have been driving her at twenty knots through the water. As in the other cases her rudder was wrenched off and her head was pulled round towards the harbour mouth.

Telegraphic orders had already been sent to Brest and Toulon directing the French submarines, and the torpedo squadron to put to sea at once in search of

these under-sea depredators that were evidently bent on disorganising the world's commerce.

They obeyed orders and that was the last that was heard of them for nearly a fortnight, at the end of which time their officers and crews began to come back with strange stories of capture by steel monsters moving at incredible speeds through the depths, and equipped with a new form of search-light which only illuminated the object that it was turned on to and not the water through which it passed.

The most exasperating part of the stories was that, whereas the said monsters could easily have smashed the French submarines into scrap-iron, they had merely disabled them, taken their officers and crews out, landed them on the nearest shore and left the vessels to drift helplessly about the waste of ocean as though they were not worth capture. Both officers and men had been treated with perfect courtesy and consideration by their captors, who were in all cases either English or American, and not only had the officers been allowed to bring all their private property away but in cases where the men were without money they were given a hundred francs in gold to see them home.

It would take pages to properly describe the condition of panic and consternation into which Europe was plunged by these extraordinary events, coming as they did as an absolute fulfilment of the direct threat made by the Kingston-Marvin Syndicate. But the next day fresh marvels happened. The main telegraph lines between Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Petersburg, Rome, Constantinople and Madrid were destroyed in a night. A Russian warship that attempted to pass the Bosphorous had been crippled

and dragged back into the Black Sea, and a tremendous submarine explosion, most curiously unattended by any loss of life, had completely blocked the entrance to the fortified harbour of Cronstadt, "the watch-dog of Russia, at the gates of Petersburg."

Then, like a bolt from the blue, fell, literally from the skies, the most paralysing blow of all.

The German Emperor had received the ultimatum of the Syndicate at first with a disdainful incredulity. and then with an uncomfortable but fast-growing conviction that, after all, there must be something in it, and so on the thirteenth day he boarded the Imperial yacht *Hohenzollern* at Bremen and started for Dover to talk the matter over with his royal uncle of England.

It was not, however, in accordance with the plans of the Syndicate that such a meeting should take place in that way, and so it happened that, as His Majesty was taking the air on the navigation bridge just before lunch, the shining shape of the *Anonyma* swooped down from the midmost heaven, and at the same time something with a glass-domed conning-tower at the fore end of it came swirling along the surface of the water at a speed of about fifty miles an hour and made a complete circuit round the *Hohenzollern* just as the *Anonyma* did the same in the air.

No one in Europe has much better nerves than the German Emperor, but even his were a little shaken up by this strange happening. He was far too good a sailor not to see that if the cruisers of the air and the under-sea had come with any hostile intent he and his yacht and all on board her were absolutely at their mercy.

While the *Anonyma* swung round and dropped until

her gangway door was on a level with the bridge of the Imperial yacht the black, half-submerged shape of the submarine, prowled round her, silent but menacing. The *Hohenzollern* was travelling nearly twenty knots through the water but the submarine hadn't the slightest difficulty in keeping up with her and making rings round her as well.

Then the door in the side of the *Anonyma* opened. Paul appeared at it, took off his cap, and said:—

“I have the honour to wish your Imperial Majesty good morning. You are, I believe, going to England to learn certain particulars which I shall be most happy to give you now if Your Majesty will honour me and my vessel by coming aboard and taking lunch with me.”

CHAPTER XVII

THE Kaiser, in common with the officers and crew of the *Hohenzollern* had been gazing in undisguised wonder and admiration at the beautiful shape of the *Anonyma* and with somewhat different feelings at the dark, swiftly-moving bulk of the submarine. It was perfectly plain that the two were working together. At the same time, although Paul's tone was perfectly friendly and respectful, still there was something in it that conveyed to the Kaiser an uncomfortable impression that it conveyed somewhat of a command as well as an invitation, and His German Majesty was not accustomed to that sort of thing.

"I presume," said the Kaiser in his stiffest, haughtiest tone, "that I am talking either to Mr. Paul Kingston, or to Mr. Marvin; that is to say to one of the authors of that preposterous proclamation by which the European Powers were insulted a fortnight ago. In that case I'm afraid I must decline your invitation."

"My name is Paul Kingston and I am quite at your Majesty's service," was the reply, politely but somewhat more formally spoken. "I can assure your Majesty that my invitation is given in the friendliest

spirit and that no harm or insult is intended to your person or to your royal dignity. The King of England, as you know, has already trusted himself on board this ship; therefore I hope your Majesty may do me the honour I ask with perfect confidence. I may say that my only object in asking your Majesty to honour me with your company is the absolute necessity of our having a little private conversation before your visit to England. When we have had that I will land you on the terrace of Windsor Castle, where you will find His Majesty King Edward awaiting you within three hours from now."

The Kaiser found himself in a decided dilemma, but he had already grasped the fact that it was no use arguing from the deck of a steamer with the master of an air-ship, especially while that submarine monster, which could sink the *Hohenzollern* in five minutes, was swirling round her. With his infallible rapidity of thought he found the means of saving his own dignity and avoiding what might have been very serious complication.

"Ah, that is quite a different matter, Mr. Kingston," he said with a good humoured laugh. "If you had put your invitation that way at first I could not possibly have refused it; but how am I to get on board? Shall we stop?"

"There is no necessity for that, your Majesty," replied Paul. "I will come closer alongside and you will find no difficulty."

Captain Vinton, who was steering in the conning-tower, heard this and brought the air-ship so accurately alongside the Imperial yacht that when the gangway steps were lowered they rested on the *Hohen-*

zollern's bridge. The Kaiser, secretly delighted at the prospect of personally inspecting this marvellous craft about which the whole world was talking and taking a trip to Windsor in her, turned to his Commander and ordered him to proceed to the Solent. Then, returning the salutes of his officers he went up the ladder, and quite frankly took Paul's hand.

"Well, Mr. Kingston," he said when the door was shut and they were alone. "I'm not accustomed to accepting compulsory invitations, but you put yours so nicely and backed it up with such an unmistakable display of *force majeure* that, well, I could hardly do anything but accept your hospitality. The submarine, I presume, is also under your orders."

"Yes, your Majesty," replied Paul. "We have two fleets, one of the sea and one of the air, and we are working together."

"So I see," said the Emperor rather grimly, "and I should say you would make a very effective combination. In fact if you only had enough of these cruisers and air-ships it would be difficult for any of us to do much without your permission."

"We have enough to control the communications of the world," replied Paul quietly. "And that is all we want at present; but within a month we shall have quadrupled our fleets and that will put us into a position to enforce the terms of the communication which we published a fortnight ago."

The War Lord of Germany looked at him in eloquent silence as he spoke, for there was no mistaking the inner meaning of the quietly-spoken words and the Kaiser recognised instantly that he was talking to a man who wielded a greater power than even

he, the master of armed millions, did. Paul saw that the conversation bade fair to become a little difficult and so he changed the subject by saying:—

“And now, your Majesty, perhaps you would like to inspect the air-ship. She is entirely at your disposal for the time being and I will show you everything. There is only one secret that I am not permitted to tell you.”

“Quite so, quite so,” said the Kaiser, “I fully understand that, you mean the secret of your motive power. That, of course, is no business of mine. I only wish it was.”

The next half hour was, as he told King Edward that evening, the most bewilderingly interesting that William of Germany had ever spent. After Captain Vinton had been presented to him he went with Paul into the conning-tower and then the *Anonyma* was put through her paces.

The *Hohenzollern* was steaming away south-westward at about twenty knots. The submarine had risen to the surface showing the whole three-hundred-foot length of her black shining whale-back hull, and her glass-domed conning-tower. The air-ship passed over her and dropped to a height of about fifty feet, a telephone-wire was passed down and connected with an instrument in her conning-tower and the Kaiser heard Paul speak the message:—

“We are going to do a little manœuvring. Please stand by to accompany us. When we have finished you will also keep in sight of the *Hohenzollern*. Remember that His Majesty is our guest, and that no accident must happen to her. Good-bye.”

“Pardon me, Mr. Kingston,” said the Kaiser, “but

may I ask whether there is any inner meaning to that message?"

"I cannot say for certain," replied Paul. "As your Majesty is aware many very strange things have happened in the last few days, and others stranger still may have to be prepared for. Your Majesty's safety is at present in my hands and I cannot of course accept such a situation without taking all due precautions; and now if you please I will show you a little of what our ship can do."

The next moment the *Hohenzollern* was a tiny white speck five thousand feet below in the distant ocean. The *Anonyma*, rushing at full speed through the air, described a swiftly ascending spiral until the Kaiser, to his amazement, saw the barometer indicating an elevation of fifteen thousand feet. He asked afterwards how it was that he had not experienced any inconvenience from such a sudden change of elevation, and Paul explained that the interior of the *Anonyma* could be made perfectly air-tight and that therefore the pressure inside did not alter.

Then she swooped down to the sea again, stopped within a couple of hundred yards from the surface about a mile astern of the *Hohenzollern*, leapt forward again, made a complete circuit round her and slowed down, hovering a hundred feet or so above the tops of the masts.

"Mr. Kingston," said the Kaiser, "you must allow me to withdraw what I said about a certain proclamation. The owners of a fleet of ships like this, to say nothing of your submarines, could, I'm afraid, enforce any proclamation that they chose to make. The Empire of the air and the sea means practically the empire of the world. It seems to me that we people

who sit on earthly thrones will have to considerably revise our ideas of government."

"Only in the direction of peace and the best interests of humanity, I hope, your Majesty," replied Paul with a seriousness that was not lost upon his Imperial guest, "and now, if you please, I will call my captain to take my place and we will have some lunch. It will be just about ready I think."

"And I am quite ready for it, too," laughed the Kaiser, aerial voyaging and wonder-seeing seem pretty good for the appetite."

"Then perhaps your Majesty will allow me to give you a cocktail," said Paul as Captain Vinton came into the conning-tower.

The lunch, simple as it was, was one of the pleasantest meals the Kaiser had ever eaten. His inflexible tact had caused him to drop all ceremony and treat his host on exactly equal terms. He recognised now with perfect clearness that the man who held control of the air and the sea was not a person to be treated with condescension and he was not slow to recognise that, although Paul was perfectly polite and invariably respectful, he also took this view of the situation.

Pleasant as it was, however, the meal was destined to come to a sudden and somewhat startling conclusion. The coffee and liqueurs—the Kaiser's favourite Kümml—had just been served and Paul was offering him his cigar-case when a dull bang came out of the sea accompanied by the whistling shriek of a shell. The next moment the first officer of the *Anonyma* presented himself at the door, saluted and said:—

"A large cruiser flying French colours has just fired on us, sir."

"The deuce he has!" said Paul, rising to his feet, "no harm done, I hope. Tell Captain Vinton to rise to four thousand feet, quicken up to half speed and go directly over him. Signal to the submarine to go down and cripple him. I was half afraid of this, your Majesty," he went on to his guest. "I don't suppose they would dare to fire on your flag, but you see they look upon us as outlaws, and apparently they are going to treat us as such."

"I'm afraid I didn't quite understand you Mr. Kingston," said the Kaiser also rising. "Am I to understand that your orders are to sink the French cruiser? You will perhaps forgive me saying that that would be an act that would place you outside the pale of international law."

"Oh, no, I didn't mean that," said Paul, smiling. "If you will come into the conning-tower with me I'll show you how we propose to wage war. We don't intend to shed blood if we can help it."

"That must be a curious kind of fighting, Mr. Kingston," said the German War Lord, as he went in front of him to resume his place in the conning-tower, thinking of the flood of devastation which a few words of his would let loose on Europe."

"Yes sir, it is, but I hope to be able to show you that at any rate it is quite as efficient as other modes of warfare."

They entered the conning-tower as he said this. The *Anonyma* was already high above the French cruiser, which afterwards proved to be the *Dupuy de Lome*. The submarine had vanished and the *Hohenzollern*, flying the German Imperial flag, was proceed-

ing on her way with an apparent carelessness born of the absolutely uncompromising German spirit of obedience to orders.

"Your Majesty will see," said Paul as he took his place at the table, "that it is now practically impossible for him to shoot at us. We are five thousand feet above him, and he hasn't a thousand to one chance of hitting us even if he had guns that could shoot straight up, because the *Anonyma* doesn't look any bigger to him now than a soda-water bottle would. Now I will just show you what we could do with him if he wanted to wage war on the old barbaric lines."

As he said this he touched a button in the side-wall of the conning-tower and Captain Vinton opened the door just as the Kaiser was saying:—

"All war is barbarous, my dear sir, but all the same it is a necessity. It is the tonic of nations, and a people that is not ready or willing to fight for its existence is not fit to exist."

"To that extent I agree with your Majesty absolutely," said Paul, but there is another way of doing these things. Pardon me for a moment."

The Kaiser bowed and Paul continued:—

"Captain Vinton, put a torpedo into the port forward tube and drop it a couple of hundred yards on the otherside of that Frenchman. Be very careful that you don't hit him. We don't want to hurt anybody, and if that isn't enough to convince him that we are not fooling you can have the after one ready and let that explode about a thousand feet above him. By that time I suppose the *Nautilus* will have got hold of him."

"Very well, sir," replied Captain Vinton touching his cap and disappearing.

"Now, your Majesty," Paul continued, "our friends the enemy down there are going to have a little surprise."

"I should think so," said the Kaiser, "if you can only do what you say—as of course you can."

"Oh yes," said Paul, there is no doubt about that. Ah yes, there she goes."

The Kaiser looked down and saw something like a flash of light dart out from the left hand side of the air-ship. It passed over the French cruiser, plunged into the water a couple of hundred yards on the other side of her, and the next moment a mountain of boiling foam leapt up out of the sea and sank down again in the midst of a wide area of yeasty, seething foam.

Even the Kaiser's iron self-control gave way under the stress of this terrible demonstration of power.

"Great Heavens, sir, that would have sunk a battleship!"

"It would, sir," replied Paul, "and it would have wrecked the strongest fortress in Europe with just as little trouble. Now you shall see something else."

He unhooked a telephone transmitter from the wall and said into it: —

"That was very well aimed, Captain Vinton. Now let him have the after one—a thousand feet above him, please."

Another streak of light flashed out from the *Anonyma's* side, and a few seconds later the Kaiser saw a brief glare so intense that it seemed for the moment to darken the mid-day sun. A blaze of greenish-blue radiance burst out between sky and sea, and a spasm, accompanied by a terrific report, shook the atmosphere so strongly that even the *Anonyma* shuddered as the returning air-wave struck her.

"If we had hit him with that, as we could have done," said Paul, "he'd have been scrap-iron by this time. Those torpedoes carry fifty pounds of an explosive which is a hundred times more powerful than gun-cotton. If it had been a thousand feet nearer the atmospheric concussion would have killed every man on board the ship."

"I believe it," said the Kaiser shortly, "I've seen quite enough for that. It is only a matter of ammunition. Half a dozen ships like these could fight the navies of the world. God forbid that you should ever fight mine."

"That your Majesty," replied Paul, "I hope we shall never do. Ah, the *Nautilus* has begun! You see the cruiser is helpless, she won't steer. That means that the submarine has torn her rudder off."

"But what are you going to do with her, Mr. Kingston?" exclaimed the Kaiser, "she may be an enemy, but surely you won't leave her helpless in the middle of the German Ocean like that?"

"No sir," said Paul, "we don't propose to make war in that way. She will have to surrender whether she likes it or not, and the *Nautilus* shall tow her down to Dunkirk for repairs."

"And now, if it is your Majesty's pleasure, we will get away to Windsor," he went on taking out his watch, "it will take us nearly a couple of hours to get there and King Edward expects you to dinner. My captain will take charge, and we may as well go back into the cabin and have some fresh coffee and another cigar."

"I think," said the Kaiser, "that, under the circumstances, I will ask you to let me send the *Hohenzol-*

lern to our friend's assistance. You see it would only, after all, be a little act of international courtesy."

"With pleasure, if your Majesty wishes it," replied Paul. "We will run alongside at once and fix it up."

CHAPTER XVIII

TWO hours after the disabled French cruiser had disappeared in the distance the *Anonyma*, flying the German Imperial Ensign by the Kaiser's own request, slowed down alongside the parapet of the terrace at Windsor Castle. King Edward and Queen Alexandra were waiting to receive their visitor and a few minutes afterwards the Prince and Princess of Wales drove in through the great gateway. As the Kaiser shook hands with the King and Queen he said:—

Well, you see I have come sooner than I expected, and I may say that I have also had experiences which I did not expect. What do you say to a crowned Kaiser being way-laid on the high seas in his own yacht by an air-ship and a submarine; being practically kidnapped, and then given delightfully exciting experiences? Yes, we were fired on by a French cruiser, after which our good friend and, I hope, ally, Mr. Kingston proved to absolute demonstration that he could scatter the Frenchman in little pieces over the water by means of some appalling aerial torpedoes that he has. After that, if you please, the submarine dives down and quietly tears her rudder off, as she

might, of course, have done with the *Hohenzollern*. In fact she was so utterly helpless and unmanageable that I felt I couldn't do less than send the *Hohenzollern* to tow the poor thing into a place of safety."

The Kaiser gave his rapid sketch of the afternoon's proceedings in such sardonic humour that the King and Queen both burst out laughing and His Majesty said:—

"I'm afraid our friends across the Channel will be something more than angry when the cruiser gets back to Dunkirk. There will be a terrible commotion in the French papers to-morrow morning.

"Yes, I'm afraid so," said the Queen. "The idea of a French cruiser being towed in to a French port by the German Imperial yacht will not strike our friends as being exactly in the perfection of things."

"Ah, said the Prince of Wales coming out on to the terrace at this moment accompanied by the Princess, "there she is at last, May—this wonderful cruiser of the air—and the Emperor! Have you come over in her?"

"Yes," said the Kaiser as he saluted the Princess and shook hands. "I've just been telling the King and Queen what a wonderful experience I have had as Mr. Kingston's guest. Perhaps you will allow me to present the Lord of the Air to you."

"With pleasure," laughed the Prince, "but I'm not so sure whether it ought not to be the other way about, for, after all, the Lord of the Air owns larger realms than we do; and, another thing, he can be a despot if he pleases, and we can't."

"Well," laughed the Kaiser, "here is Mr. Kingston, despot of air and sea. No, I am not joking. He

really is, he proved that to me conclusively this afternoon. His Majesty knows it and so do I, but you will hardly believe that that air-ship can travel two hundred miles an hour."

"Two hundred miles an hour!" repeated the Prince as he shook hands with Paul. Mr. Kingston, you have conquered the earth! I'm going to ask you if you will take me for a trip, and I think possibly my wife would like a new sensation too."

"I was just going to ask Mr. Kingston for the same privilege myself," said the Queen as the Princess smiled and nodded assent.

Paul bowed and said—

"If your Majesty and your Royal Highnesses will give me a few minutes more I shall be able to provide you with a fitting escort. I ordered the rest of our English squadron to rendezvous here this afternoon at four, and it is just four now. Ah, yes, there they come. I knew they wouldn't be late. You see we don't have stoppages or collisions in the air. That is one of the advantages of aërial navigation."

"Especially," laughed the Kaiser, "when you happen to own the only aërial fleet in existence. Ah, and so these are your auxiliary cruisers," he went on as three shining shapes rushed up out of the eastward abreast, tailed out into a long line, swept round the Castle and came to a rest one ahead, and two astern of the *Anonyma*. The golden banner of Air and Sea instantly broke out from their mast-heads and dipped three times in salutation to the Royal Standard floating over the Round Tower.

"That is very marvellous manœuvring," said the Kaiser, his military genius fascinated by the won-

derful swiftness and precision of the air-ship's movements.

"Yes," said the Prince, his sailor instincts aglow with admiration at the marvellous and beautiful spectacle presented by the four cruisers hanging motionless alongside the terrace, "it is very, very wonderful. I'm afraid the centre of power has shifted from the sea to the air. Is not that so, Mr. Kingston?"

"I think so, your Royal Highness," replied the Lord of the Air, "but that is no reason why the ancient Queen of the Seas should not be the new Queen of the Air.

"I hope so," said Queen Alexandra and the Princess almost in the same breath, "and now your Majesty," continued the Queen laughingly, "may we go on board one of these wonderful ships of yours?"

Paul bowed and signalled with his hand to Captain Vinton in the conning-tower. The *Anonyma* swung round, passed over the parapet and sank gently on to the pavement. The door opened and the gangway ladder fell down. The golden banner of the air fluttered from the mast head at the same moment. Captain Vinton and his first officer presented themselves on either side of the door, and the Emperor stepped forward to assist the Queen up the steps. The King followed with the Princess, and as soon as His Majesty set foot on the lower cabin floor the Royal Standard ran up to the mast head. The Prince followed and then the Lord of the Air entered, the ladder was pulled up and then the door was closed.

Half an hour or so was spent in an inspection of the wonderful craft before the manœuvres began, as Paul rightly divined that his distinguished guests would

want all their eyes in the upper cabin when the aërial trip began. Meanwhile signals were fluttering from the cross-yard of the mast as Captain Vinton gave, and the Commanders of the other ships received Paul's instruction for the cruise. When the inspection was over the Royal visitors took their places in the upper saloon and the Prince of Wales went with Paul into the conning-tower to have his first lesson in aërial navigation.

"Some day perhaps," he said, "your Royal Highness will hoist your pennant on the flag-ship of the air. You will find it, I think, a somewhat easier matter running her than working a first-class battleship."

"That will only be possible, Mr. Kingston," laughed the Prince in reply, "when you are able to give us your services as Chief Constructor to the Navy. Meanwhile, am I to understand that you, in this little conning-tower, can do everything that is needful?"

"Everything connected with the navigation of the vessel," replied Paul. "I am captain, helmsman, and look-out, and we don't want engineers except for maintenance of the power-supply. Of course if we were ever under the necessity of fighting, which I hope we never shall be, my captain and officers would see to the machinery of destruction under my orders, which they would get by telephone. That, however, is not a very complicated matter as we could blow the biggest iron-clad afloat to pieces with a single shot long before she could fire a gun. And now," he went on quickly changing a somewhat delicate subject, "perhaps we had better make a start."

He put his hand on the lower switch and the discs began to hum.

"We are off," said the Kaiser to the Queen with almost boyish interest. "Now you will see something more marvellous than a Queen ever saw before."

As he spoke the lifting-fans began to whirr, and the stately old castle sank slowly beneath them. As the whirr increased in shrillness the earth sank away more swiftly and the horizon broadened out until they could see the brilliant afternoon sun shining over a landscape which stretched from the Chiltern Hills to the North Downs and from London to Basingstoke. The *Anonyma's* escort had risen to within a hundred feet below her. Paul moved the upper switch and the flag-ship's propellers began to revolve; the others did the same and the little squadron went on till the bows headed the south-west.

"We will pay a visit first to the fleet at Spithead," said Paul, "but I shall have to haul the flags down or they will be torn to shreds in a few minutes. We shall reach the Solent in half an hour."

"Over a hundred and twenty miles an hour!" exclaimed the Prince, "Well, sir, I have come prepared for miracles, and I'm not going to be astonished if I can help it."

The landscape began to slip away behind the squadron, and in a few minutes it became a blur as the air-ships rushed through the whistling atmosphere at a hundred and fifty miles an hour. In twenty minutes the speed of the propellers slackened and within half-an-hour the squadron was floating over the Solent with the Royal Standard once more flying from the *Anonyma's* mast-head.

Paul had chosen this as the beginning of the trip because he knew that the Channel Fleet was paying a visit to Spithead to be ready for the mobilisation of

the fleets for the manœuvres which, in view of possible complications, had been put forward three months.

Tens of thousands of men from admirals to ordinary seamen, gazed up in wonder at the spectacle and many and picturesque were the remarks made by the Handymen and the Jollies as to what might happen if the variously and luridly described cruisers of the air were to turn to and drop torpedoes on the decks of His Majesty's ships.

But the sight of the Royal Standard flying on the *Anonyma*, and the knowledge that the King had already taken a trip in her at once removed all fear of possible unpleasantness; and, moreover, telegrams had been received at all the Southern ports notifying the departure of the squadron for the south with the King and Queen, the Prince and Princess, and the Kaiser on board.

So the White Ensigns dipped in homage, and the guns of the fleets and forts began to boom out their welcoming salute. The aerial squadron had no means of replying. Its weapons were silent and flameless, and, as the Kaiser had seen, they were meant only for annihilation.

The Queen had just requested Paul to descend and make a tour of the fleet, and he was preparing to obey, when the Prince exclaimed:

"Halloa, they are signalling us from the East Fort!"

The King looked round and saw the arms of the big semaphore begin to wag furiously.

"Is the King on board?" said, the Prince translating.

"Shall I reply, your Majesty?" asked Paul.

"Say yes, if you please, Mr. Kingston," replied the King. The Admiral commanding may have something to say.

The *Anonyma* at once replied in the affirmative and the semaphore arms at once began wagging again. They wagged a good deal longer this time and the Prince translated:

"Will His Majesty be pleased to grant interview to Admiral commanding? Important news to communicate."

"I presume that your Majesty will wish to descend?" said Paul.

"If you please, Mr. Kingston," replied the King, "I don't think the Commander-in-Chief would have said that without some good reason. You see a King is never his own master!"

Paul went into the conning-tower, and in a few minutes Portsmouth witnessed the strange spectacle of a cruiser of the skies settling down on the parapet of one of its forts. A guard of honour had already turned out and the King was received at the officers' quarters by the Commander-in-Chief of the Port. For about half-an-hour they were alone together in the Admiral's private room. When the King came out he was looking very gravely at some official telegraph forms he had in his hand.

"Mr. Kingston," he said, when he got back to the air-ship "will you favour me by rising again? I may tell you that I have just heard some very serious news, and I wish to hold what I am afraid we must call a council of war on it. As it directly concerns yourself I shall ask you to join the Emperor and the Prince and myself in some apartment where we can talk freely."

"With pleasure, your Majesty," replied Paul, "I will put Captain Vinton in charge, and you can rely on our privacy in the lower cabin."

The King, of course, presided at the informal and yet most momentous council, and he began the business in hand without any formality by saying:

News has just been received from the Foreign Office that France and Russia, with the approval of Italy, Spain, Austria, and Holland, have decided in view of what it terms the outrages committed by the authors of a circular which they consider an insult to Europe, have determined to unite for the defence, at all costs, of national and international liberty against the new despotism, as they call it, which has just come into the world. The fact that I have been in personal relation with one of the signatories of the circular and have even taken a trip in one of the air-ships is accepted as direct evidence that Great Britain endorses the policy of the Syndicate.

Further, "he went on, smiling across at his nephew," it seems that you have got yourself into trouble. Soon after your yacht took the *Dupuy de Lome* in tow the Frenchman sent a long Marconi message to Dunkirk describing the incident fully. It was immediately telegraphed to Paris and thence all over the world, no doubt, by this time. Of course, it follows that the visit of this vessel to Windsor with you on board and our embarking with you for another trip will be common property by this time. Now, these telegrams go on to say that there is the highest probability of concerted action, possibly amounting to an ultimatum to Germany, England and America, to the effect that if the circular is not withdrawn and operations stopped, they will resort to force—which,

I need hardly say, would mean a European conflagration, and possibly a world-wide one."

"Now, Mr. Kingston," His Majesty continued, turning to Paul, "I think it is quite plain to us that the primary action in this matter lies with you. You and your partner possess powers which nobody else does, and it seems to me that any reply to such an ultimatum would be impossible without, at least, a knowledge of your intentions—to say nothing of your assistance, since the operations cannot possibly be stopped without your assent. What is your opinion?" he added, turning to the Emperor.

"I am afraid I shall have to agree with you," he replied with a smile and a half-envious glance at the youthful master of the situation, "To be quite frank about it, after what I have seen to-day I am in the position of the man who found himself in a town where there was a riot and announced that he was on the side of the man with the big axe. I'm on the side of the air-ships and the submarines."

"And so am I, most decidedly!" laughed the Prince. "And now the question is: what side are they going to be on?"

"Well, Mr. Kingston," the King continued, "that is practically all we have to say at present I think. We have, of course, not the slightest intention or desire of trespassing on your confidence, or of prying into your plans. At the same time you will, I trust, consider it a natural desire on our part to know anything that you are able to tell us."

"Your Majesty," replied Paul, "I'm afraid it will be impossible for me to give you anything like a complete answer until I have consulted with my colleagues as to the attitude we shall take up in the development of

this situation. Mr. Marvin returns from the States in the *Express* boat which is due to-night. It will then probably be necessary for one of us at least to cross the Atlantic and find out the position that America considers herself to be in.

"Of course, if these countries persist in wanting war they can have it unless we find ourselves strong enough to stop it without fighting. I may say further, right here, that we are not at war and don't propose to be so with any governments, or nations, or peoples; but simply, as we have stated, with the commercial combinations and dollar-despotisms which we believe to be the worst enemies of the human race. Those we are determined to break up by any means we may have to use; but I do not think we could take sides in any international conflict—except," he went on with a smile at the Kaiser, "making it as difficult as possible for the combatants to hurt each other."

"What I mean is this: As your Majesty saw, I could easily have sunk the *Dupuy de Lome* either by ramming or dropping a torpedo on her; but instead of that I thought it better to render her so incapable of mischief that she would have to be taken care of, though she had committed an act of war against me. That is all I can say for the present, except, perhaps, that we clearly foresaw that this would happen, and that is why I endeavoured to assist Destiny so that, if possible, you should first hear the news in company with His Majesty of Great Britain and talk it over personally rather than through your Foreign Offices."

"An excellent stroke of diplomacy, I must say Mr. Kingston!" laughed the Kaiser, remembering the inflexible firmness with which Paul's invitation had been given.

"Capital," added the King, "and I shouldn't be surprised if we found that you had assisted Destiny to a very considerable extent."

CHAPTER XIX

MARVIN arrived at Southampton at six that evening, four hours ahead of time, in *Express III*, and with him came Mr. Dumont Lawson, summoned by a very urgent cable from his partner and lieutenant.

In the United States things had been going from bad to worse with the Corporation. All the securities in which its members were interested had steadily depreciated. Most of its works, even the great establishment at Pittsburg, were running short or shut down altogether. Its best officials were resigning, and its men kept going on strike and not apparently worrying about the means of subsistence. There was an enormous difficulty in obtaining coal and raw material, even from its own mines, in consequence of perpetual strikes on the most frivolous excuses, and the President had begun to notice that if it placed orders abroad for fuel or raw material the firms which accepted them speedily lost their men, however well they were paid. In fact it was this apparently world-wide boycott of the Corporation and all its works that had so desperately alarmed the usually imperturbable Mr. Schmidt, and had brought the angry and mystified President over to Europe.

It had been a sore humiliation to him to be forced to travel on board one of the boats whose performances had almost wrecked both the prospects and the finances of the great Shipping Combine, but hours might mean millions now, and therefore time was of consequence.

Besides, so many mysterious accidents such as the breaking of shafts and the loss of propeller blades had been happening to the ships of the Combine, while the *Expresses* ran with unfailing regularity and invariably within their contract time of a hundred hours.

Meanwhile, too, that inexplicable gold-tide had been rising higher and higher both in America and England, and obscure firms, with apparently illimitable capital to play with, had been keeping up such a state of utter uncertainty on Wall Street by means of the most reckless buying and selling that legitimate business had come practically to a stand-still. The same, too, in a lesser degree was happening on the London Stock Exchange and the Continental bourses, and every foreign loan, no matter how good the security, had somehow come to grief.

On the passage Mr. Lawson had had several very interesting conversations with Marvin, who now made no secret of the air-ships and submarines and the uses they were intended for. He also owned in a sort of non-committal way to knowing something about the mysterious millions which were automatically piling themselves up, flowing from nowhere into the banks and treasure-houses of Britain and America. But as to the origin of this seemingly magic flood he could learn nothing. The moment that subject was even indirectly touched upon he might as well have been

talking to the Sphinx itself. All the poor satisfaction that he could get was just this:

"Well, Mr. Lawson, I made you a fair offer to begin with and you thought it suited your book best to decline. I guess you've got to fight now, and if you have overrated the strength of your commercial opponent that is your funeral, not mine."

The *Anonyma* had immediately returned to London from Portsmouth, doing the seventy-two miles under the half-hour, and, after depositing her Royal and Imperial passengers at the gates of Marlborough House, had found a temporary resting-place in the court yard of St. James's Palace under a strong guard of wondering sentries with loaded rifles and fixed bayonets.

A message had been left at Southampton for Marvin asking him to join Paul and the Duke at dinner in Park Lane, and so he had come up in the *Columbia*, which set him down in Hyde Park and immediately returned to the general quarters of the squadron at Southampton Docks. There were three other guests at dinner that night, who came in strict incognito the King, the Kaiser, and the Prince of Wales; and from this it may be inferred that the quiet little dinner-party was one of no ordinary importance.

But there was another dinner party of at least equal importance that night at Franklin Deventer's mansion in Grosvenor Place. There was only two ladies present at either party, Lady Margaret and Paul's mother at Mark Lane; and Mrs. Deventer and Eirene at Grosvenor Place; but there was another guest at Mr. Deventer's table whose presence would have occasioned some little surprise if not apprehension at Park Lane.

This was Count Feodor Dourinoff, one of the principal secretaries to the Russian Embassy in London. He had been introduced to Miss Eirene at a ball at the Embassy to which Mr. Schmidt had secured an invitation for the family on the strength of the enormous interests owned in Russia by the Corporation. Miss Deventer's dazzling beauty and the perhaps equally dazzling aureole which the glitter of her father's millions caused to shine about her, had speedily added the handsome and impressionable young Russian to the already long list of her victims, and, after a long and earnest consultation with her father and brother, she had decided to turn her conquest to the best of apparently possible uses.

The first result of an interview which Dumont Lawson had had with Mr. Schmidt immediately on his arrival was a decision to put the whole resources of the Corporation, if need be, in money and material, at the disposal of the Powers which had now definitely joined issue with the Kingston-Marvin Syndicate, and that was why Count Feodor had his legs under Mr. Deventer's mahogany that night.

No politics were talked at dinner, although, as was only natural, the conversation ran mainly, in fact, entirely on the extraordinary events which had kept the world agog with wonder and excitement since the arrival of *Express I.* and her aërial consort; but when the gentlemen had accepted Mrs. Deventer's invitation to take their coffee and liqueurs, and smoke their cigarettes in what their hostess called the divan—a cosy room luxuriously furnished in oriental style—the real business of the evening began.

Count Feodor knew perfectly well that he had not

been invited out of sheer hospitality, or that he might feast his enamoured eyes on the radiant charms of Miss Eirene. He was too well practised in diplomacy for that; but at the same time, if he had been invited for a purpose, he had also come with very definite intentions and instructions. He had been given quite plainly to understand that his business was to conclude if possible—and the word impossible is an ugly one in the mouths of those who serve Holy Russia—to conclude an informal but none the less binding alliance between the European League, as it might conveniently be called, and the Corporation and its allies, considered always as the financial foes of the Kingston-Marvin Syndicate.

In consequence of the failure of the loan, which had come to grief through sudden and enormous withdrawals of gold from the Bank of France and the Austrian Reichsbank, Russia was rapidly approaching an almost desperate financial position. It had, in fact, become a certainty that, in spite of the perfection of her naval and military preparations, she would not be able to keep her armies and fleets on a war footing for many weeks unless she found an ally able and willing to furnish her with that most potent weapon of all—gold—and this ally Count Feodor and his chiefs hoped to find in the great Dumont-Lawson Corporation and its associates—all of which facts were just as well known by Lawson and his friends as they were to the Russian Government.

“The central fact of the whole situation seems to me,” said the President after a little introductory talk had run round the room, “that it will be very difficult if not possible for us to make this suggested alliance

effective as long as what I may call our friends the enemy retain possession of these air-ships and submarines to say nothing of the *Express* transports. Whether the people who control them also are engineering this extraordinary increase in the world's gold-supply and the equally unaccountable disturbance in the stock markets can't of course be proved, but I don't think myself that there is very much doubt about it. Anyhow, it seems to me that if they don't they ought to."

A little silence, a silence of intense thought, followed this speech. There was no mistaking its meaning. With the usual directness of his pitilessly logical interest the great American Steel-King had gone straight to the root of the matter, and it was perfectly evident to those who heard him that he, at any rate, was fully prepared to carry out his implied proposition to any lengths and by any means that might be found necessary.

Eirene looked across at her brother and he remembered a portion of a certain conversation which had passed between them not very long ago. He saw now more clearly than before why, longing as she did for the Lord of the Air, she had condescended to enslave an ordinary Secretary to a possibly hostile Embassy.

"Would it be allowable," began Count Feodor slowly, "to conclude that the absolute necessity of, well, shall I say treating these people, the owners of these air-ships and submarines who have apparently ignored all the decencies of civilized life by attempting to impose their arbitrary will upon the constituted Governments and Sovereign States of Europe, as the common enemies of the human race?"

"I should certainly entirely agree with you there, Count," said Miss Eirene, leaning back in her chair, holding a little egg-shell coffee-cup poised very daintily between her finger and thumb, "and if our interests are identical, as they seem to be, I think we should bring matters to a head quicker if we started out understanding one another quite frankly. Don't you think so, Count?"

If anybody else in the room, her mother, for instance, had made such a remark it would have had the effect of sending Count Feodor Dourinoff definitely back into his official shell; but there was a good deal more than words could convey in the accent with which these words were spoken, and yet more in the smile and the glance which accompanied them. As had happened to many another of his kind before him, Feodor Dourinoff did not know that when a woman is born for diplomacy no man not a genius has a chance with her.

He heard the tones rather than the words, and, perhaps, he paid more attention than he should have done to the smile of those lovely lips and the glance of those bewildering eyes. At any rate he was thrown off his guard for the moment, and he said, with just a tinge of hesitation which was instantly appraised at his true value by the keen intellects that were waiting to make use of him:

"I quite see the great importance of your meaning, Mr. Deventer. What you really mean is, I suppose, that we should play this game, of which the stakes are practically the mastery of the world, as the English say, with the cards on the table?"

"If we are all playing the same hands, Count,"

said Dumont Lawson, getting up and putting his hands in his pockets, "and I reckon that is what you mean, we may as well—in fact we've *got* to show each other what cards we hold so that we can play them as required. But of course you don't suppose that the other side are going to do that to us?"

"Not half!" laughed Franklin Deventer, "I reckon they have got too many trumps in their hands for that, and perhaps one or two up their sleeves that we know nothing about yet. No; I reckon that if we are going together into this game to win or lose all there is to be got hold of, the best we can do is to be absolutely honest with each other. Now, Count, our hand is mostly composed of diamonds—in other words dollars."

"Hearts don't appear yet to come into the game just here," laughed Eirene softly, with a swiftly-passing glance at the Count, "may be they will later on."

"The game of life was never yet played without them," said Feodor Dourinoff with an unmistakable emphasis, "and it never will be."

"No I don't suppose it will," said Dumont Lawson, "but just here I reckon its a case of heads more than hearts. Now, he went on, "to use the language of poker, which I reckon everyone in this room understands, we are playing for a mighty big pot and we haven't a show of winning unless we know what cards we've got and play them as such, so I suggest a showdown to begin with. Mine, as Miss Eirene said just now, are diamonds and I think I can pretty well call a flush at that."

"We're leaving the ladies out for the present," said

Mr. Deventer, "I guess we may pretty well declare the same. What do you say, Mr Schmidt?"

"The same," he replied, "with clubs if necessary. What's your price, Count?"

"Since hearts are to be left out," said the Russian, "I should declare a full hand of clubs."

"That sounds like business," laughed Eirene, quickly seizing the occasion, "and now how big are they, Count?"

She leant back in her arm-chair and looked at him over the top of her feather-fringed fan as she said this. Their eyes met for a moment—and in that moment the remains of Count Feodor's reserve melted away.

"I have said that I would declare clubs," he began with an assurance that was perhaps born of a certain form of intoxication. "Because clubs in cards are the symbol of force. You gentlemen are possessed of the force which is behind that which I suggest—the power which moves armies and fleets and keeps them effective for war. I have only spoken of the force which might be employed swiftly even rudely, perhaps, to suddenly wrest their most potent weapons from the hands of those whom I suppose all here will agree with me in calling our enemies."

"You've got there in once Count," said Dumont Lawson putting his hands on his knees and straightening his back. "I guess everyone here takes your meaning—which, put into plain American, is just this: we've got to have those air-ships and submarines. It doesn't matter about spending a few million dollars on it. They're worth the money and if anybody gets hurt over the transfer of the property, well, we have all got too much at stake, financially and politically

to worry much about that. And now, since we seem to understand each other fairly well, in the language of the immortal game, it's your call. What's it to be?"

CHAPTER XX

"BRIEFLY this," replied the Count; "none of us here owe any loyalty to Great Britain and none of us, as far as I know, have any particular reason to love her. My own government, I may say quite confidentially now that we are allies, is practically on the brink of war with her and I may add that Russia does not wage war after the ridiculous fashion of the English in South Africa. With us all is fair in war—and love—provided only that it is expedient; and all methods, would, I think, be expedient to obtain possession of such priceless instruments of warfare as these air-ships and submarines.

"Now, I will charge myself with the capture, at any rate, of the air-ships, but, as I said just now, it will be very expensive work and, to be quite candid with you, I could not under present circumstances, ask my Government for a credit for such purposes. In addition to that, I am not at all sure that my chief would consent to my taking an active part in such a venture."

"Well, anyhow, Count, I should say," interrupted Lawson, "that we had better, as I might put it, play a lone hand in this game. It isn't one for Government interference, and I reckon that if Uncle Sam got an official hand in it it would be a pretty cold day for some of us."

"Ugh!" laughed Miss Eirene with a mock shudder "I should think so. Why, they might even have the

bad taste at Washington to call such a thing an act of piracy against a friendly Power and that is a hanging or an electrocuting matter. Isn't it, Poppa?"

"That's so, Eirene," replied her father; "those ships don't fly any regular flag, but they have flown the eagle of Germany and the Royal Standard of England, and so what we propose to do would be quite enough to get everyone here penal servitude for life at the very least, and so now I reckon we know where we are."

"Well, I must say," said Mrs. Deventer, looking round the room, "that you are as respectable-looking a lot of pirates as ever came together. Still," she went on more seriously, "I don't think this is a sort of thing for women to be mixed up in, so I guess you had better leave Eirene and me out."

"Certainly not, Mother!" replied her daughter, answering an admiring glance from the Count with one that set his nerves tingling. "Why, it's my idea. Say now, Franklin, didn't you and I talk this over at the Carlton days and days ago and didn't we decide to do it at any price—yes any," she repeated, glancing half-defiantly round the little circle. "This is as big a thing as Cleopatra herself ever went for; in fact it is a lot bigger, and I'm ready to take big risks for it."

"That's so, Eirene!" said her brother with a laugh which only she understood. "It was your idea first and I reckon you've got the grit to see it through. Yes, gentlemen, this is the original conspirator and I was the second."

"And if we succeed," said the Count in his soft Russian voice, "the realms of the air could have no fairer queen!"

"That was very prettily said, Count!" laughed

Eirene, rewarding him with a glance into which he put a great deal more meaning than she did. "But I'm not so sure that Franklin will agree with you. You see, there is another Queen already, or, anyhow, someone that looks like a claimant to the throne, and I reckon the present Lord of the Air wouldn't be at all sorry to have her share it with him. What do you think about the Lady Margaret's prospects, Mother?"

An unwonted hardness had crept into her tone as she spoke the last few words and its significance was not by any means lost upon Feodor Dourinoff. His quick, highly-trained intellect instantly divined her real meaning. She was ambitious—this beautiful daughter of the New Democracy—she would be Queen of the Air, and, as she had practically said, she was ready to go to any lengths to accomplish her ambition.

And now came the question—who was to be Lord of the Air? One thing was quite certain; failure in such a desperate enterprise would mean for him disgrace and ruin, probably Sakhalien for life, for Russia never forgives those who fail. At the same time she rewards success, however attained, with lavish hand. If he could only capture this wonderful winged squadron or even a single cruiser and take it to Petersburg or Kronstadt flying the Russian flag he could ask his Imperial Master for anything and no one would worry very much as to how he got it.

And then he would be able to ask another question; perhaps to win another prize. Nevertheless he recognised with perfect clearness that the girl who had just spoken as Eirene Deventer had done would put ambition before everything, and that she meant to be Queen of the Air, whoever her consort might be.

"I should say from what I saw when we were taking that trip on the *Anonyma*," said Mrs. Deventer after a little pause, "that Lady Margaret wouldn't have to beckon twice to have the present Lord of the Air at her feet; and I think she is ready to beckon just as soon as the moment comes along. But this is hardly the sort of talk for conspirators," she went on, "and I suppose I've got to join in after what you have said, though personally I would rather you all left it alone."

"We can't do that, my dear," said her husband, "we've lost millions over it already and there is only one way of getting them back. It's a pretty desperate case and so it wants desperate measures. If we let these people go on running things as they are doing every cent we've got will go after what we have lost, and if the Count has found, as I suppose he has, a workable scheme—well, I guess I for one am going into it with both feet."

"That's so," said Dumont Lawson, "and I reckon that is about the opinion of all of us. And now, Count, you can bring along your scheme as soon as convenient."

There was silence for a few moments before the Count replied. He was perfectly well aware that he was dealing with men, and for the matter of that, with women too, who would make use of him with a quite impersonal unscrupulousness just as long as he was of use and no longer. These men were going to conspire with him to rob their own countrymen, and, for all he knew, their own country, of what must in the end mean the control of the world. It was only another proof of the old principle that capital has neither patriotism nor country. The Jews had proved that long ago and the modern money-kings were prov-

ing it again. It was dollars to begin with and to end with—dollars first, last and all the time, as they say in the Land of the Dollar.

He could do nothing without these men's dollars, but he was risking something more than money, the honour of an ancient house, his liberty and, perhaps, his life, while these men were only, after all, gambling with hard cash. It was only fair that the risks should at least be equal, and so, turning to the President, he said:

"I fully agree with you that we are playing, as you said some time ago, for very large stakes and that therefore we must run great risks. This, I am sure you will agree with me, is not a matter to be entered upon lightly, and I am quite sure that gentlemen as deeply versed in affairs as you are would think none too well of me if I were to lay an imperfect scheme before you. You know we Russians have an old saying which has a good deal of wisdom in it 'Take thy thoughts to bed with thee, for the morning is wiser than the evening.' That is what, with your permission, I propose to do.

"I must remind you also that we shall have to be guided to a considerable extent by the events of the next few days. We do not know yet what reply our friends the enemy will make to the Joint Note of the Powers, which will be officially communicated tomorrow. Seven days is the period which will be given for consideration, and if the reply is not favourable the result will be war."

"But look here, Count," said Dumont Lawson, bringing a heavy hand down on his knee, "that will never do. We don't want war, and we can't have it. As matters stand now it would mean absolute ruin."

"Quite so, quite so, my dear sir," replied the Count in his gentlest tones, "I fully agree with you that as matters stand now war would be disastrous, both to your interests and those of my Imperial Master and his allies; but once we are in possession of this aërial squadron or even the flag-ship, which is, I believe, larger and much swifter than the others, war would be all to our advantage. That one vessel would terrorise a continent—a world—and the levying of what we may call indemnities would be a matter of the most perfect ease."

"Exactly, Count," replied Lawson, "but suppose we haven't got her before the seven days are up, or suppose she has vanished into the skies before then. What is to happen? How are we to prevent war in that case?"

"Before that the inevitable will have happened one way or the other, my dear sir, replied the Count. "To-morrow I will meet you, say, in one of the arbitration rooms at the Middle Temple, at four o'clock and put my scheme before you in the shape of a document which will set forth our mutual obligations. Meanwhile my preparations will already be far advanced and I can assure you that if my proposals are found acceptable we shall have succeeded or failed within three days of the signing of the documents which I shall have the honour of placing before you."

"Well, that's business anyhow, Lawson," said Mr. Deventer, "and I reckon for the present we have got to leave it at that. And now, we may as well declare this conspirators' seance closed for the present, eh?"

"That's so," said Lawson taking the hint, "we have got about as far as we can go until we see the Count's full scheme to-morrow. You'll see about the

room, Count, I suppose; and now that we've relieved ourselves for the present of the cares of state, what's the matter, Deventer, with a game of poker? It strikes me as being pretty appropriate."

"A very good suggestion indeed!" exclaimed Miss Eirene. "Count, of course you play. All Russians are magnificent gamblers and, in the greatest game of all, usually winners, so you'll take a hand, won't you?"

It was wickedly said and wickedly intended, but the straight outlook which accompanied the words was still more wicked. To the man through whose eyes it pierced into his soul it meant, as he thought:—

"I know you want me—win and you shall have me."

It was not quite the correct reading, but as far as he was concerned it was near enough for all practical purposes.

Franklin brought out the card-table and found a couple of new packs while Miss Eirene was apportioning the chips. In deference to the comparative poverty of the guest of the evening, the only man present who couldn't sign his cheque for six figures, she proposed just a friendly game; pound bets and a five pound raise—no limit. This was agreed to and the game began.

Feodor Dourinoff had played this and many other games in all the best clubs in Europe, but he had never seen anything quite like this particular game. Eirene was the only lady at the table. The others players were her father, Dumont Lawson, Mr. Schmidt and the Count. Franklin and his mother stood out for a little chat on their own account which was not without its importance in the other and greater game that was about to be played.

Dumont Lawson, Mr. Schmidt and Franklin Deventer, senior, played poker as they did business—the hard game, taking as few chances as possible and giving none. Feodor Dourinoff played as a born gambler would, with a combination of dash and caution which at times deceived even the men who were accustomed to gamble in thousands and to think in millions.

But none of them played quite as Miss Eirene did. Both her father and Dumont Lawson knew that she was one of the best players at the Manhattan Ladies' Club, of which she and her mother had been the founders, but to-night she seemed to excel herself in the brilliant subtlety of her play and when the last pot came round, just before twelve o'clock, she opened it for a pound. Everyone came in; her father raised her five; Lawson raised him and went five better, Schmidt raised the President and went fifteen better, and the Count put it up to fifty.

He was dealing and Miss Eirene took one card. Dourinoff looked at her for a moment as though he wanted to see into her soul, but he might just as well have tried to look through the marble mask of the Venus de Milo. When Eirene Deventer was playing poker her face seemed to crystallise into a beautiful but absolutely expressionless rigidity which only relaxed into something like expression when it suited her game to do so.

Her father, who was sitting next to her, took two cards, Dumont Lawson took one, Mr. Schmidt took two, and the Count, after a moment's fatal hesitation, said he would play what he had. Then the betting began and went merrily round the table until there was about five hundred pounds in the pot. Then Mr.

Schmidt went out. It rose to six hundred before Mr. Deventer had had enough. It rose another hundred and then Dumont Lawson said with a just perceptible snap of his eyelids:—

"I don't know what you young people are playing at, but just to see what you are made of, I'll put it up another hundred."

"There's your hundred, sir," said the Count, "and you are up another."

"And there is your two hundred, Count," said Miss Eirene, smiling with dangerous sweetness at him across the table, "and you are up another hundred."

"I guess this is no place for me," said the President, throwing his cards into the middle of the table, "I'm done. Now Miss Eirene, play as though you had got them."

"It's the Count's next say," she said with another smile across the table.

"It's thirteen hundred so far, isn't it?" asked her opponent.

"That's an unlucky number," she laughed; "and so I won't see you at it. It's up two hundred."

"Then at that I will see you," said the Count, "but I'm afraid you have lost."

"Put them down," said Miss Eirene with American directness, "I've got four queens."

"Ah, douraki!" exclaimed the Count, forgetting his manners for the moment. "And I have four knaves!"

"That's pretty mean luck," said Eirene as she raked in the pot. "Still," she went on in a softer tone, "queens always do beat knaves."

Then she raised her eyes and said with a quite bewildering mingling of sympathy and defiance in her voice:

"Now, if those knaves had only been kings, Count?"

"Exactly," he said rising as the others did so.

"The next time they may be kings—who knows?"

"I hope they will be," she said.

CHAPTER XXI

WHILE the poker game was being played at the Deventer's mansion in Grosvenor Place, what was practically a council of war was being held in Park Lane; but at this no ladies were present. After dinner Lady Margaret had taken Mrs. Marvin into her own daintily-furnished little "den," as she called it, and the conversation which took place there was, in its ultimate effects, not less important than the discussion in the Duke's library; for before it ended certain confidences had been exchanged which were not without considerable effect upon the future fortunes of the world.

Gillette Marvin's keen, cold intellect had served both himself and his friend in good stead during the consultation with the King and the Emperor. The Kaiser, of course, like the excellent man of business that he is, was playing to a certain extent for his own hand; but even he had met his match in the quick-witted, widely informed Westerner, and both the King and the Prince were vastly amused by the progress of the politely waged contest.

There was now no doubt as to the practical alliance between the Empire and the Lords of sea and air. That had been to all intents and purposes settled in Lady Margaret's "den." She was England's most potent ambassador, and Paul's mother was, in diplomatic language, the other High Contracting Party;

but although the Kaiser recognised that such an alliance would be practically irresistible, especially if supported, as Marvin had indirectly given him to understand it would be, by the vast resources of the United States, and another Power at which he only vaguely hinted, still the pride of the German War Lord would not permit him to come into even such an alliance, as it were, on sufferance.

He was playing for a guarantee that, if he added his signature to King Edward's on a document which was to be carried to Washington next morning by the *Columbia* for the inspection of President Roosevelt, the air-ships and submarines should be placed under the joint control of a new Triple Alliance, consisting of Great Britain, the United States and Germany.

"I'm afraid I shall have to tell your Majesty that you are asking a little to much," said Marvin after the question had been thrashed out at a considerable length, "we cannot consent to anything in the nature of political or military control. If we did we should become exactly what we don't propose to be, and that is part and parcel of the European International System. Your Majesty will, I think, see that, if we did that, we should of necessity bind ourselves to use what I think you will admit to be a practically irresistible force for the settling of political quarrels which don't concern us in the slightest.

"Our interests are not in any sense political, military or financial. We are not worrying over politics; we are too strong to trouble about military or naval matters; and, to be quite candid with you, we are too rich to care about finance. What we want is peace and the removal of all restrictions on the industrial activities of mankind. In other words," he went on

with a half-sarcastic smile, "we really want and somehow we are going to have what the European nations have been saying they wanted for quite a long time without making any particular efforts to get it."

The Kaiser had never anything put to him quite so plainly before, but he saw the situation and accepted it with perfect frankness.

"I quite see what you mean, Mr. Marvin," he said with a laugh, "I agree with you absolutely in the abstract, but you know philosophy and politics are not always the same things. I wish they were, and I can assure you that they would be if I had my way. That is just why I have made the proposal that this power of yours, which you rightly call irresistible, shall be vested in what I may term the Triple Control. No one suspects your intentions, but I must remind you that states and empires live longer than men, and that those who may inherit this power from you might possibly be tempted to use it less unselfishly and philosophically than you would; and you can, of course, see that, under such circumstances, the lordship of the air and sea might develop an intolerable tyranny against which the whole human race would revolt."

"Quite so, your Majesty," said Marvin, "but I might as well remind you that states and empires have a habit of tearing up treaties when it doesn't suit them to keep them in force any longer; and that is our reason why we cannot consent to the control. You know better than I do that the history of international treaties is not an altogether encouraging one for people who want to believe in human nature."

The War Lord frowned and then laughed, and King Edward, seeing that matters were approaching

something like a crisis, put his elbows on the table, leant forward and said with one of his all-convincing smiles:—

“It seems to me that there is a way out of this difficulty. It would of course be quite absurd for the German Emperor or the King of England, or anyone else who knows the circumstances to ignore the fact that the genius of Mr. Kingston and the enterprise of Mr. Marvin have created a new world-power which has to be reckoned with just as seriously as any of the regularly constituted States. We have their assurance that they intend to use this power solely in the interests of peace, and for the removal of all unfair restrictions of commercial development.

“Under the circumstances, do you not think it would be enough if our three friends signed a joint document with us binding themselves to work, not under, but with the Triple Control, provided always that the President of the United States finds himself able to subscribe to the agreement? If this is done we shall be able to publish the document as soon as it returns from America, and I think that it would prove a very effective reply to the Joint Note, which, I believe, we are to expect to-morrow.”

“I think you have found the golden mean,” laughed the Kaiser, accepting the compromise with the perfect good temper of the accomplished diplomatist. “I shall not have the slightest objection to signing the document your Majesty suggests.”

“And I shall have the greatest pleasure signing it on behalf of what His Majesty the King has been good enough to call the new world-power,” replied

the Duke, "and in saying that I think I am speaking for my colleagues."

"That's all we want, Paul, isn't it?" asked Marvin.

"Everything," he replied. Then, looking up, he continued very quietly, but in a tone which perhaps meant more than even his words—

"I think this is as good a time as any to tell your Majesty and your Royal Highness that this power, the secret of which is known only to myself, and the man who made it possible for me to realize it will never be used save in the interests of peace. If I had reason to believe that he would use it otherwise—although he is the husband of my mother—I would shoot him without hesitation, and I am convinced that if he believed the same of me he would do exactly the same thing."

"That's so, Paul," said Marvin. "I would—just because you wouldn't be fit to live, any more than I should, if I had that sort of idea."

"And after that," said the Prince, "I don't think the world can ask for any further guarantee of our friends' good faith."

"For my part I am perfectly satisfied," said the Kaiser, "When men like Mr. Kingston and Mr. Marvin tell us they are prepared to shoot each other for the sake of principle I don't think any minor difficulties need be considered. And now the next thing, I suppose, is to put the matter into writing."

It so happened that, just at this moment, two somewhat important questions were being asked and answered in Lady Margaret's "den" in Park Lane and in a corner of the big drawing-room at Grosvenor Place. The questions were practically identical; the answers were somewhat different.

"I wonder why," said Feodor Dourinoff, almost in a whisper, to Miss Eirene, who was sitting beside him on a low, broad sofa, "why his present Majesty of the Air has called his flag-ship the *Anonyma*? Of course the name can only be a provisional one."

"I suppose so," she said, turning one of her swift, dazzling glances upon him, "it must be, since *Anonyma* means nameless, anyhow. Perhaps he is waiting for someone to give her a name."

"Yes," replied the Count, looking at her from under his long black lashes, "her name, for example."

"Hers—who's?" she asked almost angrily.

"I don't think there can be very much doubt about that," he replied, seeing his advantage and instantly taking hold of it, "but when she is mine as she will be in a week, I shall not ask Lady Margaret Lorraine to be her name-mother. According to the old legend the first men who attempted the conquest of the air were Greeks, and when the *Anonyma* is mine she shall bear a Greek name—if you will christen her."

"We will talk about that, Count, when you have got the ship," she replied smiling back at him. Now, Mother is going to bed and I am going too. Good-night!"

They rose, and as they shook hands she allowed hers to remain in his just long enough to give him the assurance that when the *Anonyma* really was his, there would not be much difficulty about the renaming of her.

The other question was asked by Lady Margaret:

"Why is it," she said to Mrs. Marvin, "that your son has given names to his four smaller ships and none to the flagship? Of course, it was only natural that he should name the first one after you; but the swift-

est and most splendid of them all—why should she be the *Anonyma*, the nameless?"

"It may be that Paul hasn't found a suitable name for her yet, replied Mrs. Marvin," or perhaps he is waiting for someone to name her as I did the *Sheila*."

The words were spoken quietly and almost impersonally, but they were accompanied by a glance which brought the blood very swiftly to Lady Margaret's cheeks. She didn't know exactly what to say, so she contented herself with saying:—

"Oh yes, of course; very likely," and then she promptly changed the subject.

Before dawn the next morning the *Columbia* was winging her way at full speed towards Washington, and shortly after sunrise the next day she descended in front of the White House, and Marvin alighted to make his request that the President would receive him as early as possible as the Envoy Extraordinary of their Majesty's of Great Britain and Germany.

The stories of the strange doings of the air-ships and submarines had already been published, in some cases with lavish embroideries, by the American press, and as even a President of the United States does not every day receive an envoy from the two most powerful Empires in the world, who comes riding royally on the wings of the wind across three thousand miles of ocean, Mr. Roosevelt, always an early riser, got up a little earlier that morning and by six o'clock Marvin was taking coffee with him in the breakfast-room of the White House.

Meanwhile the President had sent urgent invitations to the members of his Cabinet to attend a Council as soon as possible for the discussion of the most mo-

mentous document that had ever been presented to the Government of the United States.

But after all it turned out that there was very little to consider. The same quietly and firmly-put arguments that had convinced the King of England and the German Emperor also convinced the President and his advisers, and their conviction was all the easier since the policy of the States was practically identical with that of the Lords of the Sea and Air, save in one particular. The assembled Senators kicked vigorously and unanimously against the clause which provided for the abolition of all protective tariffs within the Triple Control and a universal and prohibitive tariff against all countries which stood outside it.

Marvin heard their arguments in respectful silence and then he astounded them by a speech which it would have considerably shaken up Messrs. Dumont Lawson and Schmidt if they had had to listen to it.

"Mr. President and Gentlemen," he began, "I am, of course, speaking to you now as statesmen in council, and therefore in the most absolute confidence."

The President bowed assent and he went on. "I see that we differ on one point only. That is the question of trusts and tariffs which, after all, I think you will agree with me, come practically to the same thing. The trusts could not exist without the tariffs, and these without trusts would be needless, and I am going to dispose of that difficulty in a somewhat unexpected way, which, I hope however, you will find satisfactory. You, of course, know from what you have already read that I and my partners have sufficient material force at our disposal to paralyse the fleets and armies of the world and to terrorise its greatest

cities into submission. That we do not propose to do, because we are the friends and not the enemies of humanity. At the same time it is necessary to tell you that when this document is published in reply to the Joint Note, which by this time will have been received in London, and which the Ministers of the Powers will probably present to Mr. President to-day, it is rather more than probable that war will be declared."

"Are matters really as serious as that, Mr. Marvin?" said the President. "Of course, with these marvellous air-ships of yours you have an immense advantage over us as regards news. I may say, gentlemen," he went on, "that Mr. Marvin has brought a copy of yesterday's *Times* from London, and if you don't believe me—well, there it is."

The miracle was passed round. For the first time Americans saw in America a London paper bearing the date of the previous day.

"Good enough," said the Vice-President, putting the paper on the table, "I reckon we don't want any more convincing than that," Now Mr. Marvin, please; you've got a pretty attentive audience. What about trusts and tariffs?

"Well, sir," replied Marvin quietly: "They have got to go unless the United States wants to be left out of this deal—and the reason is just this. We shall stop the war in Europe, if it is declared, by crippling war-ships and wrecking a few fortresses just to convince our friends the enemy that we are not fooling with them; but we shall do more than that. We have the gold supplies of Europe at our command, and I needn't tell you that nations can no more fight without gold than they can without powder and shot."

"The gold supplies of Europe!" exclaimed the Secretary of the Treasury with something like a gasp, "well, Mr. Marvin, there is only one explanation of that. You are not only the men who have made the conquest of the air. You are also the people who have been putting the money-markets of the world in general, and Wall Street in particular, upside down. In other words it is you who control this almost miraculous flood of gold that has been flowing into the United States Treasury and keeping the Assay Office and the Mint working over-time for months past."

"That is so, Mr. Secretary," replied Marvin drily, "we are the gold-bugs, and I may say quite frankly that that is the weapon we propose to use against trusts and tariffs. We think civilized humanity has had all it wants of them and they've got to close down or find worse trouble than the Iron and Steel Corporation and the Shipping Ring, and that inhuman Beef Trust did a few months ago. That sounds pretty tall talk, I know, but it is just the cold truth. If our proposals are not agreed to we will fight money with money. For every dollar that the Trusts can put down we will put down a hundred. If necessary we will make gold as cheap as copper. In other words, we will absolutely destroy its purchasing power."

"But my dear sir," interrupted the President, completely startled out of his official reserve, "that means that you must possess some unknown and inexhaustible source of gold!"

"I am not going as far as that, Mr. President," said Marvin, "but I will say this—that if necessary we can put three thousand tons weight of standard gold on the markets of the world here and in Europe within

a fortnight, and if you find it impossible to believe me I will sign an order before I go back to London for five hundred tons of it to be delivered to the United States Assay Office within twenty-four hours. In fact I will hand the order to the Secretary of the Treasury right here, and he shall prove it for himself."

"I guess I'll take your word for it Mr. Marvin," laughed the Secretary. "We've more of your stuff than we can handle now, and if it got out that we had as much as that piled on to us the bottom would fall out of every market in the States to-morrow."

That was practically the end of the argument, and after about an hour's discussion of details the President, with the consent of his Cabinet, signed his name alongside those of the other High Contracting Parties. The Vice-President countersigned, and then, after a glass of champagne, Marvin invited the President and his Ministers to lunch on board the *Columbia*, and an aerial trip along the eastern coast to Boston and back by Panama and Chicago; an offer which, after the experiences of the King of England and the German Emperor, they did not see any reason for refusing.

CHAPTER XXII

THE task which Feodor Dourinoff had set himself to do appeared practically impossible to his fellow conspirators. To carry off the most celebrated craft in the world from her berth in the midst of the busy Southampton Docks, constantly guarded at all approaches, to say nothing of the *Anonyma's* two consorts keeping mutual watch over her, was one which might well task the subtlest intellect and the most daring courage.

The Russian, as he told his associates frankly when they signed the document which bound them to fall or stand together by the success or failure of the desperate undertaking, relied upon three factors for working out the problem; first bribery, then treachery, and then, if needs be, force. But the bribery had to come first, and after Franklin Deventer and Dumont Lawson had put their names to the bond by which they undertook to pay a million sterling for the *Anonyma*, or for her two consorts, they each signed a cheque for ten thousand pounds on account, one payable to "Walter H. Johnson, Esq.," and the other to "H. Sydney Lowell." These were endorsed by the Count in different handwritings, and that evening he

had ten thousand pounds in notes and gold in his American roll-top writing-desk in his chambers at Hyde Park Court.

He had not given his confederates any definite idea as to how he was going to work. He told them quite plainly that they could give him no further assistance for the present. They had given him the money to work with, and that was all he wanted. His methods were not theirs and he was not at liberty to disclose them; but within a couple of days or so they would be able, he hoped, to judge them by results.

Precisely at ten that evening there was a knock at his sitting-room door and a servant came in with a card. He looked at it and read the name "Mr. Marcus Nowells."

"Show Mr. Nowells up and set out the spirit case and the cigars, Dmitri," he said in Russian.

"Yes, Nobleness," replied the man vanishing.

Mr. Marcus Nowells, a tall, well set-up, well-groomed man of about forty, who would have been a good deal more distinguished-looking if his eyes had been farther apart and not quite so deep-set, returned the Count's greeting with a suspicion of deference which would have suggested to a keen observer that their mutual relationship was not exactly that of friendship on equal terms; and Feodor Dourinoff unmistakably took this view; for as soon as Dmitri had put out the spirit decanters and soda water and placed beside them a carved oak box containing cigars and cigarettes, he said, quite in the tone of a superior addressing a subordinate:—

"Help yourself, Mr. Nowells, and sit down. You had better make yourself comfortable because our chat will be rather a long one."

Mr. Nowells thanked his host and did as he was bidden. The Count lit a cigar and leant back in his deep arm-chair, and after one or two thoughtful whiffs began with a slowness and deliberation which immediately told his hearer that something important was coming.

"You have served my Imperial Master for a good many years now, Mr. Nowells, in one capacity and another, and your intelligence and devotion have, as you know, been both recognised and rewarded. Russia knows how to recompense fidelity as well as she knows how to punish bad faith, and that is why you stand as well as you do at Petersburg. Everything you have done for us has, I may say, been done skilfully and with a secrecy which does great credit to your intelligence. At the same time I need hardly tell you that the path of a man of your profession, as we may call it, is beset with pitfalls and, of course, Governments can only award their agents when they succeed; they cannot protect them when they fail."

"That is one of the conditions of the service," replied Mr. Marcus Nowells quietly, "and of course, it has to be accepted as such; but I hope Count," he went on "that I am not to infer from what you have just said that there is any suspicion of failure in the last piece of work which it was my duty to do for you?"

"Oh no," replied Dourinoff, "quite the contrary; in fact, Mr. Nowells, I only give you your due when I say that you are one of the very few of our English agents who have never made a mistake, and that is the reason why I have selected you to help me in the most difficult and dangerous, but at the same time and for

the same reason, the most important piece of work that was ever undertaken by the Russian secret service. I may tell you before I go any further that no one at the Embassy save myself knows anything of it, and no one will know till we have either succeeded or failed.

"Personally, I am risking everything—the honour of my name and all my future prospects—because if I fail and get found out I know that I can expect nothing but disgrace and banishment for life. On the other hand, if I succeed, Russia will give me and those who have helped me everything that we ask for. For you, if you accept my offer failure will also mean ruin, and success five thousand pounds down and honourable retirement on a thousand a year for life."

The Englishman winced slightly at the words "honourable retirement" for he felt instinctively that only some daring deed of utter treachery against his own country would be rewarded with such magnificence. Still he had pursued his despicable trade too long now, and he had committed himself too deeply to trouble about such scruples as this, so he took a pull at his whisky and soda, and said, looking keenly across at the Count: —

"I understand you perfectly, sir. And now, is it permissible to ask what the work is?"

"It will be when you have signed this paper," said the Count, "but not before."

He pulled open one of the drawers of the desk behind him, took out a folded slip of blue paper and went on, "It will be necessary for you Mr. Nowells to sign this first without seeing what is written on it; but that you have done before, so I don't suppose you

will find any difficulty in doing it now. When you have done that I will take you completely into my confidence."

Marcus Nowells knew what signing these unseen bonds meant—it meant that the spy and instrument delivered himself over body and soul to his employers; that he took all responsibility for the work in hand and confessed his guilt to the Power which would punish him if he were caught. He knew, too, that these bonds were never signed save when some greater act of treachery than usual was contemplated. Still it was all in the day's work for a man like himself, and so he took out his stylographic pen and signed it with two names of which Marcus Nowells was an alias. The other was the name of a man who ten years before had been in the British diplomatic service at Petersburg, and had sold an official secret to save himself from ruin of another sort. It had been the old story, of course. Nations have need for such men as these and it is usually in this way that they are able to command their services.

He handed the paper back to the Count, well knowing that he was now committing himself without hope of redemption, and said:—

"There, sir, I think that is in order, and now, I suppose, I may ask what there is to be done."

When the Count had done telling him he expected him to see him half paralysed by the splendour and daring of the scheme and so he was somewhat astonished when the secret agent said quite calmly:—

"Yes, Count, I thought that was it. In fact, when that first *Express* boat came in and the air-ship followed her it struck me that a million or so wouldn't be

too little for your Government to give for them, and I began to make enquiries at once. It is my duty under the circumstances to tell you that, unless you are prepared to use force and to go to the extreme of blood-shed if necessary, there is not the remotest chance of success.

"Indeed, Mr. Nowells!" replied the Count, looking at him with surprised and angry eyes from under his slightly lifted brows, "that is hardly the sort of language we are accustomed to hear from you."

"And that, Count," replied the spy, more boldly than before, "is the very reason why, if you will permit me to say so, you should place absolute faith in me. You know, sir, better than most people in this country do, that a man who has risked life and liberty in your service as often as I have done would not use such words as that without sufficient cause."

"There is no such word as impossible in the dictionary of the Russian secret service, Mr. Nowells," replied Feodor Dourinoff in a hard dry tone which had a threat in it, "and no one ought to know that better than you to use your own words. Now what are your reasons for that extraordinary speech? Why is this impossible without force and bloodshed?"

"Because, sir," replied the spy, just as quietly as before, "the resources of the Russian secret service have never been pitted against such an enemy as this, and, if you will pardon me saying so, I have some reason to believe that you yourself have not made a very accurate estimate of the strength of the other side."

"What on earth do you mean, Mr. Nowells?" exclaimed the Count, startled for a moment out of his

reserve, and staring at him with angry, questioning eyes, "there is no enemy that Russia is not prepared to meet."

"Pardon me, Count, there may not have been a few months ago, but there is now. To put it into a dozen words," he went on, dropping the ash from his cigar into the tray, "two of our most potent weapons are useless here. You cannot make traitors of men who have no reason to be unfaithful, and you cannot bribe people for whom the very name of money has lost all meaning."

"I should like to get at your meaning a little more directly," said the Count, rising from his chair and standing over him with his hands behind his back, "come now, let us have it in plain language, please. You seem to think that you know something more about these people than I do. What is it?"

"As I was going to say just now," replied the spy, "the servants of these people cannot be bribed; therefore they cannot be made traitors. Without treachery the only possible means of accomplishing what you propose is force. It so happened that the very day the *Express* and the first air-ship arrived, I had some business with our people down at Southampton. It was only natural that such an extraordinary occurrence should make a person like myself want to know more about it, and so instead of coming back to town as I intended to do, I stopped in Southampton and made such inquiries as I thought advisable. As good luck would have it I met two men I knew in other days. One was a quarter-master on board the *Express*, and the other an assistant engineer on the air-ship."

"Then what in the name of common sense do you want more than that to begin with?" exclaimed the Count, "Of course I need not ask whether a man of your proved intelligence and good faith grasped such a magnificent opportunity or failed to make use of such very convenient acquaintances?"

"I did neither, sir," replied the spy with some approach to dignity. "I, of course, recognised at once the enormous power which the possessors of such craft must wield, and therefore what Russia could do with them if she had them. You will understand me when I say that I approached the subject very delicately with my friends; but as soon as we became anything like confidential, I discovered at once that they had taken service under a Power which neither Russia, nor Europe, for the matter of that, could hope to fight against."

"Oh come now, Mr. Nowells," said the Count, "surely that is a little too much to ask me to believe. Too great for Russia—for all Europe—to fight against! Really I don't want to accuse you of romancing, but isn't that just a little too much to ask a man of affairs to believe? And as for bribery, to put it into quite plain language, I can hardly believe you. But perhaps you don't understand the circumstances. I, for example, am ready to authorize you to bribe to the extent of half a million sterling to get possession of even one of those air-ships."

"And she would be well worth it, sir, if you could get her for that. The trouble is that you couldn't."

"What—half a million!" exclaimed the Count. "Nonsense, man! What sort of a fairy-tale are you trying to tell me."

"It would sound more like a fairy tale if you knew

it all, Count," said the spy, taking another sip at his glass. "One of these men, the man on the air-ship happened to be a very old friend of mine. In fact, before I entered my present profession I was able to do his family a very great service. Of course," he continued, with a little note of disgust in his tone, "though he knew who I was one time, he did not know what I am, and so he told me more than he would have done if he had known. He told me enough to convince me that what I have just said to you is perfectly true; that, in other words, you are fighting a force which is perfectly irresistible, at least in regard to all the ordinary measures of what we may call diplomacy."

"But still you have not told me, Mr. Nowells, what that force is," interrupted the Count somewhat impatiently "what is it?"

"Gold," replied the spy, rising to his feet and facing his master, "I tell you, sir, that these people have fenced themselves round with a bulwark that no human power can penetrate. You tell me of half a million—a million. Are you aware, sir, that these people employed in the air-ships and the submarines, which also belong to them, have as much gold as they choose to ask for? The last of their ships that came into port brought five hundred tons of it, and every ounce was theirs. Where it comes from no one knows, but it is there, and therefore it comes from somewhere.

"You spoke just now of giving me five thousand pounds down and a thousand a year for life if I succeeded in capturing one of these air-ships. Well, only three days ago this friend of mine, a very good

fellow and a highly-skilled engineer, although occupying quite a subordinate position, offered to give me ten thousand pounds merely for old acquaintance' sake and because, for purposes of my own, I had thought it well to hint that I was not in quite as good circumstances as I had been. Now, sir, I think you will agree with me that the million you spoke of would not go very far towards bribing people like that."

"Of course I believe you, Mr. Nowells," said the Count, "but it is simply because I have had no reason so far to doubt your word. Still you will allow me to ask you why you didn't accept your friend's offer?"

"Pardon me, Count," said the spy with a little laugh, "I haven't said yet that I didn't."

"Ah, I understand you, I think!" exclaimed the Russian, "I offer you five thousand when you have already been offered ten. If that is so why did you sign that paper. If these people can pay you a better price than Russia can, why do you remain in our service?"

"Because, sir," replied Nowells, "there occurred to me an idea which I am surprised did not occur to you."

"And what might that be, Mr. Nowells," said Dourinoff very stiffly and yet with a note of expectancy in his voice.

"I think the inference from such a state of affairs is perfectly obvious," was the reply. "Who are these people? How have they been able, within the last few months, to emerge out of nothing—for no one ever heard of them before—to build ocean-cruisers which have easily knocked the bottom out of all records; to conquer the air; to take the King of England and the German Emperor for two-hundred-mile-an-hour trips over sea and land; to cripple one of the

most powerful of the French cruisers; to land five hundred tons of gold in England; to give the King a five million pound cheque for his hospital scheme; and to pay their servants so well that one of them could offer me a loan of ten thousand pounds just as though he were talking about half-a-crown? Surely Count you must see what I am driving at now."

"You mean, of course," said the Count, "that we have to deal with the richest people in the world."

"I mean more than that, sir, I mean that we must be dealing, if we deal at all, with people who have some unknown and quite abnormal supply of gold at their command. It must surely be plain to you that people who can unload gold by the five hundred tons at a time as Messrs. Kingston and Marvin have done, are in a position to put every man in their employment far beyond the reach of ordinary bribery."

"Yes, I see that. Of course it follows as a natural consequence of what you have just said, and I must admit that I did not see it from that point of view before; but I quite see your meaning now, and also why you suggest that force is the only possible means of attaining our end. If you can seize the air-ship—of course I mean the *Anonyma*—and use her to capture or destroy the others you would then use her to discover this unknown source of gold, and, that once done, everything else would be easy. The only question now is: have you men enough in your service down at Portsmouth and Southampton to do it?"

"Plenty, sir, if you can let me have a thousand pounds on account and a few more as I find them necessary. About five thousand would be enough in all, I think. That would get us into the air-ship, or at any rate within striking distance of her. The rest

must be force. I shall direct the operations personally. If I am killed I have only accepted one of the conditions of my service, if I succeed—well, if I succeed we can talk about the price of victory later on.”

“Yes,” said the Count slowly, “that is another affair. A man can’t risk much more than his life, and so I think we will consider that settled.”

CHAPTER XXIII

WHEN Nowells left Hyde Park Court he walked home to his rooms in Charlotte Street, Bedford Square, instead of taking an omnibus as he would have done under ordinary circumstances. It was a fine night, and he had a good deal to think about. Like all clever men who have brains enough to succeed conspicuously in the despicable, but necessary profession which he had adopted, the idea of changing sides was always present in his mind when some great crisis such as the present arose. It was, of course, only natural that a man who could worm out the secrets of his own country and sell them to an avowedly hostile Power should be equally capable of selling the confidence of his employers if he could get a higher price elsewhere.

The problem which the Count's proposition had put before him was a very tangled and complicated one; and moreover, there were elements in it which were totally strange to all human experience.

He knew quite enough of treason and traitors to be perfectly well aware that the possession of one of these air-ships and the command of a practically unlimited supply of gold would be enough to make almost any man a traitor to his fellows. He easily pictured to himself, for instance, what might happen on board the *Anonyma* if the plot succeeded, and he put Count Dourinoff in command of her.

Every member of the crew might become fascinated

with the idea of possession of such an irresistible instrument of terrorism. Nothing in the annals of the old piracy could compare with the possible achievements of the man who held control of one of these cruisers of the air. In fact, he had not walked half a mile before the idea possessed him so strongly that he felt perfectly certain that, the air-ship once captured, not a man on board her would be able to trust another sufficiently to go to sleep with any confidence.

It was, of course, a narrow and, as had already been proved, an erroneous idea, but it took complete hold of him, and, by a curious apparent contradiction compelled him to keep faith with his employers.

"If I betray the Count to these gold-kings," he muttered to himself as he walked along the almost deserted streets, "what will they do for me?—for me, an Englishman, once an English gentleman who has become a spy in the pay of Russia? They might give me a few thousands out of their unlimited treasures and then expose me as what I am and make decent life impossible for me. In that case, too, I should never even get on board one of the ships and—that other possibility would be impossible.

"On the other hand there will always be the chance that the servant may become the master—and then, well then, who knows what might happen—what glorious revenges I might take! I, alone in possession and command, with a few niggers or Chinamen as a crew, fellows who would look upon me as a god and no more think of rebelling against me than they would against an archangel. Yes, I think, for the present, at any rate, my dear Count, it will pay me to play your game and your master's. Afterwards—we shall see what there is on the knees of the gods. I'll

go down to Southampton by the newspaper train in the morning."

During the rest of his walk he worked out, detail after detail, the crude scheme which had begun to form itself in his mind even while he was having his first interview with Peters, the engineer of the *Sheila*. Through him he had made the acquaintance of James P. Hacker, and that unerring instinct which had already served him in such good stead in so many other difficult and dangerous negotiations, had told him instantly that this was the man, if any, who was to serve his turn. Peters would be a good intermediary, a young man, honest enough in the ordinary concerns of life, but quite incapable of grasping great issues or withstanding great temptations. But in Hacker he had seen the keen, clever man of great and, so far, unsatisfied ambition—in short, the man who believed he could do great things and had never had his chance.

"Yes," he said aloud to himself as he closed his bedroom door, "that's the man I've got to deal with. If I get him I've got the *Anonyma*, and I think I ought to be very much obliged to my good friend Peters for that very interesting little story of Hacker's escapade at what they call Port Kingston. Simple and all as he is, I think Peters must have been a little drunk when he indulged in such a confidence as that though, of course, he wouldn't have said a word if he had known the sort of person he was talking to.

"It was a gorgeous stroke of luck to meet him just like that, and I should be a hopeless ass not to take full advantage of it. Yes, Hacker's the man, and tomorrow's work may perhaps decide the fate of empires. Nearly one o'clock! Well that gives me

three hours' sleep. Pity I haven't one of those airships to run down in, but in forty-eight hours from now matters may be different."

He set his little alarm for four o'clock, and went to bed. At half-past eight he was breakfasting at Radley's, and after breakfast he went to the headquarters of the Dock police and asked for Sergeant Smithson. The sergeant was off duty, and he was directed to his house. He went there, found him at home, and had an hour's very serious and confidential chat with him. As he rose to go he said:

"Now, Smithson, I hope I have made you understand that this affair is quite the most important that we have ever asked you to take part in. Of course, we shall trust you implicitly. You and I know perfectly well what a breach of trust means in such work as ours. I am risking everything and you have consented to do the same. If we succeed there will be a thousand pounds down for you and a retiring allowance of two hundred a year for life. Your men will have two hundred each, and fifty pounds a year, and, of course, if England gets too hot to hold any of you, we shall take good care to find you good appointments elsewhere. It fits in very nicely. You will be on duty to-night, and, of course, you will see that you have the right men with you. You will have a uniform for my friend who, as I have told you, is almost the same build as I am. You see to that and we will see to the rest."

"Very well, sir," replied the sergeant, "there will be no difficulty about that. We shall go into the docks on duty at ten until four. The uniforms will be here ready for your friend and yourself, and you can depend upon it that the other men will be all right."

After the interview with Sergeant Smithson, Nowells sent a short code wire to the Count and went into the Docks where he joined the wondering crowd of sightseers which every day assembled round the air-ships lying in their big, barbed-wire enclosures within which the police patrols were constantly marching up and down, while two policemen stood at the only entrance to prevent any unauthorised person from passing within the enclosure.

Nowells had already visited the *Sheila* in company with Peters and her commander, and so he had no difficulty in getting his card taken to the former by one of the policemen. The engineer at once came out to meet his old friend and, followed by many envious eyes, the spy passed through the jealously-guarded gate and went with him towards the *Sheila*.

As he was introduced by Peters, Hacker received him without the slightest suspicion and he spent one of the most interesting hours of an interesting, if not too creditable career, in going over the three air-ships. Of course, he was not shown anything that anyone might not have seen, but still he saw quite enough, especially on board the *Anonyma*, to convince him that the stake which he and his employers were playing for was well worth any amount of risk.

Of course he did not even approach the subject that was ever uppermost in his mind. That was a matter for a keener wit and a better skilled tongue than his to deal with, so he contented himself with being as pleasant as possible to everyone, especially Hacker, and taking copious mental notes of every little personal peculiarity that the conversation revealed.

He saw almost at a glance that the Captain of the *Anonyma* and Arthur Howard, his first lieutenant,

were the last sort of men to be tampered with. To allow either of them to glean the slightest suspicion of the work that he had in hand would be to ruin everything. Still he managed to pick up certain information as to watch-keeping and hours of rest on board the cruisers which proved useful to him afterwards.

He also learned that the air-ships were not expected to move for some days and that therefore their officers were at liberty to follow their own devices as long as they remained near enough to the squadron to respond to any sudden call. This being so, he had no difficulty in persuading Hacker and Peters to accept an invitation to dine with him at Radley's at six o'clock to meet a friend of his, a distinguished Russian engineer, who had for years been deeply interested in the problem of aerial navigation.

The dinner was the very best that the management could put on the table. It was, of course, served in a private room, and somehow both Hacker and Peters felt almost immediately that they had been suddenly and imperceptibly lifted into a higher social sphere whose atmosphere they found to be peculiarly intoxicating.

Count, or as he was for the present known, Professor Dourinoff, had played many an intricate game for high stakes, but he had never played for such a prize as he hoped to win now and so he had thoroughly prepared himself for it. All the brilliant subtlety of his highly trained intellect was brought into play. Every ruse that his diplomatic training had taught him: every charm of conversation and manner that even a Russian diplomatist could call to his aid, he used as skilfully as he did uncrupulously. Nowells

seconded him ably and almost brilliantly, and the result was that their two guests, led on by almost imperceptible degrees, found themselves on the brink of treason before they had any clear idea of the direction in which they had been so skilfully led.

Hacker's quick Western intellect grasped the true state of affairs long before Peters did, and when the Count put a distinctly leading question to him as to the possibility of a change of control of the aerial squadron or any part of it he leant back in his chair, looked Dourinoff in the eyes across the table and said, with a slightly exaggerated drawl:

"Say, Professor, I reckon I see what you are driving at. You've done it very prettily, but you have come along a mighty roundabout track when you might just as well have taken a bee line through the Bush. You and your friend, or those you are working for, want those air-ships. That's the plain American of it and you've got us here to see if you can do a deal that's so, eh?"

"My dear fellow," replied the Count, with a little graceful wave of the hand which held his cigar, "to be quite frank with you that is so. We and those for whom we are acting are, as we believe, working in the best interests of humanity."

"I reckon humanity don't cut any ice just here, Professor," laughed Hacker interrupting him, with a briskness that suited Dourinoff's purpose very well. "To get it into plain figures, it's just this way. You want us to betray our trust and hand over to you something that might give you the control of the world, or anyhow the power of making yourself mighty unpleasant to anyone who happened to disagree with you. Now you'll agree with me that just

supposing I and my friend Peters were inclined to consider a proposition of that sort, it's a mighty big order and it's going to take pretty big money to fill it; so I may as well tell you right here that if you owned Europe you wouldn't have dollars enough to do it."

"My dear sir," replied the Count with his frankest smile and in his smoothest tone, "of that I may say I am already perfectly well aware. You are right in supposing that we do hope to gain your indispensable services in the carrying out of this enterprise; but we never had any idea of insulting gentlemen in your almost unique position by the offer of mere bribes of money.

"What I should like now to suggest to you is the fact that the world—I mean the world we live in, the European world of monarchs and statesmen, and of the most brilliant society that has ever existed, has rewards to offer which money has never been able to buy. Those, Mr. Hacker, are the rewards which I am authorised by some of the leading Powers of Europe to offer to you as an inducement to exchange the service for that of a league of European Sovereigns who have the best interests of humanity and civilisation at heart, and who have united to protect the world against the most pitiless despotism that has ever threatened the liberties of mankind."

Now it so happened that for some considerable time Mr. James P. Hacker had been evolving certain ideas of his own on the subject of despotism. He had pictured himself as a lord of the air of a sort quite different from Gillette Marvin and Paul Kingston, and he had come to the conclusion that, in spite of the fact that he could now have gold for the asking, he would

be happier as a despot than a servant. In short, he believed himself capable of great things, a man of large possibilities who had never had his chance, and while he was listening to the Count's carefully chosen and admirably delivered words he had come to the conclusion that this might very possibly be the chance.

"Well, if that's so, Professor," he said with a look round at Peters who so far had hardly added a word to the conversation and was now looking at things through a haze of after-dinner cigar smoke and with his mental vision somewhat obscured or at least distorted by the golden medium of the wine that was bubbling in the glass beside him, "I reckon the next thing is to come to a clear understanding about these same rewards you talk of. It will save time if, as they say in the stores, you mark them in plain figures. We shall get there all the quicker and, from what I know of the movements of our people, I can tell you there isn't very much time to lose in talking."

"My dear sir," replied Dourinoff with an air in which he blended a most skilful suggestion of deference, that is exactly what I was about to say myself in other words! For all of us this is a time for action rather than words, although, of course, words are the necessary preliminaries to action.

"To put it as briefly as possible, the proposition which I wish to place before you is simply this. You are at present commander of one of these air-ships and your friend is, I believe, chief engineer on the same ship. You are the servants of the men who own these vessels and who also control an apparently illimitable supply of gold. If you remain in their service—is it possible that you can ever be anything

more than you are now, servants of despots whose object it is to enslave the world? It is true that they give you as much gold as you ask for, but what is that? Were you to ask for a million it would only be like a child filling its little bucket on the sea-shore."

"Yes," drawled Mr. Hacker, taking a sip at his glass, "as far as I know that's about the proportion, and the bucket hasn't much show against the ocean anyhow. I've been thinking that myself for quite a long time. From what you have said so far I should calculate that you were ready to go one better if you understand the language of the immortal game."

"I not only understand the language, my dear sir," laughed the Count, "but I know something of the game, and I will go not one but ten, fifteen, twenty, a hundred better. Let me put it to you this way," he went on, laying down his cigar in an ash-tray and looking smilingly across at him:

"In the first place my Imperial Master to whom I will present you very soon after our bargain is made, will appoint you Admiral of the aërial navy which shall be built and modelled after the vessel which conveys us to his presence. He will decorate you with his own hands and confer upon you a title worthy of your rank and your inestimable services. Europe will hail you as its deliverer from this threatened tyranny of gold. You will be an honoured guest at every European Court save, perhaps, that of Germany. Kings and Emperors will greet you as their friend and will not be sparing of their honours.

"No circle of society, not even the highest, will be closed to you. The noblest born and the loveliest women from Petersburg to Madrid will smile on you,

and, if perchance your heart is still unfettered, it will be possible for the Admiral of the Air to choose his bride from among the fairest and noble maidens of Europe. Of course, too, your friend Mr. Peters, to whom we are primarily indebted for our introduction to you, will not be forgotten when the allied Sovereigns of Europe reward those who have served them well."

"Well, Professor," replied Hacker, "there's not much the matter with that as far as I can see as long as you can make good what you say. What do you think, Peters?"

"I replied the engineer who had been listening eagerly to Dourinoff's glowing word-picture, "if that's so it's only a matter of proof, and if the Professor can prove what he says I'll do it. The prospect is certainly better than anything we have before us, and, after all, so far as I am concerned, it would only serve them right for not giving me command of the *Britannia* as they ought to have done."

"As regards proof," said the Count putting his hand into the breast pocket of his frock coat and taking a few folded parchments and papers I hope these will satisfy you for the present."

He had somewhat abused his position as Confidential Secretary to the Embassy in getting possession of one or two of them, and bringing them outside the precincts, but he had done so confident in the knowledge that in Russian diplomacy the end justifies the means."

"Here," he went on, passing one of the parchments across the table, "is the Commission of his Highness Prince Amaritcheff, Ambassador and Minister Plenipotentiary to the Court of St. James's, signed

and sealed by his Imperial Majesty the Emperor of the Russias. There is my own commission signed by the same august hand. Here is a copy officially certified of an agreement signed, as you will see by the sovereigns of the three great Powers and the President of the French Republic by which they bind themselves to act in concert against the threatened tyranny and appointing his Highness the Ambassador or his deputy—a post which I have now the honour of filling—to act on their behalf as may be necessary pending further instructions, and lastly, with regard to a minor and yet a necessary detail here is a bond which pledges the gentlemen whose names you, of course, will recognise, to pay the sum of one million pounds sterling in cash for the possession of the air-ship called the *Anonyma*. I hope, sir, that you will find the evidence of my good faith satisfactory.”

James P. Hacker took up the documents one by one with reverent fingers and looked at them with something like awe in his eyes. Collectively they represented to him all that was great and splendid on earth, and when he held a document signed by the Emperor of Russia in one hand, and one bearing the signature of Dumont Lawson and Franklin Deventer in the other, any last scruple of loyalty that he may have retained vanished. He put them together, handed them back across the table and said:

“Good enough, Professor, or I suppose I should now say, Count. That’s all I want and I reckon it will do for Mr. Peters. But what about a guarantee. You know after all that business is business.”

“How will this do?” said the Count pulling out his own commission and throwing it back to him. “Keep

that until I ask you for it in the presence of the Emperor."

"I reckon that a plain American citizen doesn't want much more than that," said Hacker putting it in his pocket. "The *Anonyma* is yours as far as I and Peters can help you to get her, and now I reckon the only question is—how?"

"That, Mr. Hacker," said Nowells, speaking for the first time for nearly half an hour, "you can leave to the Count and myself. Subject to your consent everything has been arranged. Now we have just one bottle left to drink to the success of our great enterprise and when we have done that I will explain the details to you."

CHAPTER XXIV

HACKER and Peters got back to the *Sheila* before nine, and as soon as they left the hotel the Count and Nowells once more went over the whole scheme detail by detail, to make sure that nothing had been neglected. This took nearly an hour and when they had finished they lit their cigars and went out for a stroll. The stroll ended at the door of Sergeant Smithson's house. Nowells knocked and they went in, admitted by the sergeant himself.

"It's all right sir," he said in a low tone to Nowells. "This, I presume, is your friend."

The secret agent nodded and said: "Yes, this is the gentleman I spoke of, and he would like to have a few words with you if convenient."

"Certainly, sir," replied Smithson, "this way if you please."

He showed them into a little sitting-room, closed the door after them and locked it. "We are quite private now, gentlemen," he went on, "What may be your pleasure?"

"Our pleasure, Mr. Smithson," said the Count, putting his hand into his hip pocket and pulling out a roll of Bank of England notes, is just this. My friend, Mr. Nowells, tell me that you have arranged your part of the business to his satisfaction and therefore to mine. You have been promised a thousand pounds for your services. Here are five one-hundred pound

notes on account, and here is a letter from myself, which, when you can obtain leave, you can take to the Russian Embassy in London, with the bank notes and you will receive in exchange smaller notes or gold or a cheque in your favour to the amount of a thousand pounds.

"Meanwhile I shall give you the bank notes and the letter will be yours when the work is done. At the same time I shall also hand you a credit for the amount due to your men, and, if they like, they can each have a hundred on account to-night. Mr. Nowells has the money with him. Is that satisfactory?"

"Perfectly, sir, that is to say, my Lord," said Smithson half-stammering, as he took hold of a far bigger sum than he had ever handled in his life. "I have arranged everything. There will not be an officer near the ships that is not one of us. The rest, of course, I shall leave to you."

"Quite so," said the Count. "We are entirely satisfied and now where are the uniforms? Time is getting on."

"They are here, gentlemen," replied Smithson moving the sofa which stood across one corner of the room, and taking out a bundle of clothing and two helmets. "I have guessed the fit as nearly as I could, and I think if you put these on over your own clothes they will just be about the measure."

"And, to make quite certain, I've got a couple of pairs of regulation boots which you had better put on because there might be some sharp-eyed person at the gates who'd notice that those boots of yours don't go very well with the police uniform. You'll find them

big enough to get into, I think, and I'll take your own inside."

In ten minutes the Count and Nowells had transformed themselves into a very smart-looking pair of policemen, and they strolled out with Sergeant Smithson towards the Dock entrance beside the railway offices. They, of course, strolled in without any suspicion and took their places within the barbed wire enclosure after regularly relieving the men on duty. It happened to be a very dark night which was all the better for the conspirators.

The *Anonyma* was lying in the middle of the enclosure with the *Sheila* and the *Britannia* on either side of her. Sergeant Smithson reported himself and his men to Captain Vinton, who at once put his Lieutenant, Arthur Howard, in charge, and went to take his watch below until four o'clock in the morning.

Lieutenant Howard then went into the upper cabin and began his sentry-go. The two other members of the crew, the engineer and the signalman had gone to their berths, and all lights were put out except one in the upper cabin by which the figure of Lieutenant Howard could be seen pacing slowly up and down.

Nothing happened for an hour, and then, when everything was absolutely quiet in the Docks, a policeman came to the gate of the enclosure and was immediately admitted. Sergeant Smithson met him and took a telegraph envelope from him. Mr. Hacker happened to be strolling about the enclosure smoking a last pipe before turning in, and the sergeant touched his helmet and handed him the wire.

Hacker tapped on the side of the *Anonyma* to attract Howard's attention and when he looked round beckoned to him with the envelope in his hand. The

lieutenant at once descended to the lower cabin and opened the door. Hacker ran up the steps saying—

"Here's a wire from one of the chiefs, just arrived. Sailing orders for you, I suppose."

As he reached the deck Howard put out his hand to take the telegram which Hacker held in his left hand. As he did so Hacker, whose right hand was armed with a knuckle-duster, hit him hard in the throat and knocked him backwards, choking him speechless. The next moment Peters, followed by the Count and Nowells, went up the steps and inside a minute Howard was safely gagged and handcuffed.

Everything had happened within a couple of minutes. Nothing had been done to excite any suspicion, for it was quite a common thing for the police-guards to go on board the air-ships and, as a matter-of-fact, on this occasion, no one saw them board the *Anonyma*, for the only people within the Docks were the police and watchmen on duty.

Never had such an important capture been made with such ridiculous ease. The perfection of all such schemes as the Count's consists in absolute simplicity, and for this reason his had succeeded perfectly. The engineer and signalman were taken one by one in their berths and gagged and tied up, and Captain Vinton only woke out of his sound sailor's sleep to find himself in the grip of three men who overpowered him before he had time to utter a sound. He, too, was gagged and tied up, and locked in his cabin, and then, when the Count and Nowells had got out of their uniforms and their regulation boots Dourinoff said to Hacker:

"Now then, Admiral Hacker, you are in command of the ship for my Imperial Master. You have done

splendidly, and everything that I have promised will be yours. Will you take charge, please?"

"Certainly, your Excellency," replied Hacker, not a little flattered by the Count's form of address. "We are quite ready. Where do you wish to go?"

"London, at once," replied the Count, "and put us down in the middle of Hampstead Heath as soon as you can."

"You shall be there in half-an-hour, your Excellency," replied Hacker, moving towards the entrance of the conning-tower.

A couple of minutes later the *Anonyma* rose into the dark sky and then the propellers began to revolve and the Count saw the lights of Southampton slipping away behind him. Those of Portsmouth came up to the right and almost instantly vanished as the air-ship gathered way.

"Well, Mr. Nowells," said Dourinoff, putting his hand on to his shoulder, "this is the greatest *coup* that the Russian secret service has ever brought off and we have mainly you to thank for it.

"After London we shall go to Petersburg and there you will only have to ask to have. How do you like travelling in an air-ship?"

"It is magnificent, marvellous!" replied the spy. "Just listen to the wind roaring past us. What a terrific speed we must be going at! It really seems almost supernatural, doesn't it?"

"Yes, it really does," replied the Count. "Admiral Hacker, how fast are we travelling?"

Hacker looked at the speed-indicator and said:

"A hundred and fifty miles an hour your Excellency. We shall be going two hundred in a few

minutes, and in twenty minutes you will be over Hampstead Heath."

He was as good as his word and before the Count's watch had marked the half hour after leaving Southampton Docks the air-ship slowed down, and they saw the myriad lights of London twinkling beneath them and ten minutes later the *Anonyma* had dropped silently and unseen on the slope of Parliament Hill.

The Count left Nowells in charge with strict instructions to shoot either Hacker or Peters on any sign of treachery or disobedience and walked quickly towards the Highgate Road. A brougham was moving slowly towards the entrance to Parliament Hill Fields. It stopped at a low whistle from him. He got in saying:

"Grosvenor Square as fast as you can, Dmitri."

"Yes, Nobleness," replied the coachman touching his hat, and away the brougham went at the best speed of one of the best pairs of horses in the stables of the Russian Embassy, and in three-quarters of an hour Feodor Dourinoff entered the drawing room of the Deventer mansion."

"It is done," he said. "The *Anonyma* is ours. Are Madame and Mademoiselle ready to accompany me to Petersburg? I have done my part of the work so far and I have come to ask for my reward."

As he said this he looked straight into Eirene's eyes. His tone was just sufficiently changed to give them to understand that he was now master of the situation. He had played a desperate game and won, and Eirene Deventer knew perfectly well that she had now to choose between keeping her bargain with him or standing out of the great game altogether. She took her choice instantly, in fact, she had taken it already, for a couple of hand-bags and a dress-basket already

packed were even then standing in the hall. She went to the Count holding out her hand and said:

"Count, I ought to be the first to congratulate you and I do it heartily. To the victor of the spoils! You have kept your word and, if you still want me to, I will keep mine."

He took her hand between his and said, half to her and half to the others:

"I have done this thing, not only for Russia, but for you, and I hope it will not be the only success that your beauty and your grace will inspire me to win. So far, you will admit, I have won my reward and now I claim it at your hands and at those of your honoured parents."

Even in that moment of mingled triumph and surrender Eirene could not suppress a sudden emotion of regret which was nearly akin to remorse. She had both suggested and inspired this colossal theft, this unspeakable betrayal of all the obligations of friendship and hospitality and the cruellest irony of the situation lay in the fact that the man who, through her instigation, had been robbed of the greatest triumph of his genius, was the only man who had ever inspired her with a single tender sentiment since she had been old enough to realise the possibilities of serious love.

The revelation of it had come to her in a flash, and yet she had scarcely realised it before her woman's intuition told her that it was already too late. She had read in Lady Margaret's eyes what Paul Kingston was only just beginning to look for, and her instinct told her that, for him, there could be no question of choice between herself and this exquisite patrician, this perfect product of a thousand years of selection and civilization.

Although this knowledge reconciled her in some measure to the blank, brutal fact that she was literally selling herself in cold blood to this Russian for the gratification of her ambition and lust of power, in another sense it made the crime in which she had become an accomplice seem unutterably mean. Still, it was done now and there was no undoing it. She turned her face towards her father and mother and said very quietly with her hand still resting between Dourinoff's:

"You know that I promised the Count that if he succeeded in doing what he has done I would marry him when he chose to ask me, but I'm not going to deceive him or anyone else. This is not going to be a love-match on my part. I ought to say that—because it isn't. Still, I shall have to keep my promise and do my best.

"That's all I have to give you now, Count," she went on, turning to him again. "Some day it may be different. At least, if I can't give you my heart now it isn't because I have given it to anybody else," she continued again, after a little pause, telling the half-lie with a perfect air of truth, "and so you will have the first chance of teaching me the Great Lesson."

"That," he replied with a distinct note of triumph in his tone, "is all I have hoped for and more than I have dared to expect. The most delightful of all tasks is before me and if I fail to accomplish it may I never know any other happiness. To-morrow I shall, I trust, have the joy of presenting to my Imperial Master the future Queen of the Air on the throne which I have been fortunate enough to win for her, and then you shall take your place, the admired and

envied of all, amidst the proudest aristocracy of the World.

"And now," he went on, releasing her hand and going towards her parents, "my happiness can demand only one thing more, your consent and blessing, Monsieur and Madame."

"You have mine, of course, Count," replied Mrs. Deventer rather limply. In her heart of hearts she hated the whole transaction and she had frankly described the proposed stealing of the air-ship as a mean and treacherous theft. But her husband, utterly careless of the means as long as the end was attained, and Eirene, absolutely determined to have rank and power and splendour even as Paul's enemy if she could not have them as his wife, had been too strong for her, and so she had drifted with a stream of events which she was powerless to control.

"I guess blessings aren't much in my line," added Mr. Deventer somewhat grimly, "but you've got my consent and my best hopes that you'll both be as happy as you want to be. Now I don't reckon you've too much time in hand for love-making just yet. What's the next proposition, Count, St. Petersburg?"

"Yes, certainly," replied Dourinoff, "the sooner we are there the better for us and the safer for the air-ship. I propose that we start as soon as the ladies can prepare themselves for the journey. It will only be a matter of a few hours."

"Very well," replied Mr. Deventer, "you'll have to leave me out, for I've too much of the dollar-work to look after here, but my wife and Eirene are, I believe, packed and ready for a flying start."

"Excellently put, my dear sir!" laughed the Count, "it will indeed be a flying start, and if the ladies agree

there is every reason that it should begin as soon as possible. My carriage is at the door and within an hour we can be on board and on our way."

Even the dog-like fidelity and Russian stolidity of Dourinoff's coachman were not a little shaken up when his master came out with two ladies and ordered him to take the dress-basket on the box beside him, and he was still more astonished when he told him to drive at his best speed back to the lonely region where he had picked him up. Still he was far too well drilled to make the slightest sign, so he touched his hat-brim, drew the whip lightly across the Orloffs' backs as soon as he heard the carriage door close, and three-quarters of an hour later he felt a jerk of the check string and pulled up in the same part of the Highgate Road that he had started from.

Dourinoff and the ladies got out, and Dmitri in silent wonder obeyed his master's order to carry the dress-basket some distance on to the turf, and then drive back to his stable at once.

Then, as soon as the carriage was out of sight, the Count whistled a couple of bars of the most popular music-hall catch-song of the hour and Hacker and Peters came out from behind a clump of bushes, touched their caps in salute, picked up the dress-basket and walked away with it towards the Hill. Presently the dim shape of the air-ship came in sight and Dourinoff, laying his hand lightly on Eirene's arm, whispered:

"There she is—no longer *Anonyma*, for as soon as you set foot on board her she shall bear another and a sweeter name.

Eirene only murmured: "Yes, it is very good of you to say so," in reply. Her mind was too full just

then of conflicting thoughts, some sweet and some very much the reverse, for her to frame any better answer, and he guessed this and was content.

As they reached the side of the air-ship the door opened, the gangway steps came down, and Nowells greeted his master and his companions with a silent bow. No time was lost in getting the passengers on board and as soon as that was done Dourinoff gave the order and the *Anonyma*, henceforth the *Eirene*, rose into the air and headed away to the eastward. In an hour she came to rest again in one of the loneliest parts of the Essex Marshes, and here the Count released his prisoners with many ironical apologies for the inconvenience which the exigencies of State had compelled him to put them to and an equally sardonic message of thanks to the creator of the air-ship for his "involuntary loan" of her.

By dawn the *Eirene* was crossing the German Ocean on her way to Petersburg.

CHAPTER XXV

WHILE the stolen air-ship was winging her way across Europe Marvin was speeding over Southern England in the *Columbia*. He reached Southampton about eleven, in the hope of meeting *Express III*. there with the last American mail. To his intense surprise he found that the *Anonyma* had left shortly before for London in obedience to a wire from Paul, and that Captain Hacker and Mr. Peters had gone with her. Obviously, he thought, something out of the common must have happened during his absence as it had been arranged that no further step was to be taken until his return.

He went on board again at once and thirty-five minutes later he alighted on the turf in Hyde Park and walked hurriedly towards Grafton House. When the door opened, and the footman in answer to his question informed him that Mr. Kingston was at home, he felt the nearest approach to a sensation of fear that he had ever experienced in his life.

"What's the matter, Paul?" he said as they shook hands. "What have you done with the *Anonyma*—I suppose you know she is not at Southampton?"

"Not at Southampton!" exclaimed Paul, dropping his hand. "What in thunder do you mean? I've given no orders—"

"I was half afraid of that somehow," interrupted Marvin quietly. "Well, if she's gone without orders

she's been stolen and that's all there is to it, so we may as well look the thing squarely in the face."

Paul looked at him in silence for a few moments. His face turned a shade or so paler, his teeth came together and his hands clenched. It was a heavy blow, as heavy as it was unexpected—and, to him, for personal reasons, a very grievous one, but he took it just as Marvin expected he would.

"That's so," he replied between his teeth. "Do you know who went with her?"

His friend and partner looked at him in frank admiration and said with a laugh that would have had an ugly sound for the stealers:

"Bully for you, Paul! I guessed you'd sand enough in you to take it like that. Yes, Hacker and Peters are missing from the *Sheila* and Vinton and Howard are gone off with the *Anonyma*, most likely as prisoners. I'd bet my life on their straightness."

"So would I," said Paul, "and I'll gamble mine that Hacker and Peters have done the steal. But why? What inducement could they have? They couldn't be bribed when they had all the gold they wanted."

"Men like that can be bribed with other things than gold, Paul," replied Marvin, "but anyhow, that's not the question now. She's gone and we've got either to get her back or destroy her before they can do any mischief with her, and we must act right away. Is the Duke at home?"

"Yes, mother and I had breakfast with him and Lady Margaret and he told me he was going to be at home all the morning. You haven't seen mother yet—oh, here she is."

The door opened as he spoke and Mrs. Marvin came in.

Her husband had too much delicacy of feeling ever to indulge in any marital familiarities with her in Paul's presence, so they just shook hands as usual and then he told her the news.

She turned white to the lips, but for all that she took the blow as steadily as her son had done.

"That is very terrible news," she said, after a little pause. "But one thing is certain. Those men have not stolen her alone. You'll find I think that Dumont Lawson and our friends in Grosvenor Place have had something to do with this," she continued, red woman's intuition leaping at once unerringly to the truth.

"Great Cæsar, you've got there in once, mother!" exclaimed Paul. "They're getting pretty desperate just now and they'd go to any length—even murder, I would wonder—to get the *Anonyma*. It wouldn't shake me up so much either, to learn that that Russian Count they've all been so friendly with lately had a hand in the game."

"Leading hand, most likely Paul," said Marvin, "and now," he continued, taking up his hat, "I guess we had better get a move on us and see the Duke as soon as possible."

They were shewn into the morning room at Romney House and found Lady Margaret alone. When she heard the news she too turned white as Mrs. Marvin had done. Then instantly the fighting spirit of her warrior race sent the hot blood back to her cheeks and a glint of anger into her eyes. Paul thought he had never seen her look quite so lovely as she did in that moment of righteous anger. But her anger did more than paint her beauty in glowing colours. It made her forget her patrician reserve for just a mo-

ment and to remember only a certain question she had asked Paul's mother some time ago in her "den."

"The despicable scoundrels and traitors!" she cried hotly, and then before she could stop the fateful words, she exclaimed in a quite altered tone, "Oh, my poor beautiful *Anonyma*!"

Her eyes met Paul's as she suddenly checked herself and the blood left her cheeks for an instant, only to flush them rosier than ever the next. The Lord of the Air read her soul in her eyes in that instant of bewildering revelation. He felt the tell-tale rush to his face, but, though he knew that he was looking something like a nervous schoolboy, he took his fate in his hands and, going close to her, said in a low but steady voice—

"Lady Margaret, I have been rash enough to hope that some day she would be yours and be the *Anonyma* no longer. I will bring you another like her in a week. If I do, will you give her your name?"

Their eyes met again for a moment. Some subtle instinct impelled him to hold out his hand. She put hers, trembling a little, into it. Then she nodded and smiled and said, "Yes" very softly, and, as Paul thought, more sweetly than that particular word had ever been said before. The next moment she exclaimed:

"Oh, those people have gone and left us. Don't you think you had better go and join the Council of War?"

"Yes," he replied instinctively, feeling that enough had been said for the present. "But won't you come too?"

"No;" she laughed, still allowing her hand to remain in his. "That's men's work. Besides I have

my housekeeping to attend to, so good-bye for the present."

"For the present," he repeated, raising her hand unresisting to his lips. There was a delicate suggestion of homage in the act which delighted her. If, with too ardent wooing, he had taken her in his arms and kissed in lover fashion her maiden dignity might have revolted. As it was when she got upstairs and had locked herself in her den to think the matter over she put her hand to her lips and kissed the place where he had touched it.

Both the Duke and Marvin looked up with a smile as he entered and, as his Grace shook hands with him, he said with a tone in his voice which had a good deal of meaning:

"Ah, Mr. Kingston, we were just waiting to ask you a question. No, don't apologise, I daresay you had a very good reason for not coming sooner. This is very serious news about the *Anonyma*, isn't it? Now what we wanted to ask you is this—can you replace her, and if so how soon?"

"That's easily answered, your Grace," said Paul almost merrily, for even the loss of his splendid craft did not seem such a very grave calamity to him just at that moment, "I have one of the same type, but slightly improved and if anything more powerful on the stocks at our place in the Aleghanies. She'll be quite ready by now and I can run over, instal the power in her, and be back here inside a fortnight. How's that for a start?"

"Excellent," replied the Duke, "and, meanwhile, I would suggest that for safety's sake, I should ask His Majesty to allow us to station the others in different

barracks about London, say one at Knightsbridge, one at Hounslow and one at Woolwich."

"Why certainly, your Grace," replied Marvin. "That would be a lot better than having all our precious eggs in one basket, as you say over here."

As he was speaking Lady Margaret knocked and came to say that luncheon was ready so the rest of the plans were discussed at the table.

"There's one great difficulty by the way that we haven't thought of yet," said Paul, when practically everything had been arranged as far as possible.

"And what is that, Mr. Kingston?" asked the Duke.

"Why it's just this, your Grace," replied Paul. "After what has happened I don't see that we can trust anyone to command an air-ship, until, of course, we have the King's consent to give us officers and men. Now I shall take the *Columbia*, and Mr. Marvin will take the *Sheila*, I suppose, but who is going to command the *Britannia* for the present? We don't want her stolen too."

There was a little pause and then Lady Margaret looked across at him with a most disquieting smile and said quietly:

"Mr. Kingston, will you teach me aërial navigation, and let me command her," then she went on, looking round the table with laughing eyes, "I'm perfectly serious and the thing is quite practicable, Papa. While you are going to see the King this afternoon Mrs. Marvin can take a trip to Southampton in the *Columbia* and Mr. Kingston can, if he will, give me a lesson. I half know how to do it already, you know, Mr. Kingston. You told me that a child could learn to manage the *Anonyma* in an hour, and I'm not a child. Besides I think you can trust me, and if there

is going to be any excitement I want to have some of it. I am not a New Female, but I would dearly love to be the first woman to command an air-ship."

"But my dear Madge," said the Duke, when he had sufficiently recovered from his amazement to speak, "granted that Mr. Kingston found himself able to do as you say, think of the risks you and Mrs. Marvin would run if the people who have stolen the *Anonyma* set themselves to destroy the smaller air-ships. It would be terrible."

"Not at all," she replied decisively. "I should be as safe there as here—safer perhaps. If these people mean war and piracy why should they not destroy this house or Mr. Marvin's—or for the matter of that, Marlborough House or Buckingham Palace? Remember they are beyond all human law now and they can do as they please. Don't you agree with me, Mr. Kingston, and you will teach me to manage her, won't you?"

Naturally it was quite impossible for Paul under the influence of those bewildering eyes to say "No," and yet he was no less startled by her utterly unexpected request than the others. A brisk discussion followed, but Lady Margaret stuck gallantly to her guns and so far carried her point as to get her father's consent to her taking a trip with Mrs. Marvin in the *Columbia* and having her first lesson in aërial navigation. After which, as Paul said laughingly, "When he was able to give her a navigation certificate she might possibly be appointed to a command."

At this moment, however, a striking and quite unexpected turn was given to the conversation by the entrance of a footman who announced that "Captain Vinton and Lieutenant Howard desired to speak to

Mr. Kingston or Mr. Marvin on very important business."

"Guess it is!" exclaimed Marvin, "and you were right, Paul. If you hadn't been they wouldn't be round here now."

"Of course," said the Duke, "I quite agree with you. Show the gentlemen into the library at once, Simmons. Madge, I think we may dispense with the rest of lunch for the present."

"Oh, yes!" she exclaimed, rising with the others. "I suppose you'll let me come and hear the story, won't you?"

"I don't think these gentlemen will have any serious objection to that," smiled the Duke with a glance at Paul, and with that he left the room.

In the library they found Vinton and Howard standing by the window looking very dejected. Marvin spoke first and said in his hardest tone:

"Well, gentlemen, I suppose you have come to give us some account of this extraordinary disappearance of the *Anonyma*?"

"Yes, sir, we have," replied Vinton quietly and steadily and looking him straight in the eyes. "We lost her. I haven't a very long story to tell and when I have told it you will be able to judge how far we are to blame for the misfortune."

"Go ahead," said Marvin shortly.

Vinton began with what had happened to his lieutenant. His own share of the story was very short, but he told it; but all he had to say was said with such obvious sincerity and deep regret that it would have been impossible to doubt his good faith, even if the very fact of their immediate return to report had not

been clear proof of his and his colleagues' innocence. When he had done Paul said quietly:

"We all believe you, Vinton. In fact we could not even had doubted either you or Howard without the clearest proof that you had broken faith with us. Anyone might have been deceived as Howard was by that scoundrel Hacker coming in with the telegram as he did, and as for you, well any man may be taken in his sleep if traitors bring thieves to his bedside. I don't think there's any more to say," he went on turning to the others. "It was clearly a misfortune that we cannot blame them for. For my part I see no reason why we should not trust them as fully as before, and I propose that they shall at once take command of the *Sheila* and the *Britannia*."

"I can see no possible objection to such a course," said the Duke, "as a matter of fact I suppose any of us would have lost the vessel under similar circumstances."

"That's so," said Marvin. "I'm agreed."

And there, for the present, the incident ended.

Unfortunately Vinton was totally unable to give any definite description of the men who had made the capture of the air-ship or of the man who had released him so that he could set his comrades free on the Marshes, hence all that was certain was that the theft must have been accomplished through the treachery of some of the members of the dock police, and this was almost impossible unless, traitors to their country, they were in the pay of a foreign Power. This certainly pointed to the probability of Count Dourinoff's complicity in it, but that was as far as they could go.

"Of course I'm very glad those poor men have got

back safe when those scoundrels might have thrown them into the sea," said Lady Margaret to Paul when they returned to the dining-room, "but now what becomes of my vaulting ambition to be the first woman navigator of the air, and commander of an aerial cruiser?"

"I'm afraid the command will have to be postponed for the present," he laughed in reply, "but of course you shall have your lesson in navigation all the same if you and Mother will come to Southampton. And, later on when we have brought these foolish people to their senses, and the *Lady Margaret* goes into peace commission she shall, if you like, be your private yacht and you may command her and—well, anybody else you please."

She looked up at him with flushed cheeks and shining eyes and whispered:

"I won't be bribed, even as splendidly as that—but I will come to Southampton."

At that moment the others came into the room and she turned quickly away and looked out of the window.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE brief run to Southampton was quite the most delightful experience that the Fates had ever vouchsafed to Paul. He had Lady Margaret alone with him in the conning-tower and, as was natural under the circumstances, the conversation did not entirely consist of a lecture on the art and mystery of aërial navigation. Sometimes, too, their hands happened to come together on one of the switches or the steering wheel and he had an entirely satisfactory suspicion that she did not take hers away quite as quickly as she might have done had she wanted to.

The mechanism which governed the movements of the air-ships was so exquisitely simple that even an intelligent child could have operated it, and before the voyage was half over—Paul, for one or two reasons did not travel at full speed—Lady Margaret was at the wheel running the *Britannia* by herself. She slowed down, quickened up to full speed, sent her soaring up to ten thousand feet and brought her down again to five hundred, and ended by rushing her round the Isle of Wight and bringing her up with a beautiful curve over the Southampton Docks.

"Splendidly done!" said Paul with a look which said a something that his lips as yet dare not say. "Now slow the fans."

Their hands met for the last time that passage, on the lever, and they moved it together. Then she took hers away and held it out to him saying:

"Thank you a thousand times, Mr. Kingston. I need hardly tell you, I hope, that it has been the most interesting lesson by far that I have ever had."

It may of course have been nothing more than his presumptuous fancy, but it certainly seemed to him that there was an almost imperceptible emphasis on the second "you." At any rate it brought up the blood under the tan of his face in a fashion which told her instantly that he had noticed it, so perhaps he was right after all.

"I am more than delighted to hear you say so," he replied, returning the gentle pressure of her hand with some interest. "Only of course," he went on, lapsing for a moment into American, "it's you that's given me the most gorgeous time. I reckon a man would have to be pretty good to get a better, even by dying."

The *Britannia* touched the ground as he said this and so the delightful interlude had to come to an end and give place to the sterner work of preparing for the great tragedy which the stealing of the *Anonyma* had now made almost inevitable.

The moment they left the vessel Marvin took charge of her and Howard of the *Sheila*, while Paul assumed command of the *Columbia*. This was done to guard against the possibility of the other captains having been corrupted by those who had conspired to steal the *Anonyma*. Paul took Vinton with him

to replace him when he took over the new cruiser, and as soon as a bottle of wine had been drunk to her good fortune and the good-byes had been said he mounted into the air and vanished through the clouds to the westward.

Marvin took his wife and Lady Margaret back to town in time for them to pay an afternoon call at Grosvenor Place, where they, of course, learnt that the family were "away from home for an uncertain time." And then, after sending off a score or so of wires and cables, the immediate effect of which was the tightening of the Gold-Chain which now encircled half the world in its pitiless coils, he went back to Portsmouth to attend to the re-powering of the submarines which were due to mobilise in the Solent that evening.

Express III. reached Southampton that evening, and was at once ordered to cancel all her freight and passage contracts and to mount her armament, which consisted of four pneumatic guns capable of throwing shells containing 100lbs. of the same explosive as that contained in the aerial torpedoes to a distance of twelve miles. These were mounted *en barbette* fore and aft. In addition she carried six twenty-pounders with a range of seven miles on each side of her upper deck, and a score of dirigible torpedoes reliable up to two miles. The other two *Expresses* were armed in precisely similar fashion, and had already been instructed by cable and aërogram to prepare for active service.

It was a full week before these preparations could be completed and it was one of intense anxiety for the Duke and Marvin as well as for the British and German Governments. It had been impossible to

keep the theft of the *Anonyma* a secret from the newspapers, and those of the more sensational sort indulged in so many lurid imaginations as to the frightful havoc such a terrible engine of destruction could work by land and sea that the public rapidly fell into a state of nervous apprehension which bordered very closely on panic.

The *Sheila* and the *Britannia* were kept almost constantly on the move, partly because it was considered the safest thing for them to do, and partly in the hope that they might discover the whereabouts of the lost air-ship. When either of them returned to England she was berthed in the gardens of Buckingham Palace under a strong guard and sentries patrolled the roof day and night, while others were posted on the Duke of York's Column, the Monument, the Dome of St. Paul's and other elevated positions round London to give warning of the approach of the dreaded enemy.

Still the days passed and she gave no sign of her existence, though she had already had time to do immense and irreparable damage. But what made the mystery deeper and more inexplicable was the obvious fact that France and Russia and their allies with such a terrible weapon ready to their hands might easily have made terms which would have relaxed in some measure at least the invisible but unbreakable bonds which were already beginning to strangle the markets and the industries of Europe. And yet the precious days went by and the armed millions remained inactive in camp and barrack, and the useless fleets and liners went on burning wasted coal in the closely blockaded ports.

But meanwhile the Gold War went on unceasingly, waged with ruthless activity by the President of the Syndicate. Dumont Lawson, Mr. Deventer and Schmidt held daily, almost hourly consultations, trying desperately to find some escape from the ever-tightening toils which were closing round them.

"What in thunder have they done with that all-fired air-ship that was to get us out of this mess in three jumps of a jack-rabbit!" exclaimed the sometime Steel King angrily at the end of one of these futile conferences, "here she's been ours for a week and we haven't even heard from her. Wonder if that darned Dourinoff was just playing for his own hand all the time."

"Likely enough," growled Schmidt gloomily. "Get a Russian and you get a Tartar. But anyhow we couldn't have got her away without him and there's just this good about it that our friends Marvin and Kingston have lost the use of her. That's something."

"Mighty little while she does nothing and they still have the other three," snapped Deventer, who was perhaps more furious and mystified than his colleagues, for both his daughter and Dourinoff had promised to pay literally a flying visit to the same part of Parliament Fields they had departed from in order to enable his wife to return home. They were now a day overdue, and his apprehensions were increasing with every hour.

"Then look here, he continued, "what about our properties and interests in the States? Franklin went over nearly ten days ago, and we haven't had so much as a cable from him. How do we know that the bottom hasn't fallen out of everything by this

time ; that we may be worth as many cents as we had dollars six months ago? I tell you, gentlemen, things are looking mighty serious, and if that darned air-ship doesn't materialise soon and shake 'em up a bit we'll just have to climb down and ask the Kingston-Marvin Syndicate for a job."

As a matter of fact Mr. Deventer's summing-up of the situation was not by any means far from the truth. The men who a few months ago had been absolute masters of tens of millions could not now have realised ten thousand pounds among them. Their paper millions had been swept away by the ever-rising flood of gold over which they had not the slightest control. For all purposes of commerce and finance they were as isolated in London as they would have been on a South Sea coral island.

During the last few months the whole civilised world had been silently but swiftly falling under the control of the intangible but omnipresent Gold-Power. By this time the Syndicate had bought up all the transatlantic and colonial lines and cables. All the Continental cables had been bought save those connecting England with Germany, and these were under the direct control of the Kaiser's Government. No code messages could be sent out of Great Britain and none at all that were not censored by the authorities. All the ports of hostile Europe were rigidly blockaded and no oversea trade was possible without the consent of the Syndicate and the Triple Control.

On land matters were not much better. The *Britannia* and the *Sheila* had blown up every railway and foot-bridge connecting the hostile countries, and destroyed all the international telegraph lines. With the exception of Denmark, and Scandinavia, which

had assented to the Triple Control, Europe was already almost entirely drained of gold. Even silver was beginning to run short and had a purchasing power nearly equal to that of gold a couple of months before. Imports and exports had practically stopped and international trade was nearly at a standstill. Foodstuffs had, of course, risen enormously as stocks shortened, and as holders were beginning to sit on them the Governments were hurriedly passing laws to compel them to sell at fixed prices and take payment in credit-notes—and copper!

One of the reasons for this measure of despair was that the Governments themselves were making every effort to get what was left of the gold and silver stocks into their own hands for state and military purposes, for strikes and riots were already growing to the proportions of a revolution, and, as day after day went by, the half starved soldiery were less and less to be relied upon.

One very curious feature of the unheard-of situation was that the tens of millions worth of precious stones, from crown jewels to personal ornaments had suddenly become almost valueless. They could not be sold, for there was not money enough even to buy a sufficiency of food at current prices. They were worthless as articles of exchange, for no one wanted them, and many of their owners were even now selling their gold settings at an enormous premium. In a word, the Slav and Latin nations were beginning to starve inside an invisible but impenetrable ring-fence of gold.

In the United States Trusts and Tariff-battlers were having a time that was a good deal more exciting than pleasant. Immediately on his arrival Paul, act-

ing on agreement with his partner, proceeded to put his former threat to make gold as cheap as copper into force. An attempt had been made to put the Anti-Trust Laws into action, but bribery and wire-pulling had rendered them practically a dead letter, and the Trust tyranny remained unshaken.

But matters quickly assumed a very different complexion when Paul presented the Mandate of the Syndicate, signed by Marvin and himself to the Assay Office and the Mint. Gold began to pour through the former into the latter by tons and thence by a hundred streams on to the already demoralised markets.

In three days panic universal reigned from Maine to Mexico. Original gold-values dropped to 75 cents, 50 cents, and finally, to 10 cents. As Marvin had promised in the interview with the Cabinet, the bottom fell out of everything. There was a terrific clamour, of course, raised mostly by the Trust-Despots, for the Government to put a summary stop, by force, if necessary, to this new gold tyranny that was ruling the industries of the Republic; but the American Constitution was searched in vain for any lawful pretext for doing so. Moreover, the President and his Cabinet had already received quite satisfactory guarantees that everything would be put right in good time, and so the Government was able to look on with equanimity.

The Food Trusts naturally held out longest, for they owned vast stocks, and, for a few days went on gaily doubling, trebling, and quadrupling the prices of the necessaries of life. Then the last blow fell on them. With a stroke of his pen Paul ordered a free distribution of gold coin throughout the poorer quar-

ters of all the great cities and towns, and cleared off the mortgages from every farm in the States.

In short, exactly the reverse was happening in America to what was taking place in Europe. There gold was at a ruinous premium; here it was at an equally ruinous discount. There food could hardly be bought for lack of money; here there was so much money that food, as an article of commerce, had suddenly lost its trade value. People who had come to look upon fresh, or even canned meat as an almost unattainable luxury now paid ten and twenty dollars a pound for it with a laugh which sounded the financial death-knell of the food-tyrants. What anybody could and would give anything for was worth nothing. By a strange irony of fate the Trusts went under beneath a flood of that very metal which they had been perfectly willing to starve their fellow-creatures to obtain.

Again, as Marvin had predicted, the tariffs went with the trusts. They automatically abolished themselves because no one wanted the gold in which the duties had ultimately to be paid. The net result was that a brief fortnight saw the end of the ruthless financial tyranny under which nearly half the Anglo-Saxon race had suffered in impotence for more than a generation.

Such was the general state of affairs in America and on the Continent when, on the fifteenth morning after Paul's departure from Southampton, London was suddenly thrown into a fever of conflicting hope and fear by the appearance of a splendid, gleaming shape circling about a thousand feet in the air above the roof of Buckingham Palace. Was it the long-dreaded *Anonyma*, or her eagerly expected duplicate from New

York? If the former, she might, within the next few minutes be raining death and destruction over the Great City. If the latter then the end of the strange conflict between Gold and Steel, between Peace and War must surely be close at hand.

CHAPTER XXVII

ABOUT half an hour before the appearance of the airship over Buckingham Palace the Duke and Lady Margaret were sitting at breakfast in the morning-room at Romney House, engaged in the usual accompaniment to breakfast, reading letters. Suddenly the Duke startled his daughter by exclaiming—

“Bless my soul. What a tragedy!”

“Why, what on earth has happened, Papa?” asked Lady Margaret looking up from her own correspondence.

“Just read that, Madge,” answered her father, tossing a black-edged letter across to her, “It’s from Elliston, poor Wyngrave’s steward, you know.”

She took the letter almost with a feeling of relief for a sudden fear had sprung up in her heart. Lord Wyngrave was an old friend of her father’s but personally she had seen very little of him outside the usual social circles. She took up the letter and read:

“Your Grace,

I deeply regret to inform you that early this morning Viscount Coniston met with a fatal accident while turning a sharp corner on his motor-car. It is feared that he was going at too great a speed, an unfortunate *penchant* of his, as you know, for when one of the front wheels struck a stone in the road, as it evidently must have done, the machine swerved and dashed into a

deep ditch, hurling his lordship with such force against a stone as to fracture his skull and dislocate his neck as well. On hearing the news the earl was taken with a very severe seizure of the heart, which his physician expects to be almost inevitably fatal. As your grace is one of the trustees to the estate, I have thought proper to acquaint you at once with the sad event. . . ."

"How awful!" said Lady Margaret, in a low voice, passing the letter back to him. "Then if Lord Wyngrave dies he will be the Earl."

"He—who, Madge? Hullo, what's the matter? Oh yes, of course! Why, you little goose, what are you blushing so furiously about? Do you suppose we haven't known all about that ever since—well as a matter of fact ever since he took us for that trip to the clouds?"

"Yes, I was afraid you—Oh there, it doesn't matter as long as you did know and weren't angry. Only, to be quite honest, Dad, it really wasn't then, it was ever so long ago."

"Indeed, Miss! And may I ask what you call ever so long ago?"

"Well, I suppose I had better make full confession while I am about it. As a matter of fact, Dad, it was during that mountaineering trip in Colorado."

"Why, you precocious young person! Are you aware that you were hardly seventeen then? And have you the impudence to tell me that you and this young gentleman—"

"No, Papa, certainly not! I wonder you could imagine such a thing," she interrupted, drawing herself up and flushing again, this time for a different reason. "Only," she went on with a sudden change

of tone, "I must honestly admit that I have thought a good deal about—well, about the trip—wasn't it delightful? And, yes, I suppose I really did begin to care for him a little bit even then."

"I'm very glad to hear it, Madge," replied her father more seriously than he had spoken before.

"Oh, you darling Dad! But why?"

"Because, dear, it shows that you now love the man, not the genius who has conquered the air and could conquer the world if he liked, or the Gold-King who has apparently bought the best part of it—though, of course, there could be no question of that. Still the other's much better. Love the man and admire all the rest. And so he wants you to be his Empress of the Air, does he?"

"His Imperial Majesty hasn't exactly asked me to share such an exalted position—yet," she replied demurely, looking down at her plate.

"Of course not. Being a gentleman he would naturally speak to me first. But I think he asked you to give your name to the new *Anonyma*, didn't he?"

"Yes, Dad—and I said, 'yes.'"

"Which, of course, means that you will say the same when he asks you a more important question?"

"I certainly shall, if you will let me, Dad. After all his blood on one side is nearly as good as ours, and his mother's a perfect darling. But what does all that matter with a man who will be greater than any king when he comes back."

"Hullo!" exclaimed the Duke, getting up as the last word left her lips and going towards the window, "what's the matter out there in the Park and in the

street? See they are all running towards the corner and pointing upwards."

"Then he has come back," exclaimed Lady Margaret with a ring of joyful triumph in her tone, "back in my air-ship! And now he'll conquer the world."

"Or else it's the other one," said the Duke with apprehension, "God forbid that it should be, for the people who were dishonourable enough to steal her would be capable of anything."

"I don't believe that for a moment," said Lady Margaret almost indignantly. "It's Paul. He promised me that he would bring her. And, besides, he couldn't fail."

Almost at the moment she spoke Mr. Deventer, who was breakfasting with Dumont Lawson and Mr. Schmidt happened to look out of the window over the Palace Gardens. He sprang from his chair with a cry of anger and ran to the window.

"There's that damned air-ship at last!" he exclaimed in a voice half-choked with fury, "and she's flying the Syndicate flag. Darned if they haven't got her back! Say, gentlemen, I guess it's about time we went to look after that clerking job we were talking about giving to Marvin when he wanted to go in shares with us. I wish to glory we'd let him."

His two partners got up and joined him at the window. Yes, there was no doubt about it. There was the stolen air-ship, as they thought, flying the golden ensign of the Syndicate and settling gently down into the space between the front entrance and the Palace railings.

"That's so," said Dumont Lawson in the quiet tone of a hardened gambler who has played his last coup and lost. "I reckon the game's over and we've just

got to pass in our checks. That's about all there is to it."

Mr. Schmidt said nothing. He was not made of such hard stuff as his chief. The fresh colour faded out of his cheeks. His lips moved as though he were cursing behind his teeth. He went back to the table and finished his tea at a gulp, got up, and left the room without a word.

"Hard hit," said the Chief laconically and went on with his breakfast.

As the air-ship hoisted the now familiar flag a mighty roar of welcoming cheers rose up from the delighted crowds which had collected in a few moments in the Park and round the Palace railings.

The King, who was also at breakfast when the first alarm was given, got up, clapped on a deerstalker hat, and went out to meet friend or enemy as the case might be. Another roar ran round the railings as he appeared, and the air-ship at once dipped her ensign in salute. When she touched the ground the steps fell out and Paul came down bare-headed. Many of the crowd recognised the Conqueror of the Air, for his photographs were even more in demand than those of the most favourite actress or music-hall "artiste," and yet another ten-thousand voiced cheer greeted him as his Majesty held out his hand and said:

"Good morning, Mr. Kingston. Very glad to see you back. To tell you the truth we have been a little anxious lest you too should have fallen among thieves. And so this is the new aërial cruiser. 'Pon my word, she is even more magnificent than her lost namesake. I hope she brings good news."

"Yes, your Majesty," replied Paul, "the best. We have smashed or swamped the Trusts, and the tariffs

have abolished themselves. The United States Government and ninety-nine hundredths of the American people are with us. The President requests me to convey to your Majesty his informal but none the less sincere and respectful greetings."

"I am obliged to him and to you, sir," said the King, with a slight inclination of his head, "informal or not, they could not have been conveyed by a more distinguished messenger or in more royal fashion . . . I thank you heartily for your good news. There is to be a meeting of the Privy Council this afternoon to confer with Mr. Marvin. I hope I shall have the pleasure of meeting you there. And now, I suppose, you will be anxious to say 'good morning' to your mother and your friends in Park Lane, and so I won't detain you."

The last words were spoken with a subtle change of intonation which brought the blood to Paul's cheeks. The King smiled as he bowed his adieux and in a couple of minutes the air-ship, upborne, as it were on the cheers of the delighted crowd, rose slowly from the ground and headed across the Gardens to the Park. As she came to a rest opposite Grafton House, the *Columbia* flashed up from the South-west, slowed down and began to circle above her. Paul at once signalled to Vinton to keep on guard and soon learned, not a little to his satisfaction that both his mother and Marvin were at Romney House.

He was, however, not a little disappointed to find that Lady Margaret was not in the library, where the Duke received him, but his apprehensions as to her not being at home were speedily set at rest when, after the greetings had gone round, his Grace put his hand

on his shoulder and with a quiet twinkle in his eyes said—

“Mr. Kingston, I received a confession this morning on a subject which, I believe, is of considerable interest to you. I have given the parental absolution, and I have every confidence in leaving the rest of the matter in your hands. No, no, don't trouble to say anything now. You can thank me afterwards, if you want. Meanwhile I am sure you would not like to keep a lady waiting. You will find Madge in the morning-room.”

As Paul opened the door Lady Margaret got up from the window-seat and came towards him, prudently keeping her back to the light. Paul closed the door and this time there was no question of kissing hands.

The Privy Council held that afternoon, to which “strangers” were for the first time admitted by Royal Command, had practically to decide the fate of the world. The Governments composing the Triple Control were now entirely in agreement with those who had brought this extraordinary state of things to pass. It was fairly certain that those who had stolen the *Anonyma* were for some reason unable to put her to the terrible uses they might have done. They had not even used her for the purpose of making terms with those who were now virtually masters of Europe, and so it was decided that she might now be left out of the calculations of the Council.

The result of the deliberations was that an ultimatum should be at once delivered to the hostile Powers to accept unreservedly the terms of the Syndicate's original proclamation within seven days. The alter-

native was subjugation by blockade and absolute isolation, not only from the rest of the world, but from each other until their political, military and naval systems fell to pieces by natural process of decay.

The ultimatum was, however, never delivered. The Powers had already had enough of the Syndicate's pitiless and yet bloodless methods of conquest. They had to choose between submission and a swift descent into anarchy and barbarism, and they very wisely chose the former. Just as the Council was rising the King received a telegram which he glanced over and then read aloud. It was brief but pregnant.

"YOUR MAJESTY: I have pleasure to inform you that the Powers have expressed a desire to send a deputation of Ministers Plenipotentiary to London to discuss conditions and terms for ending the present state of affairs which are now recognised to be intolerable and impossible. If an aerial squadron were sent to convey them excellent effect would be produced. WILHELM, R.I."

Just a shadow of a smile passed under the Royal moustache at this eminently wise, but thoroughly characteristic suggestion.

"Well, my Lords and Gentlemen," said the King, handing the telegram to the Prime Minister, "I think we may congratulate ourselves on the fact that our meeting this afternoon has, after all, proved unnecessary. I trust you will agree with me that such a Conference would be most desirable as a means of arriving at a settlement satisfactory to ourselves and honourable to what I may, perhaps, call the other side. If that meets with your views it only remains to ask our friends the Admirals of the Air whether they are prepared to fall in with the Emperor's suggestion."

The assembled Councillors bowed assent, and Marvin rose at a look from the King and said—

“Your Majesty, our ships are entirely at the disposal of the Council, and if necessary they can leave for Berlin in an hour.

“We are greatly obliged, sir,” was the reply. “A telegram shall be sent to the Emperor at once, and I think that if you could make it convenient to arrive at Berlin at ten to-morrow morning, his Majesty will then be able to arrange all the details with you.”

With that the Council rose, and, having taken their leave, Paul and Marvin and the Duke drove to Grafton House to make arrangements for raising the Gold Blockade in the event of terms being arranged—a matter about which there could now be very little doubt—and at dinner that night at Romney House another important question was settled between the high contracting parties most concerned. Lady Margaret agreed to give her title and Christian name to the flag-ship of the aerial squadron, and to exchange her surname for Paul's on the day that peace was once more formally proclaimed among the nations of the world.

CHAPTER XXVIII

PRECISELY at ten the following morning a mighty chorus of hurrahs and "hochs" went up from the huge crowd assembled in the neighbourhood of the Belosplatz, before the Royal Palace in Berlin, hailing the arrival of the aërial squadron. Tens of thousands of eyes had been looking up into the bright blue western heavens for hours, but nothing had been seen until at five minutes to the hour what looked like four rays of white light streamed across the sky made the circuit of the city at ever-decreasing speed and came to rest five hundred feet above the great, soldier-lined square.

The *Britannia* was flying the Union Jack, the *Columbia* the Stars and Stripes, and the *Sheila* the German Ensign. The new *Anonyma* flew only the golden banner of the Lords of the Air.

As they sank gently in a straight line to the ground all the flags were dipped in salute to the Imperial Standard flying above the palace portico, and as the massed bands blared out the first bars of what most of the aërial navigators took for "God save the King," but which was in reality "Heil Dir im Siegerkrantz," the Kaiser, gorgeously uniformed and gloriously helmeted, came forth to greet his guests.

The troops presented arms with machine-like precision, the War Lord touched his eagle-crested helm and walked unattended to the side of the flagship.

Never had William the Second stood so high in the esteem of his people as he did at the moment when he shook hands with the men who in a few months had conquered the air, taken possession of the sea, and reduced all Europe, saving only the Fatherland, to submission without fighting a battle or taking a single life. But for him, they thought—and rightly—Germany would now be in the same humiliating position as the Slav and Latin Powers.

During the next five days the Kaiser, as the representative of the Triple Control, made such a Royal progress from capital to capital of Europe as crowned monarch had never made before, and right splendidly did he play his regal part. It had, of course, been primarily due to King Edward's infallible sense of the fitness of things that none less than an Emperor should receive what was practically his submission of Emperors and Kings.

The condition of the capitals, even in what had once been their wealthiest quarters, bore piteously eloquent testimony to the terrible effective nature of the Gold Blockade. Everywhere starvation and stagnation had taken place of plenty and activity. Nothing could have proved more eloquently, how artificial and unnatural are the foundations upon which modern Society really rest. Its gold-basis had been partially removed, and here, in a few weeks, its once magnificent fabric was already falling to pieces.

At Petersburg the Kaiser and his fellow-voyagers met with their first and only surprise. The Emperor requested a private interview with his brother of Germany. Exactly what passed between them was never made public save that their conversation partly cleared up the mystery of the *Anonyma*, and resulted in the

instant deportation of Mrs. Franklin Deventer in the *Sheila* from the Russian capital to London, where she, together with her husband, Mr. Dumont Lawson, and his lieutenant were at once charged in the most commonplace fashion before a magistrate with conspiring to commit a felony within the King's dominions, to wit the stealing of an air-ship known as the *Anonyma*, and the forcible kidnapping of certain members of her crew.

It was a pretty mean ending to their dream of world-wide dollar-despotism, but the fifteen years' penal servitude which the three male conspirators ultimately got was, after all, only what they and a good many more of their sort richly deserved. Mrs. Deventer was at once released on their joint testimony that she had nothing whatever to do with the conspiracy, but had been dead against it all along.

On the day after the International Commission of Peace which only held one sitting and thereby somewhat precipitated another very important event—peace was proclaimed and the blockade raised. There had been, in fact, nothing to discuss save the broad question of immediate peace on the Syndicate's terms or war to the bitter end. All details were left to be discussed by a series of international committees. Lady Margaret had therefore no excuse for deferring the fulfilment of her promise and so, while the bells were pealing and the cannon thundering from one end of Europe and the United States to the other, she christened her splendid name-daughter in the presence of the King and the Kaiser and the American Minister, representing the President, in Buckingham Palace Gardens.

For the other and more important ceremony she

had managed to obtain a day's respite, as she called it, although Paul had a reason quite other than the natural impatience of a lover for taking possession of his promised bride.

On the morning of his wedding day the world woke up to witness a very strange phenomenon. The sky was perfectly cloudless, and yet the sun rose through a thin golden mist which, as the rays became more powerful, lit up and shone with almost inconceivable radiance. Mysterious as it was, all but two men hailed it as a happy augury—the herald of the Golden Age of Peace.

But when the almost private, but none the less splendid ceremony in St. George's Chapel, Windsor, was over and the bride had held her reception, by the King's desire, in the State Apartments, the *Lady Margaret* left almost immediately for London, and Paul at length found himself alone with his wife in the morning-room at Romney House, where he had first learnt that the wish of his heart was to be granted to him.

He put his hands on her shoulders, and, when he had taken the first real kiss—the sweetest a man ever gives or takes—he said somewhat seriously—

“Madge, how would you like to spend the first part of your honeymoon trip in the air?”

“And where else should the Lord and Lady of the Air take their first journey together?” she said with laughing lips and glistening eyes, “I thought it was quite understood that we were to go down to the Abbey in my beautiful namesake.”

“I am going to ask you to take a much longer trip than that, dear,” he replied, “one, in fact to the utter-

most ends of the earth, and, believe me, I have very good reasons for asking."

"Of course you have, Paul," she said, laying her hands on his arms, "and equally, of course, I will go wherever you want me to. But what is the matter? Has anything serious happened?"

"Nothing less than a catastrophe, I am afraid, dearest—I don't like to be the first to tell you of bad news, especially to-day, although, happily, it does not affect me personally."

"Thank heaven for that at least!" she said with a little sigh of relief. "I was afraid it was something to do with your fortunes and so, of course, with mine now."

Naturally there was a brief interlude after this, she said so sweetly. Then Paul led her to the window-seat, saying—

"Come and sit down. It's quite a little story, but I must tell it you or you won't understand."

Then, sitting beside her with her hands in his, he told her for the first time the wonderful tale of the discovery of the Lake of Gold, the source of the boundless wealth that was now as much hers as his. She listened in silent, almost breathless amazement till he had finished, and then said very quietly—

"It is very very marvellous, too marvellous for me to quite understand it yet. But now I suppose you are coming to the catastrophe. What has that to do with your Aladdin's Lake?"

"That I can't say for certain," he replied slowly as though his thoughts were running ahead of his words, as indeed they were, "but I feel pretty sure that there is some connection between them. To begin with, I can now tell you what is something like a

State secret. The *Anonyma* was stolen by an agent of the Russian Government, Count Dourinoff, in fact, but as my mother suspected, without even the knowledge of the Embassy. He took her to Petersburg and Mrs. Deventer and Miss Eirene went with him. Miss Eirene, it seems, offered herself as a sort of prize packet to go with the air-ship if the steal came off. Dourinoff was pretty bad about her, and took her at her word."

"A woman in the case of course!" said Lady Margaret, "I see it all now. The young lady wanted—no, I mustn't interrupt you or I shall never get to the mystery. Go on, please."

"Of course a woman had something to do with it," he laughed, "but that is not the story. When he took the vessel to Petersburg, and had to confess to the Tsar how he had got hold of it, his Majesty like the honourable gentleman that he is, wanted to insist on its being immediately sent back, and threatened to send Dourinoff to Siberia into the bargain. But, you know, in Russia not even Tsars can have things all their own way, and so, when Dourinoff told the Ministers about the Lake of Gold they couldn't resist the temptation of fighting us with our own weapon, and they brought such pressure to bear on his Majesty, that in the end they compromised, and, instead of the *Anonyma* being let loose to sink, burn, and destroy, as our friend Dourinoff wanted to do with her, he was allowed to marry Miss Eirene, and take her off under the guidance of that scoundrel Hacker, to find and annex the few million tons of gold that we left in the crater."

"Very mean of them, I must say," said Lady Margaret, "but still even that was better than coming over

here and smashing everything up with those awful torpedoes of yours. Now, of course, I see why you want to go to the uttermost ends of the earth. Very well, dear, I will be ready in an hour if you like. But we haven't got to the catastrophe yet, have we?"

"Only this far," he replied very seriously, "that we left an air-ship and a submarine there to guard the place, and as the *Ariel* has not come home to report I'm afraid Dourinoff must have destroyed her, and perhaps the submarine too."

"And so you are going to destroy Dourinoff, or take him prisoner. Splendid. When shall we start?"

"You would not start at all, darling," replied Paul, "if there was going to be any destruction about the trip. We may take them prisoners, because my theory is that when Hacker played traitor he thought he could renew the power by just putting the fuel into the converters, but there's something else to do which only two men on earth can do, and that he didn't know or he wouldn't have gone into the treachery business. Now, you see, dear, if the power had not given out or some other thing had happened to her, she would have been back days ago with some of the gold. On the other hand, if the *Ariel* hadn't been crippled or destroyed she would have come, and so I propose to go and look things up for myself."

"And the Mist of Gold?"

"Yes, Miss Impatience, I'm coming to that right now. You remember, or else you've read of the great eruption of Krakatoa, the volcanic island near Sumatra, some years ago. Well, for weeks after that the sun and moon all over the world shone through skies of all sorts of colours, and the end-of-the-world prophets did quite a heavy business, I'm told. In the

end the astronomers and the chemists found that the colours of the sky were caused by vast clouds of very fine volcanic dust floating in the upper regions of the atmosphere. But I believe—of course it's only my theory—that——”

“That your beautiful Golden Lake has exploded and gone off into thin air. Oh, what a pity—and what a waste!”

“It would be a pity,” he laughed, “because I should have liked you to see it, but as for the waste—well, I reckon we’ve about enough to go on without worrying much about the poor-house. But still it’s my firm conviction that this beautiful golden-halo which kindly arranged itself around the sun on your wedding-morning has cost a good few billion dollars’ worth of our gold to fix up. Still, I don’t grudge it, for even the heavens themselves ought to look more beautiful to-day for your sake.”

There was another little interlude after this lover-like speech, and then, when Lady Margaret had got free, she went away to tell the rest of their sudden change of plans.

On the evening of the third day after the departure of the *Lady Margaret* for the far South all the general conditions of peace, military and financial, had been agreed upon and ratified, thanks to the swiftness of intercommunication made possible by the three airships, all of which had been placed at the disposal of the Commission.

Put briefly, they were as follows: Free Trade and open competition were proclaimed throughout the civilised world with the exception of a schedule of certain articles—all luxuries—upon which import duties were to be levied at the discretion of the

importing country for revenue purposes. All trusts, combines and "corners" formed for the purpose of artificially raising prices were prohibited by International Law under penalty of confiscation of property and penal servitude for life for the promoters and active managers of such concerns. A sliding scale of prices for the necessities of life in strict accordance with the laws of supply and demand was adopted subject to annual revision by permanent committees working under the International Commission. Similar committees were appointed to revise rents and grounds values every three years.

Absolute freedom of contract between Capital and Labour was enforced. Strikes and lock-outs were made penal offences, the punishments to fall on leaders of trade organisations and heads of firms and their partners and shareholders. All disputes had to be referred to the Permanent Trade Commission from whose decision there was no appeal.

The material forces of destruction at the command of the Syndicate having put fleets and fortifications out of date, the Powers agreed to stop all warlike developments and reduce armaments to a fixed standard with reference to population and amount of sea board to be policed. Existing war-ships were to be used for this purpose only, save in the event of any Power violating the International Convention.

The gold-reserve of all countries was to be restored at the expense of the Syndicate to the amount at which it stood before the Blockade was declared. The surplus was to be gradually withdrawn from circulation, and to guard against any possible return to the old condition of financial brigandage, two thousand tons of bullion were respectively stored in the Bank

of England and in the United States Treasury, ready to be let loose in a devastating flood upon the devoted heads of any rashly-daring speculators who might feel tempted to upset the natural equilibrium of the world's markets for the sake of personal gain or aggrandisement.

The final ratification of the terms of peace was celebrated by a dinner given by King Edward at Windsor to the Crowned Heads of Europe, the Mikado of Japan, the French President, and the President of the United States, to whom the unanimous vote of the Senate had given due leave of absence. This was accompanied by a vast number of other dinners, diplomatic, political and commercial, and by universal popular rejoicings, all over the civilised world—and so the great work began in Paul Kingston's little study in Lake City was duly brought to a triumphal conclusion.

EPILOGUE

THE *Lady Margaret* flying at full speed on a bee-line, covered the six thousand odd miles between Hyde Park and Mount Kingston in thirty hours. She had taken the air at six in the afternoon and as the clock in the conning-tower struck twelve, London time, the following day, Paul stopped the propellers, started the lifting fans and swung the vessel round in a wide semi-circle. She came to a standstill over the desolate, mist-clad wilderness of mountain, rock and sand forming the promontory upon which the Lake of Gold had been discovered on that other memorable wedding-trip.

"We shan't be able to see anything from here, dear," he said after a long look over the cloud-sea through which the rock-peaks and domes of the mountains showed like scattered islands. "We shall have to go down, but I don't think there's any danger. They can't have stopped here all this time unless they had to, and if they had to they're pretty helpless by now."

"Oh, yes," she replied, slipping her arm through his. "Do let us go down at once. You don't know

how I am longing to see this wonderful Golden Lake of yours."

"You shall see it right away," he said, slipping his arm round her waist and taking a quite justifiable liberty with the tempting lips that had come so near his own, "always supposing there's any lake left, which I hardly expect."

He slowed the fans and the *Lady Margaret* dropped down through the mists to within five hundred feet of the earth.

"Why, this is not the place at all!" exclaimed Paul after a careful examination of the ground, "and yet there can't be any mistake in the reckoning," he went on, looking down at his chart. "No, this is the latitude and longitude of the lake to an inch, and so I guess I was right. There's been an earthquake and a general bust-up, and that's about all there is to it. I'm afraid you'll just have to take what I told you about the lake for granted, dear, for mortal eyes will never look upon it again."

"Of course I will, Paul," she said, giving his arm a gentle little squeeze, "but what a pity! Still, after all, I suppose it is a good thing for the world, for if it had remained there till someone else stole an air-ship or invented one, people would have fought over it as long as anyone was left to fight. But what has happened to the *Anonyma* and the *Ariel* and the submarine you left here?"

"There's no telling now, dearest," replied Paul almost gloomily, "it isn't likely that there's much left of them after a smash-up like this. Still we won't go back till we've had a good look for them. It's a pretty mean place for you to spend the first part of

your honeymoon in, Madge, but I reckon you wouldn't like to go away before we've had a try."

"Of course not. I don't care if we spend the whole of it here. After all *this* is our world for the present, and I'm quite sure I don't want any other—at least not for the present."

Of course Paul was entirely of the same mind, and so the *Lady Margaret* spent the rest of the day and most of the night cruising about very slowly at an elevation of a couple of hundred feet or so among the valleys and round the now utterly changed coastline. As soon as it grew dark Paul turned on two searchlights ahead and two astern, two tilted downwards and two upwards. They were power rays rather than lights, for, though they lit up whatever they fell on brilliantly, they were themselves invisible. It was, in fact, their discovery that had enabled Paul to at last completely solve the problem of submarine navigation.

A little before midnight Lady Margaret had gone to lie down, but so anxious was she that she was back by Paul's side in the conning-tower again before dawn, and it so happened that she had scarcely finished her first look round the broad fields of the search-lights than she pointed downwards ahead of the vessel which was then heading southward, and exclaimed:

"Look, Paul, look! There is something surely that is not rock. See it has a shape—like a huge fish. Is it the submarine?"

"Looks mighty like it," said Paul picking up his field glass and turning it on what looked like the shape of some huge stranded leviathan. "So it is, by all that's wonderful—but how in thunder did it get there?"

It's five miles from the sea and plumb on the top of a precipice that looks about a thousand feet high from here."

"Aren't there such things as tidal waves usually connected with earthquakes near the sea?" suggested Lady Margaret, half-quizzically. "It can't have got there out of the sea any other way, can it?"

"Of course not. What a fool I am," he replied. "That's it, and I hope we've come in time, for no mortal man could get away from that eagle's nest except in an air-ship. "We'll go down right away."

The *Lady Margaret* rose in a slanting direction towards the submarine and came to a rest on the narrow rocky plateau on which it was lying. As the gangway door opened for Paul to go and reconnoitre a grisly head showed itself above the hatch-coamings, and a weak voice said with a still strong American accent:

"Well, I'm darned! Is it you, Mr. Kingston, after all? We was beginning to allow that you never was coming, and I reckon you've not come any too soon."

"Doesn't look it, Pullitzer," replied Paul cheerily, "anyhow, we're here now. Have you got all hands there?"

"Yes, sir," replied the Captain of the submarine, "all our's and the *Ariel's* too, but some of them's pretty badly hurt like the rest of us. Will you come on board, sir?"

"Certainly," replied Paul, running down the steps while Pullitzer and another got out the side-ladder of the submarine. Lady Margaret, watching him from the lower cabin, at once guessed what was the matter and immediately set to work with the assistance

of the cook and steward to get things ready for the invalids.

Captain Vinton and the rest of the crew went on board the submarine and within an hour nine sorely wounded and battered men, most of them with broken arms or thighs, or both, were safely laid in the berths of the air-ship.

Captain Pullitzer, a hard-bitten, big-boned, leather-skinned "Nantucker," though badly shaken, was the only really whole man on board, and so it fell to him, when the wrecks of the *Ariel* and the submarine had been blown up, to tell as an eye-witness the story of the catastrophe which Paul had suspected in far-away London. He told it at lunch when the *Lady Margaret* was winging her way home at full speed. His story was brief, but it had a lot of tragedy in it.

"It was this way, Mr. Kingston and your Ladyship," he began as he finished his third cocktail before setting to at the soup, "Getting on for five weeks ago now—I can't fix the day by the calendar, 'cause most of us were delirious for quite a while after the bust-up, the *Ariel* was aloft scouting as usual in the first of the dawn when she sees something flashing in the sun above the clouds, and presently the *Anonyma* comes rushing up out of the nor-east-ard, slows down, runs alongside, hoists a foreign flag, Russian, I believe, and half paralyses Cap'en Forrester by calling on him to surrender his ship.

"Well, sir, I don't need to tell you that he wasn't taking any surrender in his just then, so, obeying the manœuvre instructions, he drops the *Ariel* plumb through the clouds right under the other. She dropped after him, shot ahead and let go a torpedo.

It just missed him and hit the earth a thousand feet below. Whether that started the earthquake or not I don't know, but it made a mighty good imitation of one on its own accord.

"Forrester, bein' bottom dog, as you might say, couldn't use his torpedoes, so he shot ahead too, rose a bit, and just as the *Anonyma* slipped another torpedo, he let go with one of his after guns. Then no one knows just what did happen. Maybe the shell hit the torpedo, maybe the darned thing went off of itself. Anyhow there was an explosion that seemed to heave the earth up and bring the heavens down to meet it. When things settled down a bit we, down in the harbour, of course, saw the *Ariel* slithering down slantways a lot too fast for her health. Still she reached ground without quite smashing herself, though she broke pretty nearly every darned thing inside her including the crew as you see."

"And what became of the *Anonyma*, Mr. Pullitzer?" asked Lady Margaret, who had so far listened with rapt attention but could not now control her impatience any longer. "Did she come to grief, too?"

"Your Ladyship," replied the Captain of the late cruiser of the underseas very seriously, "I'm not a superstitious man. Maybe I might have found more religion when I was about it, and kept more than I have done since, but I'm certain there was a lot of bad, hard cases aboard that craft and they went home a darned sight quicker and sooner than they expected.

"What I saw of their going was this way. When the smoke cleared we could see the *Anonyma* p'raps a thousand feet plumb over the Lake, twisting round

and dropping like a winged duck. Then all of a moment she up-ended and flashed down stem first into the golden sea they'd come to steal. It may have been a judgment or just their mean luck; but my dollars would go on judgment every time."

"Awful, isn't it, Paul!" gasped Lady Margaret, whose cheeks had paled as she followed the simply graphic recital. "What a fate! And what happened then, Mr. Pullitzer?"

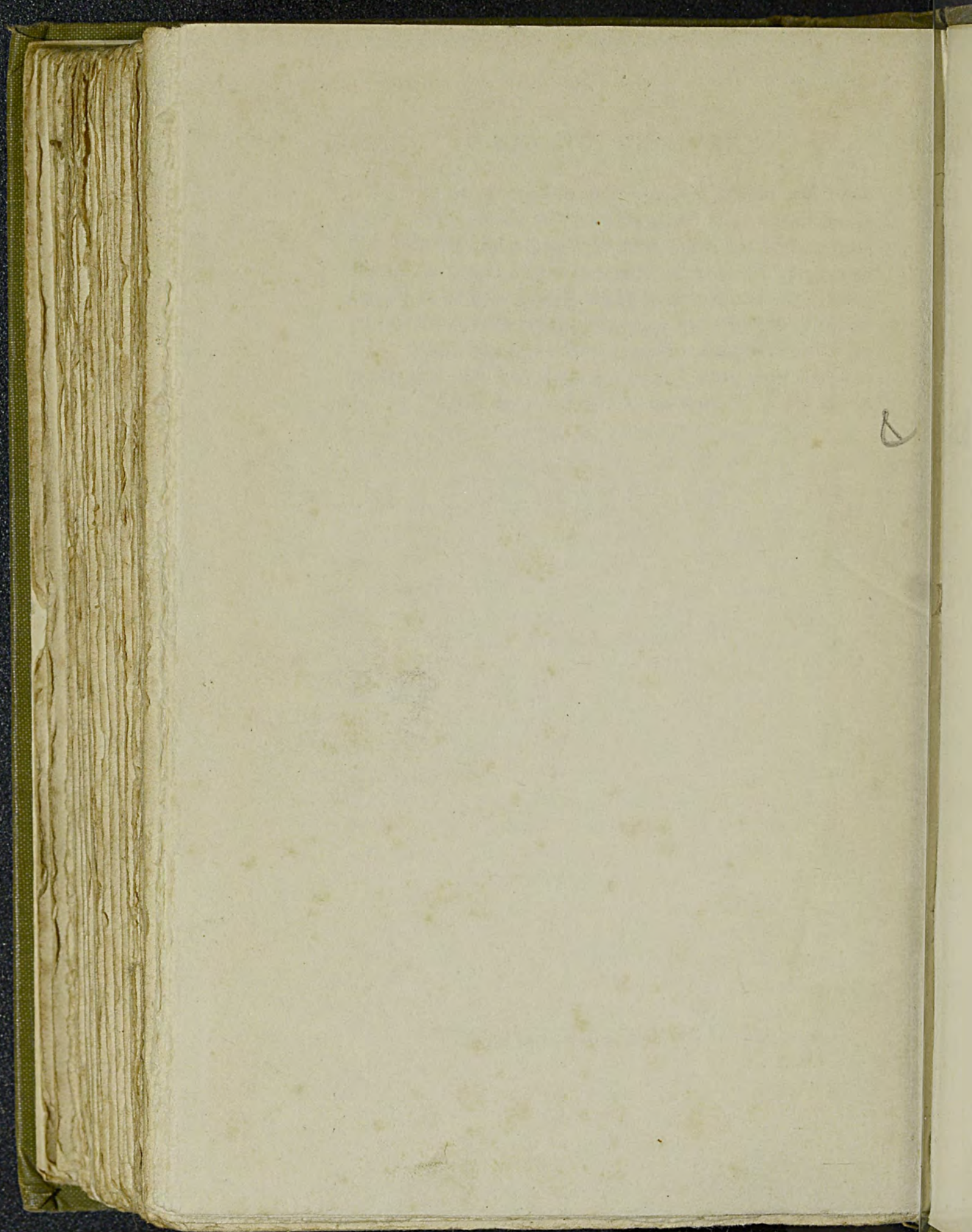
"That, my Lady," he replied with something like a look of fear coming into his clear grey eyes, "that is what no man alive can tell you. Cap'en Forrester, who's a bit of a boss at science, allowed that when the air-ship plunged from that height into the lake, she stuck in the throat of the volcano and sort of corked it up. And then what he calls the natural forces underneath got heaving around and, finding the safety valve, so to speak, jammed, sent the lake, mountain and all kite high.

"Anyhow all we ever knew was that the earth went up and the heavens came down and mixed themselves up in one almighty tangle of smoke and flame, and then, the Pacific Ocean took charge as if it wanted to put the fire out. Bay and harbour were gone in a moment. The mountains came down and we whooped over them at about a thousand miles an hour just as we got the scuttles fast.

"Then we seemed to hit something and it knocked us all to sleep in less than a wink. I guess that was when we grounded where you found us. When we came round there was hardly a whole bone in the ship. I was the only one that wasn't broken up, and when I could walk I started out to see if I could find

anything of the *Ariel*. She was lying, as you saw, about half a mile further along the slope. We didn't stop to find out what sort of miracle had planted her so near us, but somehow we managed to get all hands into the submarine and there you found us. If you hadn't it would have wanted another miracle to get us off that precipice. Now I reckon that's about all I can tell you, your Ladyship, and you, Mr. Kingston, about the final bust-up of the Lake of Gold."

THE END.





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