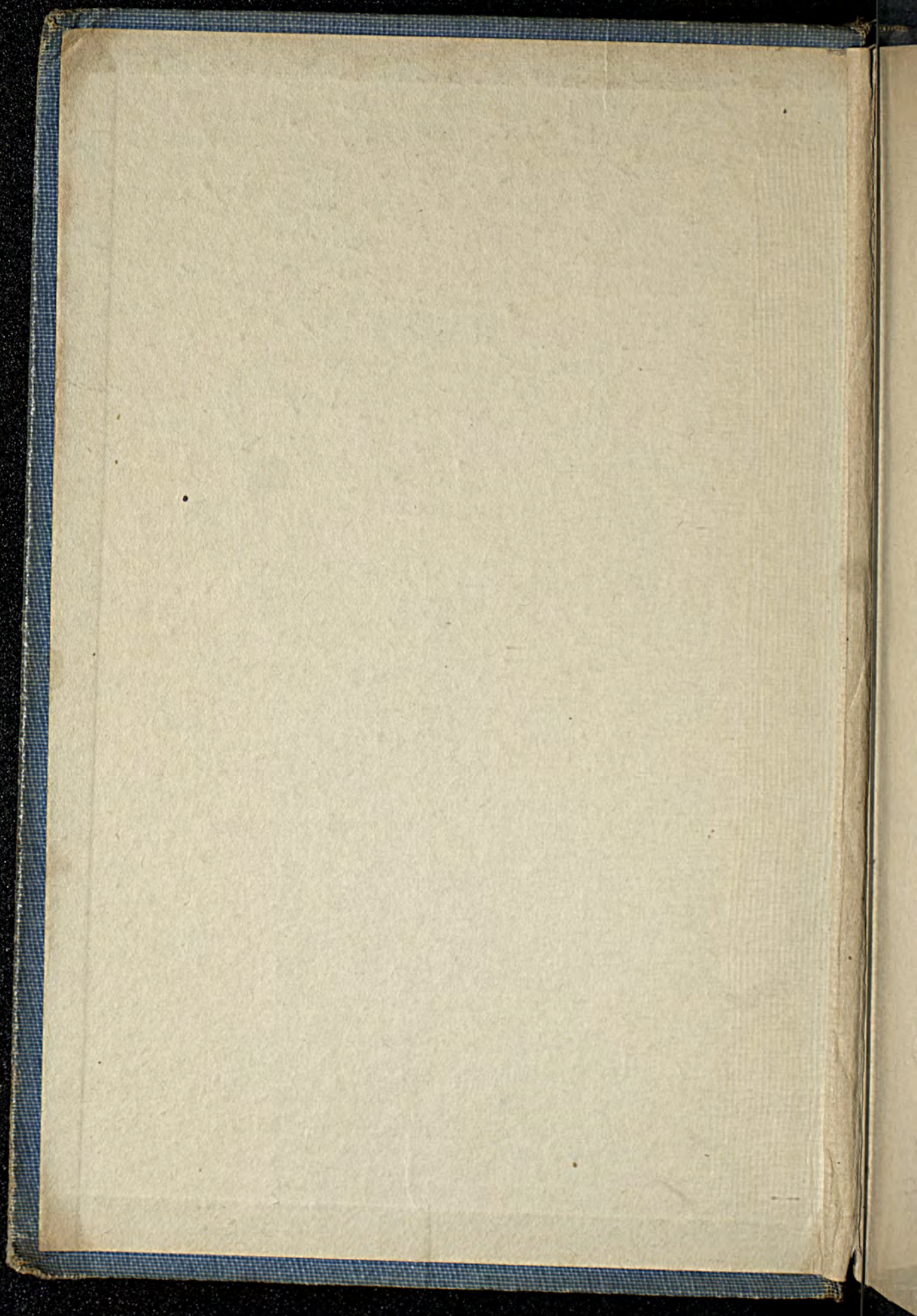


**THE
STOLEN PLANET**

JOHN MASTIN



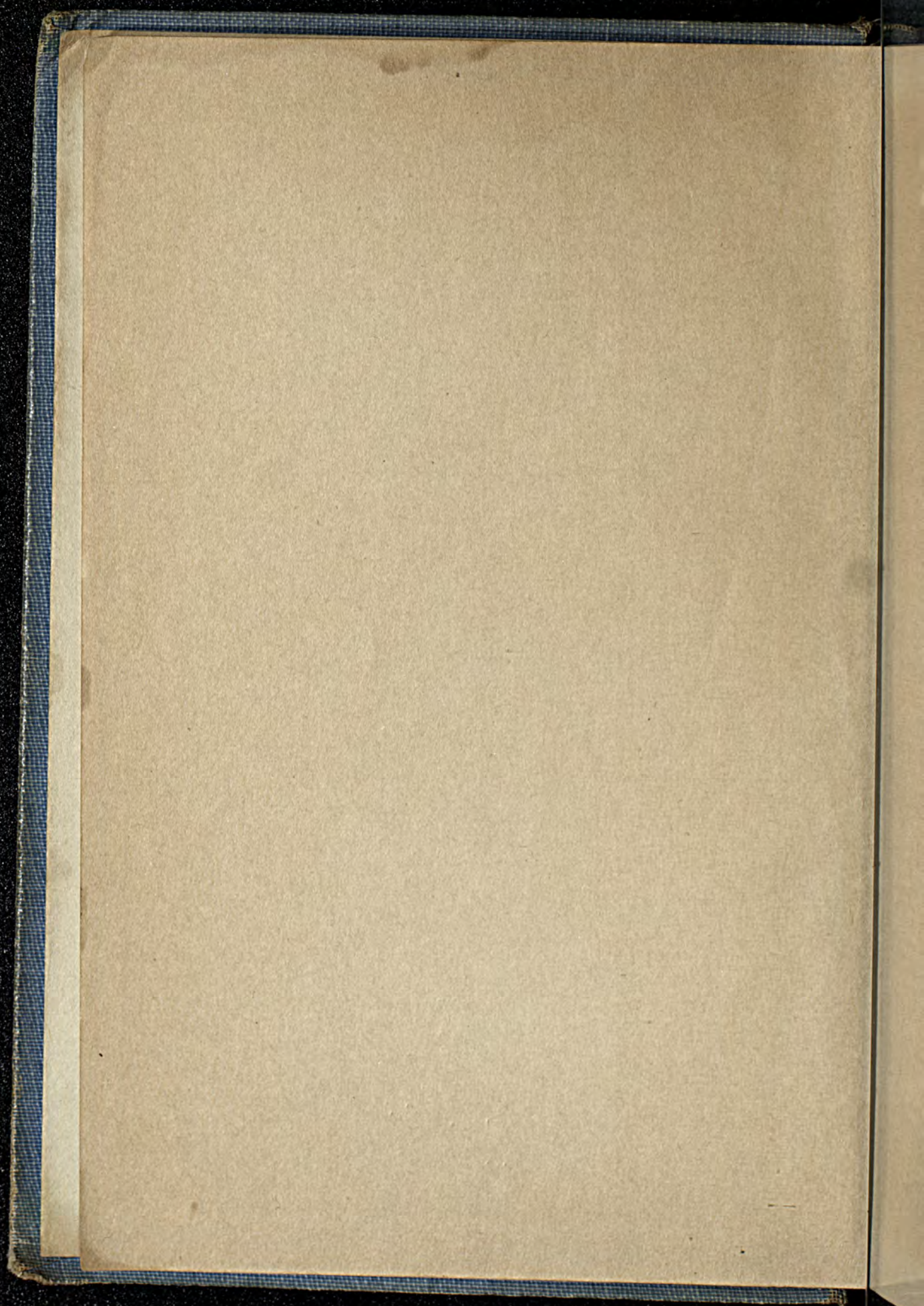
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(Companion book to "The Stolen Planet")

LONDON

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Crown 8vo., 6s.

"The Immortal Light,"

— BY —

JOHN MASTIN, F.S.A. Scot.,

F.L.S., F.C.S., F.R.A.S., F.R.M.S., R.B.A.,

Author of "The Stolen Planet;" "The True Analysis of Milk;" "Parasites of Insects;"
"Plate-Culture and Staining of Amœbæ;" "Through the Sun in an Airship," &c. &c.

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CHARLES GRIFFIN & Co., Ltd., Exeter Street, Strand, LONDON.

7 North Road,
Clapham Park, S.W.
Nov. 27, 1905.

My Dear Mastin,

I kept your MS. of The Stolen Planet only so long that I might read it thoroughly, and now I thank you heartily for sending it to me. It is a very long time since I have read anything so brilliant.

I hope it will soon be in the reach of every intelligent youth in our country.

It does not matter whether the things it relates are possible or impossible. It is the incentive to imagination that delights me.

What is gravitation to me? I don't see it. I don't hear it. That is the dull thought of the dull boy. But let him read this story, and he will open his eyes and his ears, every lesson in class will touch some point of interest, every demonstration in the laboratory will seem to have potentiality of which the demonstrator perhaps knows nothing.

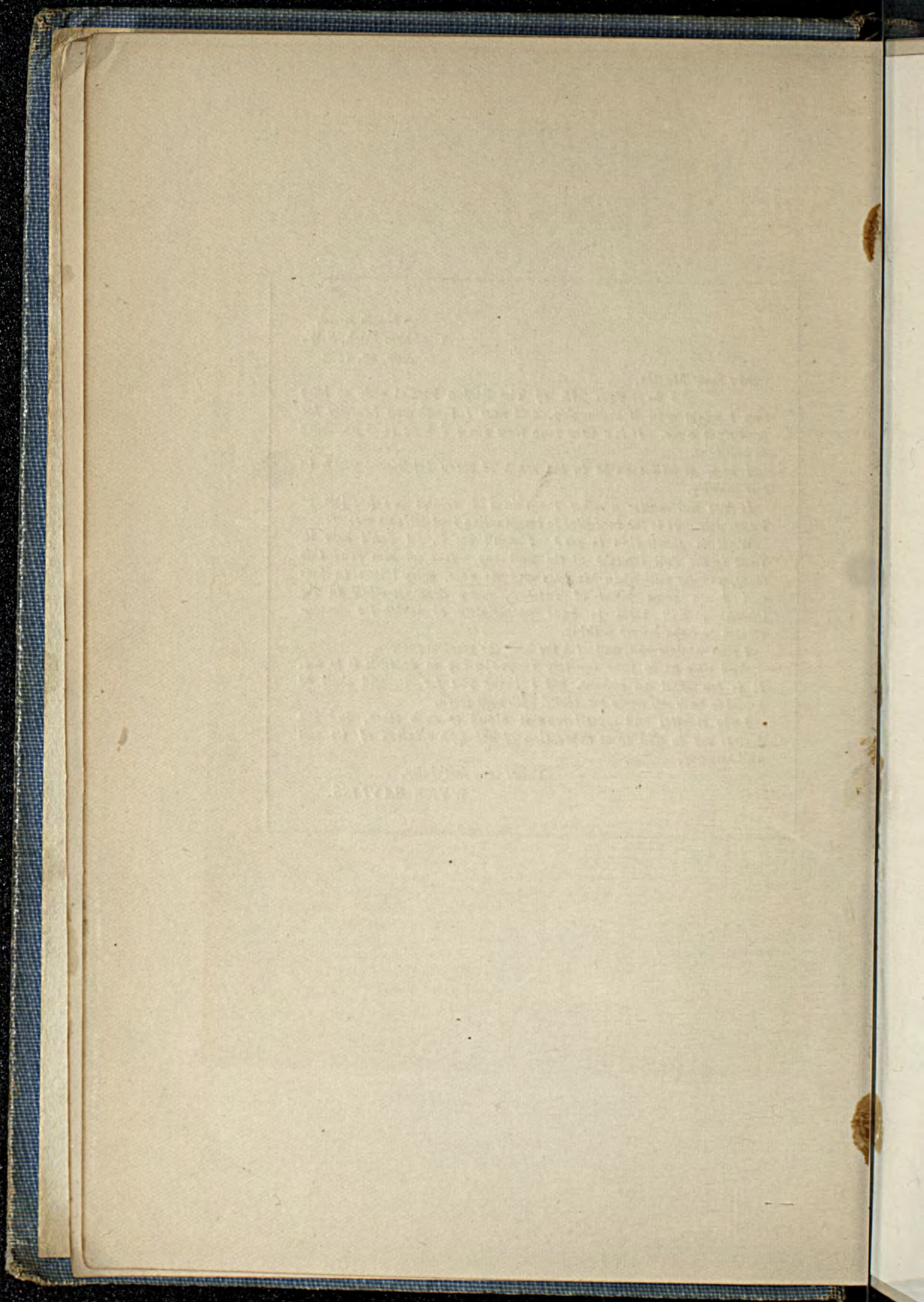
I congratulate you, and wish the book the greatest success.

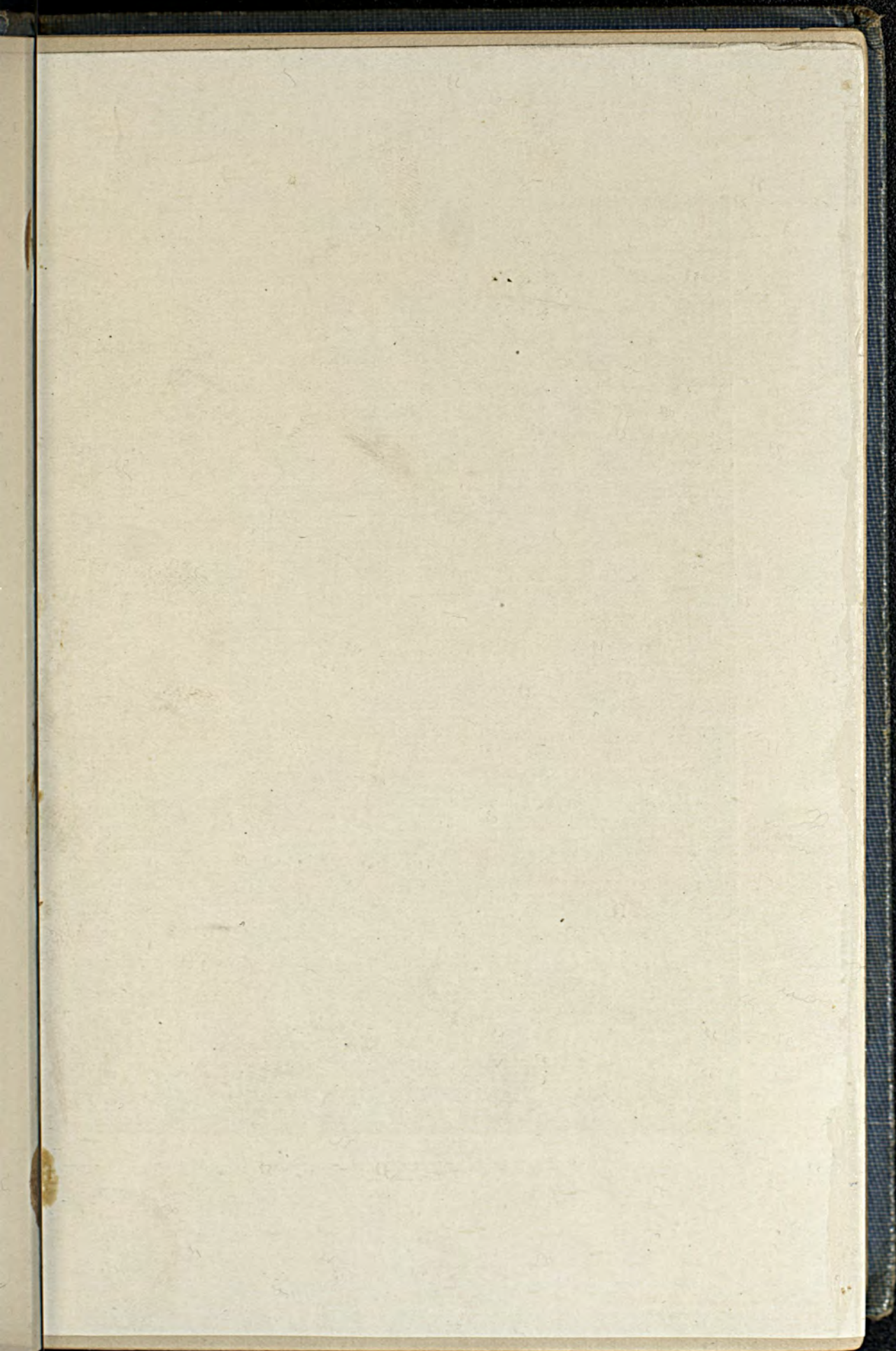
And now as to your courtesy in proposing to dedicate it to me. It is too great an honour, but I thank you for it, and shall be proud to have my name associated with your work.

Lady Bayliss and myself read it aloud to each other, and she desires me to add some expression of her appreciation of its wit and humour.

Yours very faithfully,

WYKE BAYLISS.







It was really extraordinary.

THE STOLEN PLANET

JOHN MASTIN, F.S.A. Scot.

F.L.S., F.C.S., F.R.A.S., F.R.M.S., R.B.A.

AUTHOR OF

"PARASITES OF INSECTS," "THE TRUE ANALYSIS OF MILK,"
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"THROUGH THE SUN IN AN AIRSHIP,"
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ETC. ETC.



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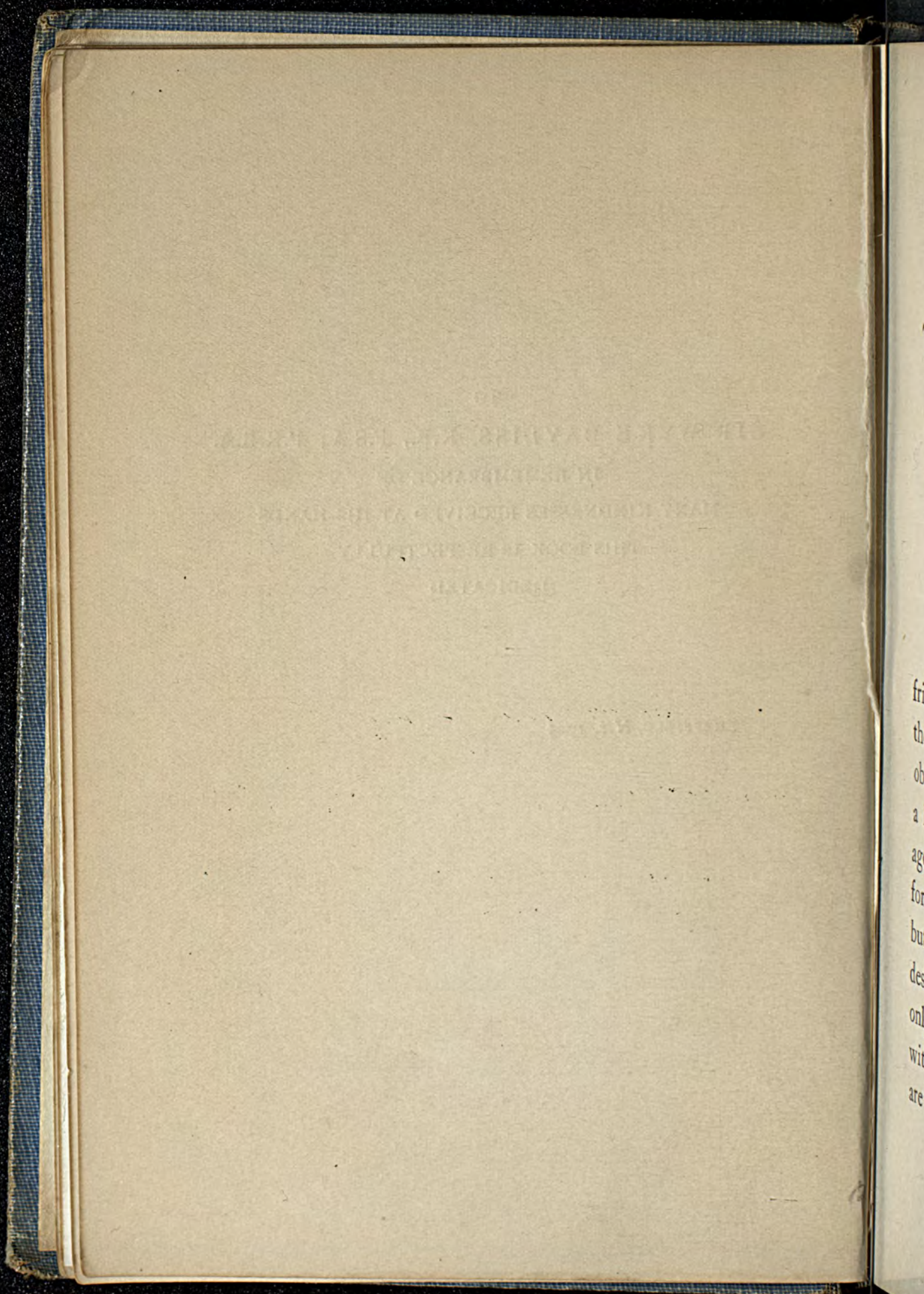
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EXETER STREET, STRAND

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TO
SIR WYKE BAYLISS, K.B., F.S.A., P.R.B.A.
IN REMEMBRANCE OF
MANY KINDNESSES RECEIVED AT HIS HANDS
THIS BOOK IS RESPECTFULLY
DEDICATED

SHEFFIELD, *Nov.* 1905



THE STOLEN PLANET

CHAPTER I

EXPLANATORY

“Words are things, and a small drop of ink
Falling like dew upon a thought, produces
That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think.”

BYRON.

NOTHING can tempt me to be false to my friend! Again and again have I said that the secrets cannot by any possibility be obtained from me. Only a few days ago, a handsome fortune was offered me by an agent of one of the foreign Governments, for the one great secret of the *Regina*; but as I have ample means to satisfy all my desires, even this was no temptation. Not only are Fraser Burnley's interests linked with mine, in many inventions, but we are bound together by inseparable ties of

the closest friendship, which nothing can divide. After our wonderful adventure, which threatened the annihilation of the world, and incidentally, made a great inroad into our fortunes, we thought to settle quietly down in our respective homes in the suburbs of Derwent, but this does not seem possible; so many people from all parts of the world are continually pestering us, and trying to wrest our secrets from us, by bribes and persuasion, that the situation has at last become intolerable. I have therefore decided to write a rough account of our voyage, and sublime, yet awful adventures, in the hope that the details, and our determination to keep the wonderful discovery of gravity-control to ourselves,—at any rate for the present—will satisfy all curiosity, and leave us to live in peace to conduct our pursuits and hobbies, in that undisturbed tranquillity we so much desire.

The two chief characters in these bold undertakings were Fraser Burnley and

myself. The latter should, by all the rules of etiquette and good breeding, come last ; and, if my own naturally shy and retiring disposition were considered, would not appear at all, but, claiming the reader's kind indulgence, and with the greatest diffidence, I will first give a very brief review of my career, in order that I may then at once pass on to that of my dear friend Fraser.

My name is Jervis Meredith, and my parents well-born and wealthy. Being as a youth passionately devoted to art, I fear my studies gave place to drawing and modelling to a great extent, although I passed through college creditably enough, and in due course obtained my degree.

Eventually I decided to become a sculptor. I was taught by Varesto, and, like him, quickly became famous.

In a few years I had amassed a handsome fortune, which, with my patrimony, gave me ample means to indulge my favourite

CHAPTER II

LUKE NORTH'S BABY

"Some children must be gently nurtured,
Others are hard as nails."

IRONS.

THE Guy Fawkes half-holiday at Mooran College was always looked forward to by us boys with great excitement, and long before the day arrived schemes on an elaborate scale were always arranged for a great fight of some sort. For some weeks before, we had our desks and lockers crammed full of crackers and other fireworks, to say nothing of gunpowder and matches; with the thoughtlessness of youth, quite disregarding the fact that these unsafe receptacles held sufficient explosives to blow the whole school and all in or near it to atoms. As the day approached, the masters got a little

lax and allowed us to do pretty much as we liked, in reason, whilst on the actual day we simply ran riot. The particular Fifth I have in my mind opened gloriously, every one was in the highest spirits, for a great battle had been arranged.

The junior boys had challenged those of the senior forms to storm a fort which they agreed to hold, Fraser taking command of the storming party. The fort in question was a wall six feet high, which fenced in a portion of the school playground. As the hour of attack drew near, both sides took up their positions and piled up their missiles ready for action, and very soon the air was ringing with the mingled yells of triumph and defiance, as the battle turned first in favour of the besiegers and then of the besieged. Many tried to scale the walls from either side, in order to get a better point of vantage, but few of us retained our positions, owing to the fusilade of crackers, squibs and the like, set off in our faces,

Scarcely was a head seen over the top but it was instantly met with a dozen or more well-directed fireworks, and as instantly withdrawn.

One of the boys, Luke North by name, was the proud possessor of a toy cannon, made of cast-iron and of rather large dimensions. Such was its size and weight, that it took Luke all his time to carry it. Fortunately for us, he was on our side—the storming party—and as the owner of this remarkable weapon, he was at once made General of Artillery.

As we were not making much impression on the enemy by our united incessant firing, both sides being fairly well matched, Field-Marshal Burnley ordered the guns to advance. At once Luke commenced to load in rather an original manner. Two boys held the gun upright, with the breech resting on the ground, whilst the charge was rammed home by repeated blows from a heavy coal-hammer, regardless of the fact

that the cannon might have exploded at any moment. The weapon was then placed in position close to the face of the wall, and the artillerist ordered to fire. However brave Luke showed himself in ramming home the charge, he was not prepared to place the lighted match to the priming, nor would any one else, until Fraser gallantly volunteered. The whole of his staff and army retired from the field, in fact the besieged left their hard-earned ramparts and rapidly retreated to the rear. Fraser, the intrepid commander, alone and deserted by friends and foes alike, marched boldly to the cannon, calmly pulled a match-box out of his pocket, struck a match, applied it, and there was a terrific crash. Fraser, the brave leader of the "forlorn hope," was blown backwards with great force. A wide breach was made in the ramparts of the enemy, and Luke's cast-iron baby was literally blown to atoms.

For an instant all were panic-stricken to

see Fraser shot backwards, but when he instantly got up, and with a yell made for the opening, the whole of the besiegers followed him like a swarm of bees, and the next moment the position was carried.

CHAPTER III

A NAVAL ENGAGEMENT

"She walks the waters like a thing of life,
And seems to dare the elements to strife."

BYRON.

EVEN as a boy at school, Fraser had a genius for inventing toys and mechanical and electrical contrivances for saving labour, and some of these inventions of his school-days became, in later life, the means of adding in no small degree to his already large income.

On one occasion he brought science to bear on some toy boats, in a very clever and ingenious manner. One of the chief amusements of the boys at the college, was the sailing of model boats and yachts on a large pond in the school grounds. Fraser, being full of a story he had recently read, of the

old pirate days, inspired many of the boys to build or buy some large model sailing yachts until there was quite a fleet of vessels. We became really expert in sailing and racing these yachts, but of course this was not sufficient for Fraser, and he must convert the yachts into a naval fleet, so that each yacht was armed with cannon, and manned by sailors in the shape of small dolls. This fleet was sailed and fought in a very clever manner; the cannon were loaded with shot, and so experienced did we become, that we could sail the vessels in parallel for some distance and fire the shots at any moment, by time fuses made of thin cotton dipped in saltpetre, and it is surprising how real some of these actions seemed.

Fraser owned a large cutter called the *Wasp*, and I, Jervis Meredith, a large vessel rigged as a schooner, and called the *Moth*. Mine was made by a sailor and was clinker-built of planks. Both were beautiful sailers, and I had challenged Fraser to a fight with

them, the prize to be a large brass cannon. The *Wasp* had six guns and the crew consisted of thirty-two officers and men all told; the *Moth* having a crew of forty all told, and eight guns. The six guns of the *Wasp* were all brought to port, but the *Moth* had four on each side.

The action was to consist of four broadsides fired by each vessel, the vessels to cross the pond at each broadside. The guns were loaded and the fuses laid. The guns of the *Wasp* had been double-shotted and arranged to fire consecutively, those of the *Moth* in a volley. The vessels left the shore in a perfectly parallel line, but after travelling over one-third of the pond, the *Wasp* luffed and shot into the teeth of the wind, her guns beginning to fire harmlessly, so far as the *Moth* was concerned, but the projectiles fell amongst a number of ducks, mortally wounding an old drake. The schooner's guns were discharged, bringing down the cutter's top-sail, killing one man

and blowing another overboard. The vessels were recovered at the other side of the pond, and the man overboard saved, so that the *Wasp* lost one man, the *Moth* being victorious.

The vessels were now to cross the pond with a fair wind, giving them a better chance of keeping dead parallel. Fraser again tried the experiment of consecutive firing, whilst I kept to the volley. When the vessels were two-thirds across the pond, the *Wasp* began to pepper the *Moth*, blowing away the foremast and killing three men, and then the vessels separated owing to the lessened sail of the schooner. This time the *Wasp* got off scot free, the *Moth* having lost three men and sustained damage. The foremast was repaired as well as possible, and the vessels sent on another cruise, but unfortunately this time both crossed the pond discharging their guns harmlessly, the *Wasp* having shot ahead.

Now Fraser played me a very scurvy

trick. He had secreted below the deck of his vessel, a very heavy gun, at a port covered with painted paper so as to be invisible. This gun had previously been loaded with a considerable charge of powder, and double-shotted, and everything laid ready for firing. Both vessels left the shore, keeping beautifully parallel until mid-stream was reached. Then there was a brief cannonade from the *Wasp*, and a loud explosion from the big gun. Such was the recoil that the *Wasp* laid over on her broadside, but the *Moth*, having one of her planks blown clean out, went to the bottom with all hands.

The battle did not quite finish here, as the respective owners retired to an adjoining field to fight it out.

CHAPTER IV

FRASER GIVES A LECTURE

"Ye aft begin a thing richt weel,
But t'endin's no sae guid."

Scotch Ballad.

AFTER this, Fraser and I became firmer friends than ever, and, when the time came for leaving Mooran College, Fraser's father sent him to Oxford, my father, at my persuasion, sending me to the same college. In making our plans for the future, as most youths do, Fraser decided to become a scientist, and therefore went in strongly for chemistry and electricity, and determined to give a lecture on one of these subjects at Derwent during his next vacation, his first lecture to be illustrated by chemical experiments.

In order to get an appreciative audience

FRASER GIVES A LECTURE 27

he arranged with the vicar of the parish in which he resided, to give his lecture for the benefit of the mutual improvement society.

Now Fraser never believed in doing anything by halves, and so he determined to go in for a brilliant display. Probably the immortal Davy, or the great Faraday, would have considered a dozen experiments amply sufficient to demonstrate the most difficult problems in chemistry, but our youthful lecturer's paper contained fifty-two, some of which were tried for the *first* time before the audience. The fateful evening arrived, and so did the audience and the chairman, the reverend vicar of the parish. The lecture-table consisted of two trestle-tables, such as are used at social teas, etc., covered with green baize, which, by the way, was mine, the elaborate apparatus on it being hired from a manufacturing chemist in Derwent, the whole arrangement looking very scientific and wonderful to the audience. One of his college chums, whose chief

recommendation to the post was a total lack of any knowledge of chemistry, was made his assistant.

Fraser was introduced to his audience by the chairman, as Mr. Fraser Burnley, of Brazenose College, Oxford, who would deliver his lecture on "The Air we Breathe," and also illustrate the same with the very wonderful and complicated apparatus before them. Then Fraser began to read his paper in rather a nervous strain, but managed to get his introduction in and to arrive at his first experiment, using the words "I shall now have much pleasure in showing you a little experiment which will demonstrate to you the difference between a chemical compound and a mechanical mixture. This consists in taking some substances which are mechanically mixed together, pouring on to the same a liquid, which will instantly cause a chemical union of the elements in the shape of a flame." Unfortunately, nothing happened, except a rush

of blood to the lecturer's face. He certainly looked as if *he* would explode, or take fire, he appeared so hot. Of course he explained that his assistant must have mixed the wrong chemicals, and thus caused the failure. Still, however, the experiment did appear to have amused the audience, who seemed delighted with the failure. Fraser at once plunged into the next subject, and brought the audience to the second experiment, which was the placing of a light to a bottleful of certain explosive gases. This experiment was a profound success, the explosion came off with a crash like the roar of a big cannon ; the ladies shrieked with fear, some insisting upon leaving the room. The chairman, being of a highly nervous temperament, nearly fainted with fright ; in fact, Fraser had to use all his persuasive powers to induce him even to stay on the platform, and to believe that the experiments were perfectly safe. Tranquillity being restored, Fraser began to take courage and to plunge

into his subject with something like zest. A little later on there was another experiment, which Fraser explained would be a very slight explosion. This also consisted of a bottle and a taper. Now this bottle was very much larger than the previous one, and the chairman, evidently working out a little problem in mental arithmetic, concluded that if a soda-water bottle of small capacity gave an explosion like the roar of a cannon, a large pickle bottle would blow him to one of the two places he discoursed about every Sunday. As he was not anxious to partake of immortal bliss,—or otherwise,—he made a rapid flight to the other end of the room, and the audience would have followed him had not the lecturer quickly applied the taper, and lo! a small puff, followed by a tremendous roar, *not* from the bottle, but from the audience, at the expense of their beloved pastor, who returned to the chairman's seat, trying to look as if it was a good joke.

After a series of failures and disasters, the lecturer decided to bring his paper to a conclusion by showing a very wonderful experiment, which he felt quite sure would atone for all his previous mishaps. This *coup de grâce* was an illustration of the "will-o'-the-wisp" of the marsh. Phosphorus was heated in a powerful alkaline fluid, and the gas allowed to bubble up through water from the nose of the retort. This experiment was most successful, especially as it was performed in the dark; the beautiful rings of phosphorus-pent-oxide ascending in their well-known beautiful manner, but also diffusing their most unpleasant odour throughout the room, much to the distress of the audience, and particularly to the chairman, who had a rooted antipathy to anything offensive to his nasal organ. As Fraser was delivering the conclusion to his paper, the chairman requested the assistant to push the nose of the retort under the water, in order to prevent the noxious fumes asphyxiating

everybody. Now this assistant, in his blissful ignorance of what would ensue, obligingly complied; thus, by a well-known law of nature, creating a vacuum in the hot retort, causing the water to rush into it, bursting it, and blowing the burning phosphorus all over *my* baize and the table, both of which immediately took fire. During the struggle to extinguish the flames, the chairman managed to knock one of the taps off the hot-water apparatus, so that there was now added to the wonderful transformation scene, a stream of hot water and steam, which showered amongst the audience.

This proved the last straw. There was a general stampede who should get away first, the chairman by no means being last. Fraser did not lose his presence of mind, but extinguished the flames and stopped the boiling geyser, the assistant rendering yeoman service, not however before the borrowed apparatus had been destroyed, together with my green baize. I told him

FRASER GIVES A LECTURE 33

before the lecture, that the whole affair would prove a *fiasco*, because no good could come of appropriating other people's green baize without permission, so I was not surprised at the result, although he seemed to be. However, although this, his first lecture, proved rather costly, still he consoled himself with the thought that the stampede of the audience had saved him from the usual vote of thanks, which, under the circumstances, might have proved too much for poor Fraser.

CHAPTER V

UP IN A BALLOON

"He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
That dares not put it to the touch
To gain or lose it all."

MONTROSE.

FRASER and myself, being interested in so many enterprises together, and being independent so far as this world's goods are concerned, resolved to keep up our friendship, and not to lose sight of each other, at any rate until some of our romantic boyish dreams had been actually tried. We were both chemists and electricians, and both had a fair knowledge of mechanical engineering, so we agreed to join forces and work out some of our inventions together. Now we were both deeply interested in aërostation, and having the means at our disposal, we

purchased a balloon of 30,000 cubic feet capacity. We had studied this subject very carefully, and certainly knew a great deal about it, or thought we did, but, as Pope says—

“A little learning is a dangerous thing;
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring.”

Now we were both fully convinced that we had drunk very deeply indeed of the *aërial* spring, so we sent off a cheque to a Paris house, and in the course of a few weeks there arrived, neatly packed in a wicker-work car, a magnificent silk balloon, with net and fittings complete. In the meantime, Fraser had had fixed in his father's grounds a large gas supply service, and when the balloon arrived we were of course very eager for a flight. We requisitioned a friend to help us, and got a load or two of sand to fill the bags, after which we commenced to inflate the balloon. First of all, the envelope was spread out in a

circle, having the valve-doors in the centre at the top, then the net was attached and the large flexible hose pushed into the mouth at the bottom.

In a short time the valve-box began to lift, and when clear of the ground, bags of sand were hooked on to the net to hold it down. As it rose still higher, the sand bags were placed on a lower and still lower mesh, till the whole balloon was quite clear of the ground. All this was done without any mishap, and at last the bag was full. The inflating pipe was then removed, and the car attached to the net ropes, with its guide rope and grapnel. A crowd of people had by this time assembled to witness the ascent, both Fraser and myself becoming quite excited as the hour for sailing drew near. Five or six bags of sand were then put in the car, and a dozen or more men were given the trail rope to hold firmly and fast. The balloon was by this time tugging at the line with considerable force ; indeed, such

was the pull, that one of the men holding the sides of the car was lifted several feet in the air and then dropped, much to the amusement of the crowd. There was a spring hook by which the balloon could easily be liberated from the men holding it. Now an experienced aëronaut would have put sufficient ballast in the car to cause the balloon to rise very slowly, but Fraser liberated it when its ascending force was at least several hundred pounds weight, consequently, it leaped into the sky like a rocket and shot through the clouds, both of us holding on for dear life, and being nearly suffocated by the rush of gas from the mouth of the balloon. This mad leap into space continued until the air became so rarefied that the balloon at last reached its equilibrium. We were both very much dismayed at this tremendous leap, but when the balloon floated slowly and majestically, we ventured to rise and look round.

"I say, old fellow," said Fraser, "where's

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the world? There's the sun, but where's the earth? It has absolutely vanished!"

We looked round in amazement, but nowhere could we see the earth, and we felt very much terrified. One thing that horrified us was the utter silence and solemnity. Not a breath of wind stirred, not a sound reached us except the weird, unearthly creaking of the net on the envelope of the balloon.

"When a man gets so high up, and clean away from the world," I remarked, "I think it tends to make him feel very good and solemn, like being in a fine cathedral."

Fraser quite agreed with me, and we gazed in solemn silence at our surroundings. For some moments we thought we had actually got lost, but with the subsiding of our fears, our reasoning faculties asserted themselves, and we began to discuss the situation, coming to the conclusion that we could not have left the earth's atmosphere, or we could not breathe—although we

were even then breathing with great difficulty.

"I think," said Fraser, looking over the side, "the fog we see below us, is only the clouds we have come through. Shall we throw out some sand, or go down?"

"Do not go up," said I; "I think when we get down once more I shall be rather glad. Ballooning is very nice to read about, but a jump through the clouds like a streak of lightning is not so very pleasant the first time. Fancy a bit of silk, not a fiftieth of an inch in thickness, being all there is between us and a mighty big drop. We should reach the bottom with a tidy bump, and this frail wicker-work under our feet seems awfully insecure."

Fraser laughed,—he did not seem at all nervous, but then he was a few years older than I, and those few years made all the difference. Anyway, I wanted to return, and although Fraser would have preferred

going higher, when he saw I had had enough of it, he at once decided to descend.

Of course we knew all about it, exactly what to do,—simply to pull the valve-cord and let out the gas. An experienced aëronaut, again, would have gradually opened the valve and held it open, but we both swung on the valve-line, pulling the immense doors wide open, thus allowing the gas to rush out, with a roaring like a gigantic waterfall, and the consequent drop was so sudden, that the car bottom seemed to fall away from us. We were so startled that we both suddenly let go the rope, when the doors banged to with a tremendous crash, being forced together by the strong springs and the terrific pressure of escaping gas; these noises being increased a thousand times by the resonant atmosphere, the effect was truly awful, surrounded as we were by the awe-inspiring and hitherto silent scene.

This clamour had an even greater effect upon our nerves than the upward rush, and

for some minutes we knelt in the corner of the car in terror. This feeling of abject fear soon passed off, and we again pulled the valve open, this time very cautiously, and descended slowly. Suddenly we were in the midst of clouds of vapour, beautiful white clouds, in appearance like fluffy cotton wool, which, illumined by the rays of the sun, presented a most magnificent spectacle. This was but transitory however, as we were soon so enveloped in the vapour as to be invisible to each other. Fraser spoke to me, and his voice sounded awfully strange, coming as it did from apparently nowhere. We stood looking over the side, still invisible to each other, when the clouds suddenly parted and a little green patch was seen below, then a toy house came into view, then others, all of such marvellous minuteness, that they looked like nothing so much as the small patches on a patch-work quilt. We were very much relieved and delighted to once more catch even a glimpse of mother earth. The

balloon then descended further, and at our great altitude, the view we had was of enormous extent, the horizon being a tremendous distance away, forming a magnificent circle, of which we were the centre. It was like being in a large, deep saucer, on which were painted houses, trees and rivers, and the rim of which was level with our eyes all round. It was truly beautiful.

One of the things we noticed, was that we felt no breath of wind. The fact of the balloon travelling with the wind and at the same speed, proved to us that even in a gale, the occupants of a balloon would appear to themselves to be in a dead calm, everything else apparently moving whilst they remained stationary.

By this time the houses were growing considerably ; objects and people could be distinguished on the ground. A large town was seen straight in front of us, and in a few minutes we were passing over it, seeing a very wonderful sight below, and also hearing

many curious sounds, first a murmur, then a roar,—a combination of all the noises of the town, the barking of dogs, screeching of engine whistles, and the like. We had been so busy looking at the sight presented to our view below, that we did not become aware of the danger of descending in the heart of a large town, till we had nearly knocked off a few chimney-pots.

“Out with the ballast!” cried Fraser. “Do not drop a full bag, or some one below may get killed.”

By this time hundreds of people were beneath, yelling and screaming, and many of them shouting all sorts of instructions, but heedless of this kindness, and with a shout to them to look out, we each opened a bag of sand over the sides, and the contents fell on the upturned faces below, turning their shrieks of excitement to yells of rage. Fortunately for us the balloon rose and cleared the town, or the sand bath given to the people would have meant a very warm reception, had

we been obliged to descend amongst them. When we reached the open country, the valve was pulled wide open, and in a few minutes, the balloon with its car, was bumping and trailing across a field. People now began to come up like rabbits out of the ground, in scores, and willing hands seized the car and held it fast. We alighted, and, with their assistance, packed the balloon safely in its car, and a friendly farmer having lent us a dray, we were soon on our way to the station and home.

Thus ended our first adventure in the air.

CHAPTER VI

THE DISCOVERY

"There are things whose strong reality
Outshines our fairyland."

BYRON.

AFTER this we made many ascents, and became experienced aëronauts. We passed through many exciting and dangerous adventures together; on one occasion, when at a very high altitude, the gas in the balloon almost caught fire; however, *experientia docet*, and we were none the worse for our mishaps.

During one of our flights in the air a thought struck me, and I said to Fraser, "The balloon is heavier than air, yet when it is filled with gas, which is lighter than air, the gas, in rising to reach its equilibrium, takes the balloon and ourselves with it, and

we ascend. We thus set at defiance the law of gravity, by means of the gas employed, but could we temporarily suspend or destroy the gravitating power of the earth, this balloon would then have no weight, and if thrown upward would travel onward, even past the earth's atmosphere."

"You are quite right," said Fraser. "It is the gravitating power of the earth which endeavours to draw all objects to its centre. When we speak of weight, we really mean that the gravitating pull of such and such an object is so many pounds, so that all objects weigh exactly their gravitating pull towards the centre of the earth."

"That is so," said I, "but it has occurred to me, that if we could come across some power which would overcome gravity, we should get hold of a good thing."

Fraser laughed heartily and said, "That's rather a big order. It is not possible."

"Why not?" said I. "Haven't you discovered many things which, before you

brought them out, the world deemed impossible?"

"That is all very well," said he, "but really, Jervis, you cannot be serious?"

"I was never more so," I replied, "and I feel sure that if we set to work in earnest it can be done, sooner or later."

Fraser answered, "If it is to be accomplished, it will be electrically."

"All the better," I replied, "for no one knows more about electricity than you do, and if you will take up the idea, I will give you all the assistance I can."

We therefore agreed to commence a series of experiments to see if it were possible, by some means, at present unknown, to destroy the gravitating power of the earth, or even to set up a repulsive force, which should not only make an object lighter than the earth, but enable it to be repelled—or fly away from the earth—in exact proportion to the power of the force used.

We began by taking two soft iron mag-

nets, and wrapping coils of wire round each. By sending a current of electricity through them, the two magnets became attached with great force, and remained, as it were, cemented together, the negative and positive of each pole being powerfully attracted. Immediately on reversing the current on one magnet, the two not only lost their attractive power, but were repelled with considerable force.

Taking this experiment as a correct basis, we then tried to extend and apply it to the gravitation of the earth, using the earth as one magnet, and the object to be repelled or attracted as the other.

After a long series of costly and exhaustive research, one day Fraser said to me, in a very solemn and serious manner, "Jervis, old fellow, we have at last hit upon the exact thing. I will show you the most wonderful and astounding experiment ever performed on the face of this earth. The thing we discussed the other day has

answered beautifully. I had one made and have just tried it; the result is positively marvellous."

Full of eager expectation, I followed him to his observatory, where he showed me a conical-shaped projectile made of cast-iron. This was placed on a thick iron plate, below which was some very elaborate apparatus, of such delicate and fine adjustment, that electric force of any power could be transmitted, from a very weak current of one ampère and one volt, to a current of thousands of ampères and thousands of volts, representing a few ounces of force, or several thousand horse-power. By means of this apparatus the projectile could be made so tremendously heavy, that no human being could move it, not even with pulley-blocks and multiple leverage. The next moment it could be made so exceedingly light as to float away like a soap-bubble. The apparatus would also transmit several thousand horse-power to the projectile, and hold or draw it

down to the earth with that tremendous pressure, and by merely reversing the current, would repel or force away the projectile with the same power. Fraser had arranged a pair of multiple pulley-blocks, and with one hand I readily raised the projectile, the normal weight of which was fifty pounds. As I held it in the air, Fraser slightly moved his resistance, slowly and irresistibly came the downward pull, until, in spite of my exertions to hold it, the weight again rested on the plate. We then both endeavoured to move it, but it was held fast with the force of many tons. Such was the force, that had the full power been put on, the mass of iron would have been drawn through the plate, the floor, and deeply into the ground below. Fraser now slowly reversed the current, having brought the resistance back to zero.

"Now," said he, "I want you to try to lift it."

This I could readily do with both hands,

but as he brought his resistance into play again, the weight diminished more and more until slowly and surely it became nil.

Now Fraser played a practical joke on me. As I was holding the now light projectile, he put the resistance or repulsive power on me also, and I instantly became so exceedingly light, that I floated up to the ceiling, still holding on to the projectile.

"If I put on a little more current," said he, "you will go through the top ; if I put on less, you will drop through the floor."

"Hold hard, Fraser," cried I. "This is a bit too thick. I have heard of people being light-headed, but I seem to be light all over. Just draw it mild and bring me down again. You had better try this trick on old Tom, who lies down there sleeping comfortably."

Fraser gently brought me down again to the floor, by which time the projectile had become a good handful, it also having resumed its normal weight. When I had placed this on the slab, I tried to persuade

Fraser to take my place, but he looked very knowing, and slyly said, with a Yankee drawl, "There ain't no flies on me, my boy."

He then opened the upper lights of the observatory, and placing the plate and projectile exactly under the aperture, suddenly turned on the full repulsive force. With a dreadful shriek and swishing roar, the projectile shot through the window ; so terrific was the speed, so frightful the velocity, that it had not travelled twenty yards upwards, when there was a tremendous explosion, and a shower of molten iron was blown like stars in every direction.

The repulsive force had sent up the block of metal with such power, that the heat generated by its upward rush and friction through the air had melted the iron and consumed it. So elated were we with the wonderful success, that, without consideration, we placed several other objects upon the plate, and these ascended gently upwards and

through the window, then floated away on the breeze like balloons.

The next day the people in the neighbouring town were astonished to see a chair, a boot, and a large black cat floating through the air. The chair and the boot were never heard of again, but Tom turned up towards evening on the following day, none the worse for his forced flight. One of the most astounding features of this electrical force, was that all objects remained the same weight that the apparatus had given them, so Tom was placed on the iron plate and his normal weight restored, which seemed to please him, although he accompanied the operation with a volley of unprintable language, which shocked us, as he had previously borne a reputation for refinement.

We excused him under the circumstances, as his temper had been very much tried.

After sailing through the window he had travelled several miles, floating through the air, much to the amusement of a building of

rooks, which circled round him, cawing in wonder and curiosity. One, however, becoming too curious, alighted on pussy's back, and was instantly seized in the claws of the feline aëronaut. A tremendous battle ensued, and, as can readily be conceived, Tom became victor. In the struggle the bird began to fall to the ground, and, not having lost his gravitating power, brought Tom down with him. Thus did Master Tom alight on terra firma. After making a hearty meal of his antagonist, and becoming proportionately heavier, he began to try to make his way home, but even the added weight of a tough old rook did not make him very heavy, consequently every puff of wind caused him to sail gracefully upward and away, but he always came down gently and quietly to the earth. Some boys captured him, and began amusing themselves by blowing him in all directions, which made him angry and spiteful, as he was by this time rather tired of his aëronautic exploits.

Ultimately he was caught by a man who, when he had recovered from his surprise at his lightness, took him home to exhibit to his friends. Tom had by this time digested the rook and was considerably lighter, so much so, that he had to be pressed to the saucer before he could drink the milk which the man placed on the floor for him. He then became sufficiently heavy to slip out of the door, and speedily found his way home. No wonder his morals were corrupted.

CHAPTER VII

MIDNIGHT OIL

"Strange things pass nightly in this little room."

ERNEST RHYS.

THE next day we met and had a long and serious discussion on this exciting subject.

"It is quite evident, Fraser," said I, "that here is a wonderful force at our command which will enable us not only to navigate the air, but the realms of space also. The melting of the projectile so quickly shows the tremendous power we can utilize, and there is no doubt that if you had sent it up with a force that would have kept it intact, it would have travelled upwards and onwards for thousands, nay, millions of miles ; and always having a tremendous repulsion for matter, it would

have kept clear of any gravitating body in the heavens, and thus become a perpetual wanderer."

"Don't you see," said he, "all that we have to do is to construct a conveniently shaped air-ship, fit it with engines of great power, with propellers for use when in the presence of atmospheric air. Equip it with this attractive and repulsive energy, make it proof against great heat and cold, and sufficiently strong to stand the pressure of air within when surrounded by vacuum, and to be capable of regenerating its own atmosphere internally; man it with a crew of chosen men, and store it with provisions and power for a long voyage. We would include apparatus for telephoning by the Hertzian waves, and every known scientific aid and instrument that would help us. By these means we could see and learn something of the unknown wonders of God's creation, and actually visit the distant stars."

We were so absorbed in discussing this

wonderful plan, that the evening faded into night, and night brightened into dawn, before we realized that we had been hard at work for ten hours, designing, planning, and arranging the details of our proposed aërostat.

In order to complete our work as speedily and successfully as possible, we decided that each of us should be responsible for certain portions : I to find the crew, work out the chemical problems involved in the regeneration of the air ; see to the proper apparatus for receiving and transmitting telegrams ; keep a true and faithful log on the voyage ; be responsible for the stores, and, indeed, to conduct generally the business of the ship, leaving Fraser at liberty to concentrate his thoughts and energies upon the constructing and perfecting of the vessel itself, with all its complicated machinery.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BUILDING OF THE SHIP

"So much to do that is not e'en begun,
So much to hope for that we cannot see,
So much to win, so many things to be."

L. MORRIS.

Now Fraser was a born inventor, and had tried many experiments and constructed several wonderful machines. He was one of the few men who really believed that the problem of aërial navigation was not only soluble, but was more simple than was generally supposed by engineers and scientists. He was also a strong advocate for the internal combustion engine, in which he placed implicit faith, and it was his firm conviction, that if ever an aërostat was constructed, it would certainly be driven by a motor of this type. For instance, 33,000

pounds raised one foot, in one minute, equals one horse-power, and if a machine could be constructed weighing *less* than 33,000 pounds, and yet be capable of exerting one horse-power, it would certainly be able to lift itself one foot, in one minute. Further, it is a well-known fact that an engine weighing considerably less than one hundred weight will exert a force of ten horse-power, so that a machine weighing ten hundred-weights will lift 147 tons one foot high, in one minute; thus proving that flying is not only possible, but that mechanics have in their possession, sufficient force to raise themselves, their machine, and motor in the air. It is also an acknowledged truth, that out of 100 units of heat, eighty units are lost, so that if a means could be discovered of utilizing the eighty units which are lost, the combustion engine would be able to exert a power at least 400 per cent. greater than it does at present, and yet occupy the same bulk, only being a little

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heavier because of the added strength required. Proceeding according to the above facts, we designed an air-ship in the form of a boat, having a deck like a yacht, with cabins, sleeping-berths, and engine-room. The vessel and decks were made of an alloy of aluminium and other metals, in such a manner that it was practically airtight, and the windows of a special glass of our own invention, which was thick, flexible, non-conducting, and beautifully transparent. At the stern of the vessel was placed a pair of properly balanced propellers, capable of being driven at terrific velocity. When the negative current was turned on, the vessel became lighter in exact proportion to the position of the resistance switch, and began to diminish in gravity, until the weight was practically nil. Several of these gravity-appliances were fixed in various parts of the vessel, so that any particular portion could have its centre of gravity altered, and thus be made lighter or

heavier at pleasure. Having two propellers at the stern, each capable of revolving at varying speeds in any direction, the vessel could travel either way, and if one propeller was worked one way, and the other given an opposite movement, the air-ship would then turn completely round. Further, she could be made to float in the air like a balloon, at any altitude, in exact equilibrium, so that any prevailing current of air or atmosphere could be made use of.

The engines of this aërostat were of enormous horse-power, and consisted of eight multiple cylinder internal combustion engines.

The air-ship was so constructed that outside wheels could be driven from the engines, giving it the power of being steered and manipulated on solid ground as a motor-car. Being properly shaped, and having a high-speed screw at the stern, it could be used as a sea boat also. Thus it was an aërostat, an ocean vessel, and a land

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vehicle combined. It was fitted with all the most beautiful and intricate mechanism, and every instrument which science and ingenuity could suggest, both for power and comfort. The wireless telegraphic and telephonic apparatus was the latest and most perfect known ; combined with which was a clever contrivance invented by Fraser, enabling us in our cabin to see what was taking place in every portion of the ship, and for some distance outside. Also, in order to anticipate any attempt at mutiny on the part of the crew, or the formation of any plan to seize the ship, we had fitted into every cabin and corner of the vessel, a number of secret microphones, connected with a recorder in our cabin, so that should necessity arise, we could distinctly hear the slightest whispers of the men wherever they might be, and as a further safe-guard, by the mere moving of a switch, any cabin could be closed, and the suspected occupant imprisoned until all danger was past. There

were also electrical communications with every part of the vessel, and by means of a further series of switches, the engines and gravitating force were under absolute control, and could be manipulated with perfect ease by one man alone.

All these precautionary measures were known to Fraser and myself only, and were worked by a series of switches placed in a secret part of our cabin, along with those for the manipulation of the engines and the steering, which latter were fixed in the observatory also, the entrance to which was by a doorway and staircase from our saloon cabin. Our berths were on either side of this doorway, through which no one could pass without our knowledge, and we had telephonic communication.

This cabin was so electrically arranged, that no one, without knowing the secret, or unless we permitted it, could enter or remain a moment, without receiving such a shock as would render him powerless

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to move a limb, and in the case of dire necessity, electrocute him by de-atomization.

The source of power being petroleum, the vessel was capable of storing a vast amount of energy in small space, sufficient to keep the engines going continuously for many, many months without replenishing the tanks.

She carried six searchlights of tremendous power—two at the stern, two at the bows, one elevated amidships, and one under the keel. These when in operation presented a fine sight, throwing, as they did, a light capable of brilliantly illuminating everything within a radius of several miles, and this light, when reflected on the bright body of the ship, gave the vessel the appearance of a gigantic meteor.

For several months Fraser and I were employed in getting together suitable workmen, each man in his own particular line being a master of his craft ; and, as no one but ourselves was to have the slightest

knowledge of the construction, it became necessary to change the men every few days, so that as each man made something, according to instructions given to him by Fraser, he was either discharged or given an entirely different thing to do, and a fresh man continued the work he had been taken from. By proceeding in this way none of the men knew for what purpose their work was intended, as they invariably left it when half finished, and had to turn to something else.

In addition to this, many parts were brought from America and the Colonies, and from various districts in England, and these were put together in such a manner that only we two understood their ultimate use.

During this period I was getting the crew together. Here came another difficulty. It was necessary that every member of this crew should be absolutely without knowledge of the secrets hidden in the

aërostat, therefore none of the men who had been working at the various parts were eligible. In fact, long before the work was completed, Fraser had had a great deal of trouble with his hands, and, but for the safeguards mentioned, many of the secrets would have become public property. The building had been started at his father's works in Derwent, and a special shed had been boarded up and set apart. A constant watch was kept day and night, and as the operations progressed, it soon became noised abroad that something wonderful was on hand, and the workmen were bribed, and every conceivable effort was made to get at the details of construction by fair means or foul.

In selecting the crew, it seemed to me best to secure the services of sea-faring men, who would be hardy, accustomed to dangerous altitudes, have good sight, and, above all, be already trained to the most rigid discipline. The men eventually engaged

were a fine lot of fellows of superior class. All were strong and robust, eager for fresh adventure, brave to recklessness, inured to danger, and, what was very important, without family ties. Every man was medically examined, and pronounced mentally and physically perfect. Considering the dangerous nature of our proposed expedition, we thought it best that each man should, of his own free will, sign a deed drawn up by our lawyer—which all willingly did—placing their lives, with all their faculties, at the disposal of Fraser as the captain.

Our crew consisted of two engineers, one electrician, a surgeon, who also acted as mate, two smiths, a carpenter, steward, cook, and a handy-man, making, with Fraser and myself, twelve all told.

The chief engineer, Henry Adams, was a big, burly fellow, standing six feet two in his stockings; he had a chest like a door-mat, and was a perfect Hercules. One could scarcely keep a stolid face when he was

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about, so jolly was he, and his hearty laugh was irresistible. His assistant, Tom Ward, had been a marine ; although he turned out to be a jovial fellow, always kind-hearted, and ready to give and take a joke, he was at first sight very grim and forbidding, but improved on acquaintance.

Sam Pearson was the electrician, and a very clever one too. He was short and stout, almost as broad as long ; so short and fat were his fingers, that when engaged on small delicate work, such as minute terminals and contacts, they looked like German sausages sewing on buttons. In spite of these podgy fingers, he could play the violin divinely, for which we all owed him no small thanks long before the voyage was over.

Frank Kennedy had been a ship's surgeon, and held a master mariner's certificate also. He was, of course, a very important member of the crew, and, as we grew to know and appreciate him, he, to a certain extent, shared

our responsibilities, such as taking observations, and relieving the watch, which we had originally intended should be kept only by Fraser and myself, although even he was not trusted with any of the secrets. He was an exceedingly nice fellow, and when any of us went a little wrong in health, which was very seldom, he was as tender as a woman, and had us right directly.

The chief smith went under the name of Hall, although we had reason to believe that this was not his true patronymic. Before joining, he had been honest enough to tell me his past history, and on talking this over with Fraser, we decided to take him, as we were firmly persuaded he was now a straight man. He was an exceptionally good mechanic also, in which branch he would be specially useful to us ; in fact, this was really the reason why he was with us. To him we looked for the forging and tempering of all our repair work, but he had a great fault in refusing to do anything that did

not come within the articles of his engagement, although all the others willingly turned their hands to anything. He was of a morose disposition, and rather inclined to be suspicious, but this we attributed to what he had passed through. He had an assistant named Ben Wilks, a young fellow of twenty-five, who immediately became a great favourite. He was good-tempered and frank, and as innocent as a girl. Although slight in build, he was like steel and whipcord, strong and brave as a lion; his mobile face seemed made for mimicry, in which he was an adept. He had also a wonderful store of good comic songs, which he rendered in a rich baritone voice, like an organ.

George Dyson, the carpenter, was a bluff, hearty fellow, of exquisite temper, and as void of humour as the proverbial Scotsman. The most cutting sarcasm elicited nothing more than the blindest smile. No one could be angry with him, for the most deserved reprimand was invariably met with

such an innocent, dog-like expression, that only two courses were open, either to laugh it off or to appear a perfect brute. Before two days were over he had become the butt, as well as the favourite, of the crew ; but he took everything with the most refreshing good humour.

The steward was quite a gentleman in manner and appearance, and rejoiced in the aristocratic name of Edward Percival Osborne. He had formerly been a nobleman's valet, and latterly had acted in a similar capacity to an admiral of the fleet, and was the beau ideal of a well-trained servant. He anticipated almost every want, and was brave and true as steel. He stood a great deal on his dignity with the rest of the crew, and expected them to treat him deferentially. Needless to say this never happened, in fact it was a source of great trouble to him that his first Christian name lent itself to the abbreviation of "Ted," and in spite of his constant corrections, the crew

would persist in pronouncing his surname *Osburn*.

The cuisine was under the control of Walter Colver, who, in his way, was quite an original. He was robust and healthy, but seemed to have a fixed idea that he was very delicate, which was often amusing. Nothing pleased him better than to be gravely asked if he had passed a good night and felt better, and he was constantly asking the doctor if he would eventually recover. Sometimes he would forget his rôle of invalid, and join heartily in some rollicking fun, to suddenly remember, or be reminded by some one, that this was not quite the thing for an invalid to do, when he would at once feel bad, and go to Kennedy to be treated. From this quarter, as from others, he got very little sympathy; but when he was told that the only thing to cure him would be to put his head outside the *aërostat* for a change of air, he at once began to mend. Delicate as he thought himself, he was not

at all anxious to shuffle off this mortal coil in that way.

We had the "handy-man" in the person of Bob Davy, a good all-round man, who could turn to anything and everything, from helping the doctor to strap a cut, to striking for the smith. In one thing, however, he did not shine. The culinary art was full of mysteries which he could not fathom. On one occasion, when lunch was nearly ready, the cook left it in his charge, and by some means or other he managed to make it uneatable. Another time he spoiled our dinner, after which the cook asked for help from some one less previous, and not so fond of experimenting.

I was very fortunate in getting such a fine lot of fellows together ; being for an expedition in which we should all be brought into close and daily contact with each other, it was absolutely necessary there should be no disturbing element on board.

The salary of each member of the crew

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commenced with his engagement, and none of them knew where or when they would be required, but were told to wait instructions, to be sent by letter or wire. As they were located in various parts of the country, there was little chance of any information about the aërostat being obtained from them. This matter being satisfactorily arranged, I then proceeded to purchase the various stores, both for the supply of power and for food. The provisions were in condensed form, sufficient of everything to supply us all with a good table for three years. We also had an ample supply of water arranged in tanks in the hold of the vessel. I then had a quantity of petroleum oil highly compressed into solid blocks, by a recently discovered process, and thus easily stored sufficient of this to keep the engines working, at full pressure, for three years.

Then came the complicated apparatus for regenerating the oxygen, together with all the necessary stores, chemicals, etc., for

giving us an excellent supply of fresh air for about six years. Although we did not expect to be away for more than twelve or eighteen months, we were going to places where human beings, as we on this earth know them, do not exist, and we knew not what conditions we should have to face, so that a three years' store of provisions would, we thought, give us double what we were likely to require; and as some of the oxygen might be lost, and probably much of it needed for welding and repairs, I provided sufficient chemicals, etc., to give six years' supply, to be well on the safe side.

The next purchase was the efficient wireless telephonic and telegraphic apparatus, of a special design, so that none of the messages could be received by any other instrument except on a corresponding apparatus which we had fixed up in the private office of our friend Saxern of *The Times*. Then came the purchase of a small library of books, a piano, games of all kinds, and the hundred

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and one other things which would go to make the air-ship a comfortable, and even luxurious home during our wanderings.

The question arose of how to secure the safety of the men in case Fraser and I should both lose our lives whilst in space, or on some other world, as we should be the only persons on board who understood the secret of gravity-control. How could the crew return?

We discussed the matter at some length, and finally decided to write out a full and detailed account of this great discovery, together with the mode of its application, so as to be most lucid to even a novice in electrical matters. Also a similar explanation of the apparatus for the regeneration of the air.

These were placed in our safe, in an interior drawer, and in order that no entry should be effected by any one stealing the key from *one* of us, we had the lock of the drawer so arranged that our two keys would

have to be used simultaneously. As these keys were kept on chains, and never left our persons, we felt secure.

A sealed letter showing how this information could be obtained, was placed amongst our papers where it would be readily found, addressed to the officer in charge, to be opened only in case we should both die and the crew be in extremity. This would give ample security, for were the letter taken and one key stolen, no use could be made of it without the other.

CHAPTER IX

THE FIRST FLIGHT

"Silence, how dead! and darkness, how profound!
Nor eye, nor list'ning ear, an object finds;
Creation sleeps! 'tis as the general pulse
Of life stood still, and nature made a pause."

YOUNG.

By this time the aërostat was nearly completed, and was a truly magnificent sight as it rested on its supports in the semi-obscurity of the shed, the roof of which was made to slide. It was built like a yacht, with long, graceful, flowing lines, the material—being white like silver, and highly polished, to reflect the rays of heat which would be encountered—was of dazzling brilliancy. The interior was spacious, luxurious, and as comfortable as skill and a couple of deep pockets could make it.

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In due time the great work was finished, the stores were aboard, and everything in working order. At last the hour we had longed for arrived; the realization of our dreams was at hand! This beautiful creature of our imaginations had become a still more beautiful reality, and as she lay in the shed ready for her maiden flight into the world of space, we thought no name so suitable as the *Regina*, for this majestic queen of the heavens.

We proposed to take this first trip alone, and, to ensure its being unobserved, a dark moonless night was chosen. The theory of dreams was now to be put into actual practice, and although we had no fear as to the result, yet there was the possibility of terrible disaster, should any mistake have been made.

Our excitement grew as the hour approached, and at last we entered and closed the doors, which hermetically sealed us inside the vessel. The atmospheric

purifier was set in motion, and a current of ozonic air was soon permeating the interior. We stood together at the gravity switch, and, taking a last look round to see that all was ready, Fraser slowly turned on the negative switch, and the vessel became lighter and lighter, and in three minutes' time, when the hand of the switch exactly reached the power marked on the indicator—proving how beautifully the calculations had been made—she floated upwards.

Suddenly, with a yell, he reversed, and exclaimed, "Well! we *are* a pair of fools! We've forgotten to open the roof of the shed, and in another second it would have been carried with us on the top of the observatory."

Down we came to the floor again, and going outside, pulled back the sliding roof of the shed, which was now open to the sky.

This false start had the beneficial effect of considerably calming our excitement, and it was with much cooler heads that we

again sealed ourselves and resumed our places at the switch.

Once more Fraser started the negative current, the *Regina* this time floated clear of the shed, and, much to our delight, rose slowly and majestically, until a great altitude was reached. We could now distinguish a vast tract of dark country, dotted with innumerable lights, but as we were old balloonists, this was no novelty to us. We then passed into a stratum of inky-black cloud, and I said to Fraser, "Let us go through these clouds and see the stars."

Fraser considerably increased the ascending power, and the *Regina* rapidly flew upward, and was soon surrounded by the beautiful canopy of the sidereal heavens. Upward, still upward, she rushed, the heavens getting darker, and the stars increasing in luminosity.

We were soon far outside the earth's atmosphere, and it was with strangely

mingled feelings of pride, reverence, and littleness, that we beheld our earth through the windows, a dark and light mass of globulous matter. No human eye had viewed such a sight before, and although it was what we expected to see, yet the sight was both bewildering and terrifying. All around us were innumerable stars, and a vast wilderness of space ; our sun and moon looking awful in their grandeur, without the softening influence of an atmosphere. And what space ! With a glass we saw no end to it, a still more powerful glass, and still more space. We went into the observatory, and looked through our most powerful telescope, and even then, the distance was still lost in infinity of space. Suppose we could not get back to our earth again—one star among so many—and we two went wandering on in the solar system, till death relieved us ? And then a great fear overtook us and we fell into a panic, not knowing or caring what we did, if only

we could get back again. This fear almost blinded us, and we knew not what we were doing, or where we were going. Fraser had reversed the current, and we were going somewhere, but did not care where that might be.

Here a wonderful feature of the discovery saved us from madness, if not from death. The vessel had left the earth in a straight line and had kept it, and when the current was reversed, the *Regina* had returned on the same line, with the same speed, so that in the course of half-an-hour we were again in the earth's atmosphere, and breathing freely. Soon the *Regina* was once more in the clouds. Down, down, she fell, the descending motion being slowly stopped as the earth was neared, and not ten miles away was the town of Derwent! The propellers were started, and in a few minutes the vessel floated over the shed and was soon safely housed.

We had got over our fright and were

now delighted with our unique voyage, and the working of the vessel, which had thoroughly realized our most sanguine expectations, and we burned with an eager desire to extend this enchanting experience.

CHAPTER X

WHAT IS IT ?

"The over-curious are not over-wise."

MASSINGER.

AFTER this successful flight we made several more trial trips, all of them in a vertical direction, rising on each occasion to tremendous heights, and alighting on our return near home. We had not as yet used our lights, consequently the aërostat had attracted no particular attention—

"For, so swiftly it flew, the sight
Could not follow it in its flight."

We now tried the vessel's capacity for horizontal flight, and found this also very satisfactory. We allowed ourselves to become visible by using the powerful searchlights,

and were highly amused to afterwards read the various articles which appeared in the newspapers from time to time, as we made rapid flights on different occasions.

Our friend Saxern was aware of these trial trips being made, but, entering into the spirit of the thing, published in *The Times* all the letters and articles sent him, which gave him as much amusement as they did us. One morning an article was published in *The Times* describing a startling appearance in the sky. A leading astronomer, when viewing the starry heavens, suddenly saw a wonderful meteor which seemed to float in the heavens like a luminous ball of fire. This meteoric body he described as being so extremely phosphorescent, that it gave out a great band of light like a comet, and stretched right across the hemisphere. He described it as consisting of an incandescent mass of matter, probably of the weight of white-hot steel. Further, he explained how it had been rushing through space for millions of

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years, having only just entered the earth's attraction. He went on to describe its enormous distance from the earth, but the most astounding feature of the observation was that this remarkable body suddenly disappeared, although clouds were absent from that part of the sky. Strange to say, and what quite upset his calculations, the body reappeared in the opposite direction, evidently, as he explained, having travelled millions of miles in a few seconds. Suddenly this wonderful comet took an upward flight and vanished. Now this astronomer and all the scientists of the day found it utterly impossible to account for the erratic jumps of this strange object, and their theories, after all, were felt, even by themselves, to be mere speculations.

A few evenings afterward, London was terrified by the tremendous rush of a mighty meteor, which again the astronomers described as of the probable diameter of twenty miles. It rushed across London,

diffusing a broad blaze of light, and again vanished.

Strange to relate, during the past few days of these appearances, the whole of the wireless telegraphic apparatus in the country had been in a state of wild confusion, doubtless caused by the meteoric phenomena. One amazing fact that puzzled the electricians, was that the telegraphic machines rapped out the words, "What fools these mortals be!"

Now again the astronomers and electricians endeavoured to explain that this was probably caused by the mere accidental induction of the waves of current forming these particular words.

What had really happened, was that the *Regina* had sailed, and that Fraser, in his usual madcap style, must play a few pranks with the wiseacres of our native island, London in particular.

Silently and quietly, with her full crew, the *Regina* had finally floated from her

moorings ; and, not without a pang of regret for all we were leaving, though full of the brightest hopes, we commenced the most wonderful and sublime voyage ever undertaken by mortal.

CHAPTER XI

THE LONELY SKY

"This prospect vast, what is it? Weigh'd aright,
'Tis Nature's system of divinity."

YOUNG.

THE air-ship rapidly left the earth's surface, when a tremendous impulse was given with the propellers, and a greater repulsive force induced, which sent the *Regina* darting into space with lightning speed. Upward she flew, leaving the earth—an immense dark object—far below.

It was midnight when we started, and soon we saw the atmospheric glow from the illuminated side of the earth, surrounding the blackness with a halo of golden light.

Still onward and upward we flew; already the stars shone with increased brilliancy; the heavens became like a black pall with

glittering points of light, the beautiful blueness of the sky having vanished.

It is impossible to describe our feelings of awe during the early hours of our flight. The dreadful stillness everywhere,—so profound was the silence, that our own voices almost frightened us, so grating and unhallowed did they sound,—the deeply solemn sight of the starry heavens and our own earth far away behind us on our left, and now shining on us like a star, and before us the moon, momentarily growing larger in volume and density—a magnificent spectacle,—all these wonders of Nature seemed to almost crush us with their vastness.

There, thousands of miles behind, rolled our earth, the seat of all the science and learning of which we were so proud, the home of all we held dear ; and yet what is it really ? Only a small star, one of a million of others floating in space ! and we—a few human beings, in a frail vessel, which the most minute star in passing could annihilate

—also rushing through an infinity of space, and permitted by the gracious Guardian of all this majesty to travel for a short time amongst these stupendous works. No wonder we felt the actual, tangible presence of the Creator Himself, and were so filled with a sense of this reality as to walk about with reverent steps, and to speak in whispers. For some days this sensation continued, until gradually the spirits of all on board returned, and a keen delight was felt in the wonderful cruise. Our calmness, also, inspired the men with confidence, although they had at first been somewhat shaken by their strange surroundings.

In the meantime, however, the moon seemed to be rushing on us with terrific speed, we, to ourselves, appearing stationary.

Shortly after leaving the earth's atmosphere, the lunar landscape became distinctly visible, with its great rocks, gigantic mountains, and dreadful precipices, and its beautifully illumined heights, casting crude, hard

shadows, perfectly black, and giving a weird, unreal effect. As we approached still nearer, Kennedy, who was standing with us silently watching, observed, "What an enormous mountain that is before us! Surely it must be Huyghens! How strange it seems that these lunar mountains appear so much higher than those of our earth, when the moon is the smaller planet."

"It does seem strange," assented Fraser; "the only reasonable explanation seems to be, that most of these mountains surrounded inland seas or lakes, which are now dried up, so that the heights of the mountains are taken from what was the bed of the sea, and not from the old sea level. For instance, see Huyghens, standing 18,000 feet high, supposing this to have been a rocky island, in the middle of a sea 14,000 feet deep, the land would be but 4,000 feet high in the moon's prime, whereas now it is considered 18,000 feet."

"Apparently then," said I, "if the oceans

and seas of the earth were dried up, our planet would also have enormously high mountains, out of all proportion to its size. Thus the island continent of Australia would appear like a gigantic mountain, having a flattened top, and containing irregularities, which would really be the present mountains, and the sides of this mountain would be the present Pacific and Indian oceans."

We could observe the hills forming the range of the Leibnitz mountains, which are on the further hemisphere and are therefore seldom seen from our earth, except at certain times when they are brought to the limb by libration and seen by us in profile, and are considered at least 27,000 feet high. They are near the South Pole, and we on earth had thought ourselves able to measure mountains in the moon to within 300 feet, if they were near the centre of the disc. From our excellent position, however, we could measure to within a few feet, and found the earth measurements by no means

so accurate as we expected. Thus the highest peak on the Leibnitz range measured 41,750 feet ; and Mount Huyghens, in the fine range of the Lunar Apennines, towered up to 19,450 instead of 18,000 feet.

We then contemplated our inhospitable satellite in silence, which Fraser broke by saying, "The moon is so familiar to us that we should not gain so very much from landing, I am afraid, and I think we had better leave it, and make full use of its gravitating power to get an impulse which will accelerate our speed."

Again the air-ship's bows were pointed to the realms of space ; Fraser gave the aërostat the whole of the negative force at his command, and the cold, pale moon was left to pursue her lonely course, while we rushed onward with mighty force, the speed attained being so great as to be immeasurable by time and distance, the human mind not having the faculty to realize it.

For several days we maintained this

headlong rush through space. In silence and solitude the *Regina* travelled on, the wonders of the heavens unfolding themselves before us in ever-changing majesty.

Venus and Mercury shone with resplendent beauty, and gradually grew larger till they were like our moon at the full. The earth also, with its satellite, could still be clearly seen, and later, the planet Mars was distinctly visible in the distance, all presenting an entirely different aspect to what we had been accustomed to see, looking, as we had previously done, through our atmosphere. Here, Mars, with his brilliant ruddy light, loomed out like a beautiful jewel. Our powerful telescopes plainly showed him to be a world like our earth, with the same configuration of land and water. To all appearance, his atmosphere and clouds were identical with those of the earth, and the spectrum analysis showed this to be a fact, with the air a little richer, the vegetation being red in places.

"Who would dare to think," remarked Fraser, "that the Almighty would create yonder beautiful sphere, endow it with everything the earth possesses and not people it?"

We sped onward past this radiant world, and very soon crossed the orbit of the planetoids, myriads of which were to be seen, some no larger than meteoric rocks, others one or two miles in diameter—little planets rushing onward in their long course round the sun—others again were several hundred miles in extent.

The planets Vesta and Juno were visible, travelling with lightning speed; and straight ahead, the mighty Jupiter pursued his royal course, blazing in resplendent white.

The aërostat was brought very near to this stupendous planet. "Now is our chance," said Fraser, "of a tremendous impetus; that from the earth was very good, but here is a world several thousand times larger. Thus we shall be able to multiply

the speed imparted to us by the earth's gravitating power, in the same proportion."

Again was the repulsive force brought into full play, and the ship shot forward with a mighty impetus. So terrific was her speed that the gigantic Jupiter, in the course of a few hours, had so diminished in size that he appeared like a star of the fourth magnitude only. Of course at this immense distance from our sun, we derived no benefit from his rays, although, in speeding past various planets, we came within their influence of light and darkness.

To avoid confusion of ideas, we regulated our habits according to the terrestrial calendar, working regularly during the earth's working hours, and filling in the remaining hours as is customary on the earth.

CHAPTER XII

A NEW WORLD

" . . . The astronomer in his lonely height,
Exploring all the dark, descries afar
Orbs, that like distant isles of splendour are."

PRUDHOMME.

So far on our eventful voyage, we had enjoyed exceptionally good health, the chemical atmosphere being perfection. After the depression of the first few days, caused by the awful strangeness of our surroundings, we felt a buoyancy of spirits, such as can only come from a perfect poise of mind and body. We quickly settled down to a pleasant routine, and, having proved our confidence in the air-ship's safety, Fraser and I were able to somewhat relax the severe tension of the first few weeks, and many of our duties were now divided amongst the crew.

Shortly after leaving the orbit of Jupiter, one evening Fraser, Adams, Pearson, and myself were in our cabin, enjoying a rubber of whist before retiring to rest. On deck, Kennedy held the watch, which was always rigidly kept, although the *Regina's* repulsive power was so great as to keep her in a straight course and to avoid all solid bodies.

As usually happens when engrossed in recreation, we became rather dry, and various gargles were telephoned for. These were brought in by Osborne, who was evidently much perturbed; but, in accordance with his rigid code of etiquette, which nothing could induce him to break, he would not speak until we first addressed him, and the free-and-easy inquiry of "What's up, Ted?" from Adams, was received in disdainful silence, as such a vulgar question could not be considered. On my asking the question in a style more suited to his dignity, he very politely answered, "No, Mr. Meredith; I am desired to convey a message from Mr.

Kennedy to Mr. Burnley, with Mr. Kennedy's compliments."

"Out with it then," said Fraser.

"Mr. Kennedy requests me to say that he does not wish to disturb you, sir, or he would have telephoned, but he would be glad if you would be so good as to come up to him at your convenience, as——"

"Come, hurry up, man, not so much prelim," I broke in impatiently.

"Mr. Kennedy thinks it would be advisable," he continued with unabated dignity, "for the vessel to rise, as following in our wake is a large body which he thinks is a wandering world, and he would be glad——"

He had no more chance of oratorical display, as we all sprang up and rushed pell-mell on deck, to find all the men who were not on duty with their faces, as it were, glued to the windows. Far behind us, we saw with dismay, a large luminous body apparently holding the same course, and without doubt rapidly gaining on us. Fraser rushed to

the telegraph, and signalled to Ward in the engine-room. Instantly the *Regina* rose.

"This is evidently a wandering star," said Kennedy, "a planet, which, for some reason, has been thrown from its orbit by some frightful convulsion, and is wandering away in space, a danger and menace to other worlds."

We all watched it tearing along, in breathless silence. Suddenly there was a shout from Dyson, who had gone to look out of one of the starboard windows, "Why, here's another!" he cried. We all rushed over in great excitement, and to our astonishment, saw a similar body travelling swiftly in a cross direction away from us to the left.

"I say," said Pearson, "wouldn't there be a crash if those two were going in opposite directions, and banged into each other?"

"It's just as well they are getting further apart," said Colver, "or they might blow us up as well."

In the meantime, the first wandering star

had come into close proximity to the *Regina*, when Fraser and I saw it suddenly swerve and rush away from our course obliquely.

"What's the cause of that?" exclaimed Fraser. "Is it the gravity of the other star attracting it?"

"I should think not," said I. "It is more likely that it had just entered the repulsive gravitating force of our vessel, which has thrown it aside."

"You are right," he replied; "for see, it has again swerved, and is now evidently entering the gravitation of the larger star, and is rushing to it with fearfully increased velocity;—a collision is inevitable!"

He called to the men, "Those two *are* going to collide after all, and there will be an awful smash."

Suddenly there was a frightful blaze of light, yet no sound reached us, owing to the absence of sound-waves. A dreadful catastrophe had taken place. Two mighty worlds, greater and more stupendous than

a hundred earths, had suddenly crashed into each other with terrific force, and, like globules of mercury, had coalesced. A colossal sphere had been formed. The vast energy which produced the terrible speed of the two bodies had suddenly expended itself in visible heat, and the collision had created a blazing sun, a liquid living mass of incandescent fire, whose light radiated into space.

In colliding, immense lumps of matter had been splashed or torn from their surfaces, and these had become spheres by their own gravitating power. They were incandescent—white-hot—and were now rushing round their parent sun, in a new orbit of their own creation.

We had witnessed the creation of a solar system, and these planets were now travelling in their orbits for the first time. "Probably, in time, these new worlds will cool down?" observed Fraser, "and in the ordinary course of evolution, a crust will form upon their

surfaces, vegetation, and the rudimentary forms of organic life will be developed, until the most wonderful of God's creations—living, thinking beings—will appear."

"It is more than likely," said Kennedy, "that dead suns and systems, in a moment of time, are so re-energized, and their latent heat made active, so that in due course, they are again habitable, until they become, as it were, exhausted, and can no longer sustain life."

"Yes," said Adams, "and the marvellous transformation we have just witnessed will then no doubt be repeated."

"I suppose," said Hall, "in thousands of years this new sun will lose its influence over its planets."

"No doubt," I replied, "but an infinity of time may pass before they again become dead and wandering stars."

"Well! It is one thing to read about this sort of thing," said Fraser, "but it is vastly different to actually *see* the creation

of a world take place before our very eyes."

During the whole of this beautiful and marvellous scene—the creation of a mighty system—the lonely *Regina* continued her steadfast course towards the goal of our hopes—the star Sirius.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SILENT CITY

"Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
Until death tramples it to fragments."

SHELLEY.

THE following day, Fraser and I, being in the observatory together, working out some calculations, were much interested to perceive a peculiar hazy light or glow in the intense blackness of the heavens, at some distance off our path. Our course was immediately altered, and we made straight for it. The luminosity soon assumed the definite form of a ghostly sphere, which rapidly bulked so largely to our view, that it blotted out an immense portion of the heavens.

"What do you make of that light,

Fraser?" I asked. "It seems too widely diffused to be the light from cities, and hardly what we should expect from them either."

"I can't make it out at all," he replied. "It is like nothing we have ever seen either in earth or sky."

At this moment an excited message was telephoned from the deck that the compass, which up to the present had lost its power, had commenced to operate, and the needle was pointing to the bows of the ship, proving the presence of magnetic forces on the new world. We at once went on deck, Fraser to the controllers and I to the air-generating apparatus, to assure myself that it was working satisfactorily, and, finding everything right, I returned to Fraser.

In a few minutes, however, the temperature had risen considerably, which much surprised us, and, turning to me, Fraser said: "How is the air?"

"Oh! that's all right," I answered. "But

what can be the reason of this intense heat, which seems to be getting worse each moment?"

By this time we were bathed in perspiration, and still the thermometer was slowly rising. Just then Pearson came up and said, "Excuse me, Mr. Burnley, but aren't we going too fast? The sides of the vessel are quite warm, as though with friction through an atmosphere."

In an instant our speed was reduced, Fraser saying, "Thanks very much, old man, you're right. We have been so long out of an atmosphere, that I had, for the moment, forgotten the possibility of there being one here."

He then gradually reduced our repulsive power, until finally we were gently floating nearer and nearer the unknown world, and the air-ship had fallen to about 25,000 feet from the ground, when it was made stationary. Through our telescopes, we could see that the surface was singularly flat, and we

failed to discern even a mountain-range or river, or any sign of life whatever, although many groups of cities could be plainly seen.

"This can't be an inhabited world," remarked Colver; "for of course there could be no rain without mountains and rivers; and without water there could be no life."

"I should think it could not have been originally flat," exclaimed Hall, "unless it is entirely without volcanic action, as that alone would cause mountains and springs."

"The atmosphere itself would condense into rain," said Ward, "and cause streams and moisture; so how would that fit in?"

"How could it condense without a sun? and there does not appear to be one," replied Hall.

"It may be," said Kennedy, "that some action, volcanic or otherwise, has levelled all hills, and consequently sapped the springs, thus taking all moisture out of land and air, making life—as we know it—impossible."

"If that is so," remarked Dyson, "why are the cities standing?"

"We will land, if possible, and see," said Fraser, "and leave all theories till we get there;" and, drawing me aside, he said: "I think we had better discover something of the nature of the air before we land. Will you look after it?"

I acquiesced, and taking Kennedy with me, he, by my directions, carefully opened a valve in the side of the ship, whilst I watched the barometer, the finger of which began at once to indicate a rise in the barometric pressure, proving that the air was rushing out of the valve; so that the sphere was probably of similar dimensions to that of our earth, or at most, not more than three times its volume.

I reported this to Fraser, who caused the *Regina* to fall to within two or three hundred feet of the surface, when he asked me to again test the air.

I remarked to Kennedy, "If my calcula-

tions are correct, when the valve is again opened, the barometer will begin to fall and the atmosphere of this planet will rush into the ship. Before allowing it to do this, however, we must take a sample and test it, as it might contain poisonous fumes."

I then placed a thin india-rubber balloon to the tube of the valve which was then opened. The balloon began to inflate, proving the external pressure to be greater than that in the air-ship. I then tested this air and found it good ; similar to our own, but with greater proportion of oxygen. We then filled a large collecting jar and put one of our birds in it. The canary appeared quite happy for the few moments he was in, and twittered merrily, as if pleased with his change of atmosphere.

On breathing the air from the bag, myself, I found it fresh and pure. I then opened the valve and found the result exactly as I had anticipated, and going to Fraser said :
"We may now safely land, the air is

practically like ours, and in order to save the chemicals, we might have the air-tight doors opened, and take full advantage of the outside air."

Fraser gave the necessary orders, and for the first time during the voyage, we breathed natural air, and felt the exhilarating winds of heaven coursing through the ship, as we displaced the air, in slowly settling on solid ground.

We landed on an immense prairie, which, probably owing to the absence of a sun, was nearly white in colour, or rather of an ashy grey. Not the faintest murmur broke the stillness, no cry of bird or insect, no rustling leaf disturbed the solitude.

"So lone it was, that God Himself
Scarce seeméd there to be."

We all had an uncanny feeling as though in the presence of the supernatural, which was the more astonishing, considering what we had already passed through.

"This is getting on my nerves," said

Fraser to me. "What do you say to our going to one of those cities, the lights of which we saw from above, and which are no doubt the cause of that glow on the horizon?"

"Yes," said I, "anything is better than staying here." The *Regina's* course was therefore steered to a phosphorescent light in the distance, and in a few seconds we landed in the heart of a mighty city. Seeing no signs of inhabitants, either in the city or the country we had passed over, and not wishing to be taken unawares by some probably hostile people, we turned on all the searchlights, and before we ventured to alight, a cannon was fired. The roar caused a tremendous peal of thundering echoes. So terrific was the roar, and so appalling was the intense silence which followed, that every man on the *Regina* felt a vague fear, as though some sacred temple had been profaned and all were awaiting the vengeance of an insulted deity.

Even this uproar aroused no life. Everything still remained tranquil, silent, and ghostly. There was something unreal in this apparently dead city.

The aërostat was brought to the ground ; and for the first time since leaving earth, we alighted, and proceeded to explore ; all keeping together in case of surprise or attack.

Before we started, the *Regina*, with all its contents, was made secure by Fraser giving it a tremendous specific gravity, which caused it to be, as it were, cemented to the ground, and nothing could be moved by any one not possessing the secret.

We soon reached what appeared to be the centre of the city, passing through streets of buildings, much the same as ours on the earth, but on a much larger and more ornate scale.

The people had evidently made up for their partial absence of light, by having their dwellings and other edifices built of

some peculiar phosphorescent stone, which gave out a luminous glow; this was, no doubt, the light which had so puzzled us previously. This remarkable substance, which shone beautifully, illuminated every corner and crevice so perfectly and equally, that there were no shadows.

"The people here," said Ward, "are not very inquisitive, as they don't use windows. I am afraid some of the folks on our earth would do badly without them."

"What use would windows be, with stone like that?" asked Dyson.

"Windows are occasionally used for other purposes than for transmitting light, Mr. Dyson," remarked Osborne sarcastically.

"I say, Adams," cried Pearson, "you're pretty thick, but you look a mere candle in that doorway. Surely they are not house-entrances, they are so high!"

"They must be gigantic people," said Fraser, "for all the doorways are the same, and the buildings proportionately great. It

would be as well for us to keep as close together as possible, as we might fare badly should they prove disagreeable. We are well armed, but we do not know what weapons these people may have."

We walked along the streets of this city, lost in admiration at the magnificence of the buildings and decorations, and the marvellous skill displayed in the statuary, carving, etc., which abounded in profusion on all sides.

"What a wonderful race these people must be," said Kennedy. "In all my travels I have never before seen such sublime statuary."

"Look at the size, too," remarked Fraser. "In that group of figures across there, none of the men can be less than twenty feet high, and even the youths and children must be ten to twelve feet in height."

"Yes," said I; "what exquisite proportion and grace of pose; and how amazingly *human*! So life-like are they that, but for

their stillness, one almost expects to hear them speak. Even as they are, they look like living persons turned into luminous stone."

We all stood in an ecstasy of delight admiring these wonderful works of art, compared with which, the Elgin marbles are but the work of tyros.

At last Wilks said: "Don't you think, Mr. Burnley, we might venture into one of the houses? The place seems to be quite deserted, so we should be safe in entering."

"Well, we'll risk it, anyway," replied Fraser. "Come along."

Accordingly we entered one of these massive doorways, which were at least twenty-three or thirty feet high, and a most astonishing spectacle met our gaze. The walls, ceiling, and floor of the room we entered were like the walls outside, made of the same luminous stone, emitting a mild, silvery light, which was softened by a kind of gauze suspended from the ceiling,

so as to hang immediately in front of the walls, but without touching them. This gauze appeared to be made of strands of amber crystal, woven in a fine mesh, and this web of glass gave a most fascinating effect to the light. So light and delicate was it, that the air, disturbed by our movements, gently swayed these hanging webs, producing an opalescent, scintillating radiance.

In the centre of this large and lofty room stood a massive table, apparently made of one solid piece of tortoise-shell. The legs were eight in number, all truss, and most beautifully carved, with gambols of children, cupids, and animals, in exquisite designs, whilst the top was one solid piece thirty-five feet long, ten feet broad, and four inches thick, with fluted and egg-and-tooth pattern edges. Nowhere could a joint be found, and it seemed marvellous to think of this being made of one shell, unless these animals were colossal on this planet, as the table was

four feet nine inches high. We applied several well-known tests, but found it was not made from any animal substance, so concluded that the material must be glass, which these people could evidently work, make malleable and weave.

In a niche in the wall, I came across a glass hammer and some glass nails, of such density and toughness, that the nails could be driven into this wonderful stone as easily as our iron nails into wood, proving how much more advanced these people were than we on the earth in the working of glass. I naturally pocketed the hammer and nails, and subsequently experimented on them in many ways, but they resisted everything, even hydrofluoric acid, which will dissolve *our* glass. These may be seen amongst the other curios gathered on the voyage.

There were no pictures on the walls, but statuary in profusion. Strange to say, this was not placed on brackets or pedestals, as we were accustomed to see it, but sprang

from the walls, as though carved out of the same pieces of stone ; in some cases being held by a mere thread, or a finger-tip, and the remaining portion of the figure standing entirely without support. One specimen particularly struck us, by its exquisite beauty. It was a young child, in all the happy abandonment of joy, stretching out its hand to capture a butterfly touching the hair in alighting. The other hand was thrown back to balance the figure, a swinging fold of drapery touching the wall, and entirely supporting the whole. It seemed as though it might fall at any moment, so slender was the support, and I suggested to Fraser that he should appropriate it. I could see he was hungering for it, but his keen moral sense of desecration made him hesitate. However, the temptation was too strong, and he tried to break it from its frail support, but it would not give way, in fact, the united aid of four of the men could not wrench it off. Being desirous of preserving it intact, as

much as possible, Fraser asked me to go back with several of the men for the oxy-hydrogen blow-pipe and apparatus, so we proceeded to the ship and took these, a pick, some cold chisels, a nine-pound sledge hammer, and other tools ; and after I had made the vessel and contents secure as before, we returned to the house, and in a short time, a stream of oxygen six inches in diameter was beating on the strip of stone with a deafening roar. This was kept up for over an hour, but the material was even then unfused. This made Fraser determined to have it at any cost, so Hall was directed to detach it by fair means or foul. He therefore took the sledge hammer and gave a tremendous swinging blow, which fell with crashing force ; the hammer-head split into two pieces, but the strip was not even misplaced.

We all stood by in amazement. "Well, I'll be jiggered !" said Hall. "That would have smashed the toughest steel."

"It licks Pompey !" said Adams. "What-

ever can it be made of? nothing seems to touch it."

"It certainly is a marvel," said Fraser. "It is not unlike radium, but it is not radium, and there is no known metal or stone on the earth like it."

"It is quite evident we shall have to take a slab out of somewhere, just as it is," said Kennedy. "Suppose we take a cobble or two out of the street? It seems like sacrilege to deface any of these beautiful walls or floors."

We decided to do this, but first examined room after room in this beautiful building, to find that all were arranged and decorated after the same plan. On some of the floors were dried rushes, similar to the style of the old Roman houses, with similar furniture also, but a little less severe.

Although we entered house after house and building after building, nowhere could we find the slightest trace of human being, or even any emblems of mortality. All was as silent and hopeless as if we were standing

on the very brink of the grave. This lifeless silence everywhere so reminded us of our inevitable destiny, that we were relieved to get out into the open air, and, in order to raise our spirits, we set to work to wrench a cobble out of the roadway. Davy struck at a point in the mortar with a pick, but, well-tempered as it was, the point turned. Others then set to work with cold chisels and other tools, but each tool used, bent or broke as a soft tallow candle might do if hammered against a steel plate. We asked each other how it was possible for these people to have hewn this material into slabs, carved, cut and built it up into all the glorious designs and edifices we saw around ; but who were we of earth to answer such queries ! No wonder the works showed no signs of decay. No wonder there was not the slightest crack in any of the stone, nor a weak, soft place in any of the pointing.

Such material and workmanship must be the handiwork of far superior beings to ourselves—of gods—and built for eternity !

CHAPTER XIV

THE QUARRY OF MYSTERY

"Search not to find what lies too deeply hid,
Nor to know things where knowledge is forbid."

DENHAM.

ALL this mystery and deadly silence had got on our nerves, and we were all glad when Fraser suggested that we should leave the neighbourhood of the buildings and streets and go through the city to the outskirts.

We noticed that there was no wind, neither was there any dust, and this we attributed to the possible fact that the sun which had once shone on this planet, had become void of heat, and consequently had ceased to warm and vary the temperature, and the result was a stationary atmosphere. This theory was borne out by the fact that

there were no fire-places or other means of warmth in any of the buildings, which no one had noticed until the discussion on this matter had reminded us ; but how the cooking had been done—if the inhabitants had lived on cooked food—was another mystery. Although the air seemed excellent, yet most of us felt weary and languid, and walking fatigued us. Colver complained of feeling dizzy and faint, but we were accustomed to hearing such-like tales from him, and Adams jokingly lifted him up and dropped him in the basin of a fountain ; but as it was empty, he was none the worse, and climbed out and down again, amidst roars of laughter from every one except himself ; this completely cured his indisposition.

We were very tired, but did not consider this surprising, as we had done several hours' most laborious work, with a great deal of running about, and, moreover, all seemed to have a touch of the blues, which latter was perhaps a natural result of the oppressive

silence. We therefore sat down to rest on a low wall, with our backs to a beautifully worked brass palisade, and Fraser brought us all to high spirits again by telling us humorous stories, which were interspersed with a few comic songs from Wilks, and we then set off along the streets, looking about us in interested wonderment at all the marvels around.

On and on we walked, encountering the most enchanting yet awful beauty, but not a soul could be seen, no life was manifest. Many fountains were there, but without water; we saw neither birds nor animals, and although the streets were planted with trees and bordered with gardens and flowerbeds, yet all the grass was dead, and on the trees, which were in full leaf, all the leaves were hanging limp and dead, everything being of a dull, ashy grey, as though some mighty pestilence, plague, or blight had held the city in an unrelenting grasp, until all life had been for ever extinguished.

Inured to danger as we were, this death

in life, this awful doom which had fallen upon everything whilst still in its glory, filled us with an intolerable dread.

"This is awful," said Kennedy. "Let us leave this accursed city, and get outside in the country; this everlasting ashy grey is really appalling."

"It certainly does give one the creeps," said Fraser. "What astonishes me most, is that we do not come across any human remains; the grass and trees exist, though dead; and surely there must be a cemetery somewhere, with tombstones, which would give us some information about these people, before this judgment fell, although of course the inscriptions, if any, could scarcely be intelligible to us."

Here Davy, who had been lagging behind, hurried up to us and said, "Mr. Burnley, I have noticed a peculiar light coming from something which seems to block up one of these side streets, and I thought you would like to know, sir."

"Thanks," said Fraser ; " we will have a look at it."

We therefore retraced our steps, and at the bottom of a short side street was a most awe-inspiring sight. For several miles around, a vast chasm broke the surface of the ground, and this, on closer inspection, proved to be an immense quarry, apparently going down into the bowels of the world. At the first sight it had seemed like a live volcano ; so deceptive was the luminous, phosphorescent light from the stone, that it quite dazed us with its shimmering glamour. When our eyes became accustomed to the effect, we saw roads going in all directions, up and down the quarry, in such positions that it was quite evident the traction used by these people could not be any with which our earth is acquainted. Several of us went to the edge, fascinated by a peculiar, unholy glinting, which in places flashed like a diabolical will-o'-the-wisp. Fraser asked one of the men to get a few specimens,

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turning to me and saying, "Now we shall be able to get a supply of this wonderful stone, and you can analyse it and find what it is really made of."

The men, however, were unable to cut or break it, the previous experience being but repeated.

At some distance away from where we were standing, were some curious-looking implements and machinery, so we went to make a closer inspection. Not a single thing was known to any of the party. Gigantic levers, which seemed to work on nothing; wheels without teeth, belts, or other means of attachment for purposes of power; curious tubes, rods and cylinders—all of some strange metal which looked like steel, but when Adams tried to saw into a very thin piece, the teeth of the saw were at once melted. A cold steel chisel, on contact with what appeared to be a strand of thick copper wire, was also instantly fused. Aluminium, brass, iron, and in fact every metal of earth

was similarly fused at the first contact, and yet the unknown implements could be handled harmlessly, and suffered no hurt or alteration when brought in touch with each other, no matter how dissimilar they appeared.

Here one of the men turned a bar over, and the instant it was vertical, a large slab of the phosphorescent metal or stone was quarried out.

"It is quite evident," said Pearson, "these people were a highly enlightened race, and understood the action of one metal on another, utilizing such action to minimize labour. Now we shall be able to get some of the stuff." So saying, he used the rod again, and by several applications the material was reduced to a slab of moderate size. It still proved too heavy to lift, so Dyson took hold of a line of wire which chanced to be dangling from a bracket overhead, with the intention of tying it round the slab, and so getting a purchase on it;

but no sooner had the wire touched the material, than it nicked it, and when the wire was wrapped round and pulled taut, it sliced it through, as soap might be cut with a thin wire.

"Here is another revelation," said Hall. "If we on earth understood how to bring one force to bear on another, what revolutions it would cause in our manufactures."

"These people were far ahead of us in this respect," said Colver, "and no doubt all these other appliances are as wonderful as these we have accidentally discovered."

A number of specimens of this azoic rock were now easily obtained to be taken on board, but after several hours' fruitless trial of the other machinery and implements, we had to give them up.

Just about this time, Osborne almost fell over the edge of the quarry, with a severe attack of giddiness, which Kennedy attributed to his standing near such a dangerous and deep opening, and warned us all to be

more careful. Soon after, to our consternation, Adams staggered and then fell insensible. Kennedy was at his side in a moment, to find his heart was beating very fast, but so feebly and uncertainly as to cause the doctor considerable anxiety. Fortunately, he invariably carried a pocket emergency-case, and, after some difficulty, Adams was brought round, but only to lapse into unconsciousness in a few minutes. Suddenly an idea struck me, and I mentioned it to Kennedy, who at once agreed with me that our wisest course would be to return to the ship immediately; which we accordingly did, Adams, by this time, being sufficiently recovered to walk with assistance. We were nothing loath to return, being very tired and much troubled at our comrade's sudden illness.

During the journey back, Ward kept close to the brass palisades which surrounded most of the houses and gardens, and at last came to Fraser, saying, "Mr. Burnley, I

have been examining these railings, and I do not think they are brass ; would you mind looking at them ? ”

Fraser complied, and, after carefully examining them, said, “ I believe it is gold, or an alloy of gold ; break a knob off and give it to Mr. Meredith to test, when we get back. If it is gold, you might all return and take some.”

Ward accordingly broke off a knob with a hammer, and later we found it was solid gold, of exceeding purity. On hearing this good news, the men went down the ladder, and from the railings close by collected a great quantity of this metal, so rare to us, but so common here ; nor did they forget poor Adams. All of them were very grateful to Fraser for this permission, and returned to the *Regina*, where all was made snug and tight, Fraser elevating the vessel about 400 feet, making it and the outside air in equilibrium, so that it would remain stationary and be safe from surprise or attack.

All then turned in except the watch and myself, as I wished to quietly conduct some experiments, and in a few minutes the airship was as silent as the city beneath.

I then commenced a series of exhaustive experiments on the material brought from the quarry, to find that no re-agents known on the earth would touch it, it being an entirely new element. While these experiments were in progress I tested the atmosphere which pervaded the ship, and made an unpleasant discovery, which caused me to first set our own atmospheric apparatus going, and then rouse up some of the men to close the air-tight doors, in order to shut out the air of the planet.

After this, the men returned to their berths for the few hours yet remaining before the usual time for rising.

The noise had awakened Fraser, who came into the laboratory to know the reason of this alteration, and see how I was progressing. I told him that when my head

had come near the material under analysis, I had felt dizzy and faint, which feelings had vanished on putting the stone aside. This had puzzled me considerably, as the most searching analysis of the atmosphere failed to show anything injurious in it. I had then breathed some of our artificial air, with a piece of this stone at my nose, with no bad result. Coming to the conclusion that some unknown constituent of the atmosphere, in conjunction with the peculiar metal or stone, generated something dangerous to us, and remembering the strange and sudden illness of Adams and the others, I had at once ordered the ship's doors to be closed.

After hearing my explanation and theory, Fraser, in order to rectify that portion of the planet's atmosphere which remained in the vessel, permeated it with pure ozone from an apparatus of his own invention, and completed the experiments, whilst I turned in for a few hours' rest, first hermetically

sealing what remained of the metal or stone for storage. On returning, I found him still busy in the laboratory, and we talked matters over, coming to the conclusion that it would be safer for us to at once leave this most interesting world, and continue our journey, much as we should like to stay. We had only spent one day on the planet, and yet several of us had felt its baleful influence, and the general lassitude probably came from the same source ; but what confirmed our decision, was the fact that at breakfast, Adams was in his usual robust health, the few hours of our own atmosphere, with Kennedy's treatment, having entirely cured him of his illness.

Fraser wrote out a long document in various languages, giving particulars of our visit, who and what we were, and where we had come from, and formally taking possession of the newly-discovered world in the name of His Majesty the King of England. This was placed in a hermetically-sealed

tube, and left in what we supposed was one of the public buildings, after which the vessel was again closed, and preparations made for a fresh start on our journey.

Thus did His Majesty's dominions become extended by the annexation of a whole world, equal in volume to more than three earths, to which we gave the name of "Silens."

Once more the last farewells were said, and the *Regina* soared swiftly and silently into space, the world we had left appearing smaller and yet smaller, until it was a faint phosphorescent glow in the distance, as we had first seen it.

Again we were rushing through the realms of space, on our journey to the Dog Star, the brightest star in the firmament.

In case any readers would like to note this ghostly planet on their celestial maps, I may say it is situated about half-way between Altair in Aquila, and Sadalmelik in Aquarius, and near the constellation Equuleus. It is not possible to see it from the

earth, owing to its almost total lack of light, the faint phosphorescent glow already mentioned, which emanates from the mysterious metallic element, being invisible at so great a distance.

CHAPTER XV

A TRIANGULAR 'CRACK'

"Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth,
Unseen, both when we wake, and when we sleep."

MILTON.

WE quickly settled down to the old routine. Although we had only been on the planet about one day, the time had been so full of incident and excitement, as to seem weeks. We much regretted being unable to explore further, but the crew were in high spirits—chiefly caused, no doubt, by the fact that a large quantity of pure gold had been obtained, which, when divided, would provide a comfortable fortune for each—and games and music were in full swing.

Of course, the peculiarities of the wonder-

ful planet we had visited formed our chief topic of conversation.

"What marvellous contrasts in this city of magnificent desolation," exclaimed Fraser. "We find science and art of a high order, far higher than was known even to the ancient Greeks. Furniture, decorations, buildings, remain, but all life, even in insects and plants, is absent!"

"Not only all life, but all trace of life seems absent," said Kennedy; "because we failed to find the slightest record of its inhabitants; no human remains, no tombstones; and who would dispose of the last man, and what can have become of these relics?"

"The excess of oxygen in the atmosphere would not account for all trace of life having absolutely vanished," replied Fraser. "Then there was the mysterious illness of the men, but I myself felt nothing unusual, although I understand you did?" remarked Kennedy, addressing me.

"Yes, it was very curious," I replied. "Could these things point to the planet's atmosphere having been originally like ours, and then some change having come into it, some strange element, which, when breathed continuously, sapped the life of everything, even plants, and so far as animals, insects, and beings of flesh and blood were concerned, absolutely dissolved them?"

"That is more than probable," said Fraser, "and the change you speak of was most likely caused by some volcanic action, which turned what was originally the world's stone into a new element, which is unworkable by ordinary means as we proved in trying to detach the statue, and this in turn acted on the atmosphere, and in fact the earth itself, bringing about the result you mention."

"This change would, of course, be gradual," said Kennedy; "and the people, finding out by their intelligence, that the metal could be fused and worked by other metals, which would also have been altered,

utilized this knowledge to perfection, as we saw by the wonderful machinery in the quarry, which no doubt enabled them to build and carve in so magnificent a manner."

"Then gold is a common metal here," said I, "and although we found all kinds of peculiar machinery, and in one of the houses a hammer and nails, yet nowhere in the city did we see the least trace of any scientific instruments, such as we are acquainted with. Nor did we find any jewels, rings, or other ornaments."

"Perhaps the people had reached such a high state of culture," said Fraser, "that such instruments as ours were long ago obsolete."

"That may be," said I, "and the hammer and nails might also have been obsolete tools, and preserved by them as curiosities, as we found no other specimens."

"To go back to the people," said Kennedy. "Supposing this was one of the worlds where the denizens of our earth came to after death,

and all the bodies or spirits have been again translated, leaving their works behind? This may seem over-fanciful perhaps, but the thought has just occurred to me."

"What do you think of the life after death, Jervis?" asked Fraser.

"My idea is that on our own earth we shall stay, and begin a new existence, in a new atmosphere, which we neither know of now, nor could we exist in, did we know."

"Do you mean to say," asked Fraser, "that you believe those who have died, are living on the earth with us and amongst us, working, toiling, and loving, and we not know?"

"I think so," said I in reply.

"How could that be?" said Kennedy. "We know the earth, the sea and air, and we certainly have no other beings with us. It is not possible."

"I do not see it either," said Fraser.

"To me, personally, it seems very clear and possible," I replied. "For instance, so

far as we are aware, the deep-sea fishes find their whole world in their own element, and some insects theirs in the deep ground; these would not know our existence, and if they are brought up even for a moment into our element, the air, it is death to them. They cannot therefore know that we build, read, and study, nor do they share our ideals with us; yet we, being superior, know their life. To me, this seems convincing proof, that unless we are exceptions to the rule throughout nature—which does not seem possible—we, at death, will be changed into beings who could not possibly live on the earth, as we know it now, although we should still be on it, but in an atmosphere, or element, impossible to us till death makes it possible, and as incomprehensible to us in our present condition, as our books and studies are to a deep-sea animal.”

CHAPTER XVI

ASSAILED BY A COMET

"As full of peril and adventurous spirit
As to o'erwalk a current, roaring loud,
On the unsteadfast footing of a spear."

SHAKESPEARE.

By this time we had completely lost sight of "Silens." For several days our course was uneventful, no star of any magnitude being clearly visible for some time ; but one day this outer solitude was broken by a faint light in the distance, which became slowly brighter, like a dawning day. All hands were called up to watch this strange phenomenon. After the streak of daylight came a broader belt, which spread outwards and upwards, and became a brighter yellow, then deepened into gold ; then came a blush of rose, followed by a blood-red crimson, which again

faded into an indescribable gold. No alpine sunrise was ever half so glorious ! Onward it came, rising obliquely above us, like our sun approaching its meridian, and pouring such a brilliant light into the ship that we were all obliged to wear smoked glasses, or the glare would have blinded us.

“ Why, it’s a comet ! ” cried several simultaneously.

And so it proved to be. We scarcely dared to breathe, and were held spell-bound at the windows, so awful was its grandeur. The comet was coming towards us, and would pass many miles over our heads. By this time the nucleus could be plainly seen to consist of a small solid body about one hundred miles in diameter, which body was at a dazzling white heat, and was surrounded by a white-hot vapour some two or three thousand miles in extent, of an oval shape with the front part radiated like a star. Encircling this was a luminous nebula, or coma, which, with the nucleus, formed the

head of the comet. It was this nebula which was so brilliantly coloured, and we saw that it was purely gaseous, thus settling what has long been a disputed point.

The comet rushed along with a deafening roar, truly frightful and nerve-shaking, especially as it had now grown to such proportions as to occupy the whole of our range of vision. Then came the tail, cracking and exploding like thousands of cannon, a mighty mass of thunder and lightning, and all vapour, burning, bursting into a myriad points of light ; these forming into clusters with a cracking, spluttering whiz, to be exploded and whirled, as it seemed, to the utmost limits of the universe. Thus it continued in perpetual cycles, increasing, spreading, and thickening, till it must have covered a distance of ten or twelve million miles ; and still it came on from as far as the eye could reach. In fact, its vivid brilliancy would have overpowered everything else, could we have seen beyond.

Fraser, when quite near, pulled the *Regina* up considerably, by slightly reversing the current, and now the comet was far away above and past us, but still the tail stretched before us for millions of miles.

We slowly approached, and were contemplating the awful spectacle in apparent safety, when, without a moment's warning, in the twinkling of an eye, we were in the very midst of this hissing, whirling vapour of a tail, the aërostat having, by its own impetus, projected itself into this mighty turbulence of cracking, thunderous ebullition of gases, which, like sound-waves, intensified the thunder till it became almost deafening.

This tremendous electrical power at once upset that of our ship, and instantly Fraser rushed to the controlling switches, and tried to rise,—to fall,—to go backwards,—*any* way to get out of it, but all to no purpose. Only one way was possible, and that was forward, through the millions of miles of the seething, roaring gases forming the tail. He imme-

diately had the motors started at full power, and the electric engines commenced to evolve currents of terrific power, all of which were projected from the vessel with enormous force, in order to neutralize the vast magnetic influence against us. He then rejoined us, and we watched at the windows in solemn silence.

Never will the scene be effaced from our memories. Even now, in the calm safety of home, the mere thought of it comes on one like a horrible nightmare.

With the starting of our motors began the fiercest and most terrible fight ever witnessed—a fight to the death between natural and artificial electric forces. Brilliant, blinding streaks of lightning played about the vessel, giving auroral displays of fire, lighting up the heavens, in a manner truly marvellous, with the most beautiful shades of lovely, opalescent and shadowy lights, and sparkling discharges of electric fluid bathed the vessel in St. Elmo's fire.

Still the fight went on, and the whole universe seemed to have been suddenly turned into a perfect hell.

Oceans and seas of this deafening and riotous discharge of electricity could be seen as far as the eye could reach; wonderful waves and mountains of fire, whose distance was immeasurable, and whose height and depth were unfathomable.

Still the *Regina* forged onward with unabated speed through the defiant opposition of the tumultuous thunders of the War-Gods of Electricity, the neutralizing fluid sent from the ship only sufficing to keep the floods of fire from damaging the vessel.

So fearful was our position that every second was an eternity of suspense. Every face was blanched, and instinctively each sought the nearest hand, until we had a comrade's hand grasping ours at either side, the same thought passing through all minds, that death—which we felt was imminent—

should find us all ready to meet it bravely, and together.

For hours we momentarily expected utter annihilation, but, to our inexpressible relief, the uproar became gradually less as the tail thinned off into space, until finally the whole of it had passed us, with a few scattered reports, which were felt in the air-ship in spluttering reverberations, as though she were conscious of shaking off the last of a horrible peril.

For some minutes we could not speak, our hearts were too full for words, but we each shook hands all round, and were not ashamed of tears, men though we were.

Before and around us lay the now silent and lonely heavens, dotted here and there in the distance with stars, and high up behind us, the comet, with its hundred million miles of tail.

Even now the immense power of the comet's magnetic force could be felt, and the *Regina* was sending out great neutral-

izing force, but as it receded this power diminished, until the aërostat was no longer under its influence. Fraser then had the motors stopped, and the vessel resumed its former condition.

It was found, however, that the needle had been deflected to the course of the comet, and held there with such force as to be apparently welded. It was rendered useless, and fresh fittings had to be inserted. This was the whole extent of the damage we sustained from our exciting encounter.

CHAPTER XVII

THE *REGINA* CAPTURED

"You have displaced the mirth, broke the good meeting
With most admired disorder."

SHAKESPEARE.

As mentioned in the last chapter, that portion of the heavens we were now traversing, was void of stars in the immediate vicinity of the *Regina*, but far away in the distance in front of us, we saw the constellations Andromeda and Cassiopeia, one on either hand. We rose high above the constellation Lacerta, and almost in our path we saw a sphere, about four times the volume of our earth. It was attended by four moons, and was illumined by three suns. This system was not marked on any of the celestial maps we had with us,

although they were up to date and the latest published.

"Are we going to visit that johnnie over there, Mr. Burnley?" asked Pearson, who was close by fitting the compass.

"We might as well," replied Fraser; "it seems very much like our earth, and I fancy with this glass I can discern a faint mapping of land and water through the breaks in the clouds."

"Is it likely to be inhabited?" asked Pearson.

"I think it is almost certain to be," replied Fraser; "but whether there will be beings such as we are, remains to be seen."

I suggested to Fraser, "How would it be to wait in the course of the planet and allow it to approach us this time, instead of approaching it?"

"Yes, by all means," replied Fraser; "it will be an interesting experience."

He accordingly somewhat reduced the repulsive force as the sphere advanced. It

was a magnificent sight to see it coming towards us with lightning speed, attended by its four satellites. The halo of its atmosphere glowed like liquid gold, reflecting the rays of its suns. The sphere rapidly enlarged in size as it drew near, until with a mighty rush it was on us, and we were swept into its atmosphere and carried along with it.

"Do you notice," cried Fraser, "that we are now bounded by a horizon, the extent of which is limited to the curvature of the globe, and the altitude at which we stand? We will go through the clouds and see what the world below is like."

Instantly we fell, and now we could see nothing but bales of beautiful, white, woolly-looking clouds, tinged with the lovely light of a glorious sun. Below this was the exquisite beauty of a summer's day, and the vessel, bathed in sunshine, slowly sank lower and lower, until it had approached within two miles of the surface of the

ground, and was then brought to a stand for us to reconnoitre. The ground presented a similar aspect to our own earth, but the air seemed to be full of dust, which the strong sunlight showed up plainly. This puzzled us greatly, as there appeared to be no cause for this, there being no movement on the ground. With the assistance of Kennedy, I obtained a bagful of the air, as we did when approaching "Silens," and found that what we took to be dust, was really animalcula, with which the air was teeming. I called Fraser, and we examined these minute organisms under the microscope, to find that they were facsimiles of those of our earth, only so much larger as to appear to us, at first sight, like fine grains of dust. There was but one inference to draw, and that was, that the gravity of this world must be so great as to require life to be on a colossal scale.

On referring to the gravitometer, we found the gravitating power here was several

thousand times greater than that of our earth. This being the case, it would not be safe to land, as our weight would immediately be so increased as to crush us. Of course we could have our specific gravity increased to suit that of the planet, but our invention could not give to us sufficient physical energy to sustain and use our added weight. Fraser explained this to the men, who at once began to look eagerly for some of the inhabitants, but none were in sight; in fact, we seemed to have approached the world at an uninhabited part, so the propellers were started, and we went skimming along about two miles above the surface for about 150 miles, when we saw, about five miles ahead, what even from that great distance appeared to be a full-sized house, then others, then a few farms, and lastly, a large town or city.

We descended lower still, and although we expected to see everything on a gigantic scale, we were surprised to find the blades of grass were about twenty feet high, and

nearly one inch thick ; so transparent were these, that the veins with their circulating sap could be readily seen. The same effect was noticed in the great leaves of the enormous trees, which, contrary to what we should have expected, were low, being little higher than the grass, but broad and spreading. On these leaves were all kinds of horrible-looking insects, some of which we purposed capturing. We were so intently watching these things that we were rather startled by the sudden appearance of a gigantic bird, which darted out of the very tree we were examining, and came sailing directly towards us. The flapping of its enormous wings vibrated through the ship. In appearance it was like a gigantic bat, but terrible to behold. Fraser at once ordered one of the machine guns to be trained upon the bird, or vampire, feeling it was quite capable of doing considerable damage to the *Regina*. It flew round and round, darting above and below, just as though endeavouring to

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acquaint itself with the mechanism, but finally flew away and was lost in the trees.

Fraser then brought the vessel slowly down, till it rested on the roof of one of the houses, there to watch for some of the inhabitants. The people did not appear to be awake or stirring, although it was brilliant sunshine as at noon, from which we inferred that here was continual sunshine, which conclusion appeared to be correct, as we stayed on this planet about sixty hours, and no night fell during that time.

From our elevated position we could plainly see the drops of dew on the vegetation beneath us, and across a leaf an enormous caterpillar was slowly wending its way, taking its early morning meal from the luscious dew-spangled shoots. He seemed a formidable customer, with his array of spear-like hairs and long, sinuous body with its substantial-looking feet. His happiness, however, was short-lived, for almost before he had had the satisfaction of a good meal, there

came a bustling, jerky-tailed sparrow, of extraordinary size, and in a trice the insect had vanished. The bird evidently enjoyed its find; it came close by the air-ship on the roof, and sat preening itself and chirruping merrily, the sound ringing through the vessel. It did not appear the least afraid of its strange neighbour, and thus proved itself first cousin to our cheeky little sparrows of earth.

We now began to see a little animation on the ground below. Along the roads came horses, dogs, and cows, many times larger than ours, the dogs being about the size of our horses. These great cows were being preceded, or led, by people who were enormous, but not so large as we expected, judging from what we had witnessed in the size of the sparrow, caterpillar, and the animals and insects. Both men and women were dressed in picturesque style, much after the manner of the Arabs, and passed beneath us, singing strange, melodious

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songs, so far unconscious of their foreign visitant.

Here, almost on our arrival, I was the cause of our nearly losing the air-ship, and bringing disaster on all, for a mere freak.

From our position on the ridge of the house, we saw a giant of a boy come out of a house on the opposite side of the road, with a metal or pewter jug of vast proportions, evidently on an errand.

"Look at that huge youngster!" cried I to Fraser, dragging him to the window; "he is probably off to a brewery."

Fraser laughed, and said, "My word! that's not much of a jug; it looks like the casing for a water tank. Let us watch what he brings."

In a few minutes he returned, carrying about a bathful of frothing, fresh milk. Never before had there been such an opportunity to taste and analyse another world's milk, and, in a fever of excitement,

I asked Fraser to hook the thing up, even if he brought the boy also.

Fraser was quite willing, so a rope and hook were brought and allowed to fall gently outside, the *Regina* at the same time following the boy up the street, he perfectly unaware of the grappling-iron, which was drawing nearer each moment. Suddenly we let go, and then jerked the rope back, when a hook caught one of the handles of the jug, which tilted up, spilling about four gallons of its contents, but the boy held fast to the other handle, and then began the tug of war.

It will be understood that when we rested on the roof, the repulsive gravitating force had been adjusted, so that we should do no damage to the thatch and yet be sufficiently heavy to be steady. The aërostat was therefore almost in equilibrium with the air, and although by the merest movement of a switch, we could have pulled up the whole of the village, neither Fraser nor

any one else thought of anything but the humour of the situation. Twelve of us men were pulling at a bath-like jug by one handle, with a boy pulling at the other. Certainly a boy weighing about eight of our tons, with strength in proportion, yet still a boy.

He held on to his handle like grim death, and the wonder was it stood the strain. At last he uttered a thunderous yell, and a man, no doubt the boy's father, came to a doorway, looked up, and the next moment, before we had time to wink, he had given a mighty tug to the rope, the jerk throwing us all off our balance. Before we recovered, and before Fraser could alter the gravitating current, we were inside a house, and on a gigantic table, where our captor was showing his find to an admiring family.

We were naturally much flurried to be so suddenly introduced to a family circle at breakfast, and deposited *en masse* in the middle of the table. In spite of our confusion at such unceremonious treatment,

we could not fail to notice how thick the air was with living organisms. We know that we ourselves breathe thousands of animalcula continually, but they are so minute as to be invisible to the naked eye, fortunately for our peace of mind; but here we could plainly see the same process in these people, who gulped down myriads of living creatures with their food and drink and in breathing, but were evidently quite unconscious of doing so. To us, it was not exactly pleasant to see many disgusting-looking creatures going down their throats and in at their nostrils in shoals.

There were flies hovering about the food, exactly like our own house flies. Happily for us on earth, it is necessary to use a microscope to be able to see the repulsive parasites which abound on these insects, but here, in this room, the flies were so large, that we, being out of proportion and consequently possessing unduly keen sight

for this planet, could clearly distinguish such an army of parasites on them, as to crowd on and cover their bodies, wings, and even the hairs of their legs, in such profusion as to be hundreds deep, as we see bees when swarming. As they flew and walked over the table and food, the motion of their limbs and wings caused myriads to fall off, some spreading all over, and thus no doubt carrying disease, whilst others raced after their prey, in the endeavour to overtake them and commence a fresh attack. In sheer desperation, many of the flies appeared to deliberately commit suicide, by flinging themselves into some liquid in order to end their torture, and whenever this happened, we saw, surrounding the floating insect, millions of these blood-suckers in a palpitating scum of disgusting, struggling animalcula.

Now we were in an awful quandary, and Fraser said, "If I give our vessel more anti-gravitating power, it will certainly go through the roof and away, but we should

injure the dome of the observatory and perhaps crush it in."

"That is true," replied Dyson, "and although we can repair ordinary damages *en route*, yet we could not build a new observatory or put a patch where it had been should it get knocked off."

"We dare not risk that," said Kennedy, "or how should we return home?"

"Let us wait," suggested Adams; "perhaps a chance may occur soon, and we must be ready to take the first opportunity."

However there seemed to be no such luck. These people looked in at our windows, talked to us in a strange tongue, tried to get at us, and felt the vessel all over with their great hands, our young friend of the milk-jug being specially active in this. Fraser turned on all the lights, to their utter amazement, and the father put the *Regina* on a shelf, which we took to be the mantel-piece, no doubt to make it show to better advantage.

We still saw no chance of escape, and we could not break through the closed windows without injury to our vessel. These closed windows gave me an idea, and, telling Fraser what I was about to do, so that he could be prepared for action, I went into the laboratory, and took nearly half our stock of manganese peroxide, and placed this in a stone still, which I connected with a tube, placing the other end outside the vessel. I then poured a quantity of hydrochloric acid in the still, and heated it by means of a current of steam. Instantly a powerful stream of chlorine dissipated its dense, yellowish-green fumes throughout the room. The deadly corrosive gas soon made the people splutter and cough with a sound like thunder, but they evidently did not at first know where it came from. One of them presently saw the fumes issuing from the *Regina*, and then all the family gathered round to look. Finding the air close to the vessel

too severe, they retreated precipitately. By this time the atmosphere must have been almost unbearable, as the gas was being given off regularly and in strong, dense volumes. The people were soon gasping for breath, apparently not knowing what to do. At last the large mother, who was obviously the most practical member of the family, opened the window, and long before she had got it wide open, the *Regina* sailed out and upward into safety.

CHAPTER XVIII

'INIMICUS INGENS'

"If Adam had seen in a vision the horrible instruments his children were to invent, he would have died of grief."

LUTHER.

Now we breathed freely, and waited at a safe altitude to note what would happen, but we were no longer unnoticed, as our captors immediately raised the alarm, and soon crowds of people lined the streets below; excitement was written on their faces, and their actions caused us to put a still greater distance between them and us.

It was well that we did so, for they brought into the street an arm of strange construction, in appearance not unlike a siege mortar. This they proceeded to load with a curious ribbed ball. What the expulsive power was, or how the shot was fired, we could not

tell ; it made no sound, and we only knew of its being dispatched by seeing people clear away from its immediate vicinity. Instantly the ball came towards us, screaming through the wind, but seemed to stop, fortunately for us, some distance below the *Regina*, or our adventures would there and then have ended.

Never was such a diabolical missile seen on earth ! It came up from the ground with a screw motion, rested for the fraction of a second in mid-air, then there was a loud click, as of some spring being released, and instantly each of the ribs opened and became rigid arms, varying in length. At the outer end of each arm was a chain, carrying a ball at its other extremity, and these arms were joined to a central cone, having its point upwards. At the instant of opening, the screw motion it had risen with spun it slowly round, till all the balls, chains, and levers rose in a horizontal line, like the governor of an engine. Then, gathering momentum, the angle was raised, and the whole

projectile began to rise still higher, and the scream became a shrill shriek as it revolved with lightning velocity. The balls described a solid circle at least a mile in diameter, and had we been anywhere near it, nothing could have saved us from being drawn into the awful vortex, and impaled on the cone, whilst the solid funnel of flying balls would have beaten us to powder.

“What fiends these people must be!” said Ward; “fancy those infernal machines flying at an army!”

“They might wait to see if we are going to injure them before trying to pop us off,” said Davy.

“It is just like us at home,” said Wilks; “if a rare bird or strange animal does but show itself, some fool or other rushes out with a gun to shoot it.”

The revolving fiend had now spent itself considerably, and the balls were rotating more and more slowly, when, almost at the moment of cessation, it closed up, and re-

turned to the mortar, striking the ground but a few yards from its starting-point.

"That beats us," said Hall. "We should spend about £2000 to dispatch a missile like that, and then lose it, whereas these folk can use theirs over and over again."

As our presence seemed to anger these people, Fraser signalled for the propellers to be started, and we sailed along to find another town where the inhabitants might be more friendly. Soon we passed other cities, only to be greeted by more of these winged fiends, which proved that the people we first visited must have communicated with all the other cities, although by what means we failed to guess; certainly not by telegraph as we know it, as there were no wires nor any wireless stations, and though we tried to communicate with them by means of our apparatus, our messages elicited no response.

We proceeded over 20,000 miles, passing over many countries, and everywhere the

people were awaiting us with some annihilating contrivances.

However, there was one agreeable exception to the general unfriendliness. We chanced to stop over a farm which stood alone amidst a great tract of bleak country, and saw immediately below us a prodigious girl milking a cow of immense bulk. This seemed another good chance of sampling the milk supply, but this time—as we had made a hash of the first attempt, or perhaps, rather, it had been a little too successful—we managed it more warily. A can was let down by a line and deftly dipped into the pail, bringing back about a quart of milk. The astonished girl gave a shriek of alarm, which brought the whole household to the spot. We could tell by her gesticulations that she was explaining what had happened, and although they seemed much frightened, yet, good souls that they were, they evidently thought we had stolen the milk from dire necessity, and so brought out piles of food

and a large can of milk, then beckoned us to come out. This, of course, we could not do ; in fact, it was only by means of specially constructed valves that we could draw anything into the vessel, or let anything out, whilst it was hermetically sealed. We showed them we understood by letting down a short line with a hook on it, and in a few minutes we had on board enough food and milk from this strange world to serve us some weeks ; but it was very ponderous, and we left the tasting of it for a future occasion, when we should have tested it. The people evidently wanted us to come down, but Fraser, not wishing to be again captured, kept well out of reach, although they appeared very friendly.

In returning the empty can, we enclosed as a souvenir one of each of our current coins, together with a group photograph of the lot of us, which those below examined with great interest, and the farmer fetched from the house a little packet which he

signalled for us to draw up. Again letting down the rope, we hauled it inside, and found it to contain a beautiful and life-like portrait of himself, painted in a kind of enamel on some unknown metallic substance. On the back of this portrait was some strange writing, which no one on the earth has been able to decipher as yet, or to explain the process of this excellent work of art, which now finds a fitting and safe resting-place in the British Museum, along with the many wonderful objects which we brought back, and which the authorities arranged in a special room, making an unique collection, such as never was seen before in the history of the world.

After trying unsuccessfully for some time to hold a conversation with our friends by signs, we left these delightful, kind-hearted people and journeyed on to make further explorations.

We passed over many continents and seas, keeping very low so as to get a better, if

more restricted, view of the features of the world round which we were journeying. The countries generally were delightfully varied; thickly-wooded hills, beautiful valleys with rivers twining amongst them like silver wire, precipitous rocks, wild cheerless country, which in turn changed to moorland, covered with a kind of heather bearing a bright red flower; then came lakes, with wooded and grassy slopes, giving food and shelter to thousands of wild cattle; following this, a great stretch of desert; then prairie, seas and islands, and then again continents—in fact it was almost a replica of our own earth on a greater and more beautiful scale.

There appeared to be no shipping, but a kind of boat made of bark, which, large though they were, seemed to us very frail vessels in which to cross the mighty seas. From this we gathered that in this world of perpetual sunshine, the seas were always calm.

The mode of travelling on land seemed to be a curious kind of railway, probably electric. The carriages were a sort of basket running on one line in the centre, and so perfectly balanced as to be steady under all conditions. They travelled at a tremendous speed, and seemed to keep the same pace both up hill and down. It was very interesting to see carriages on this single line go up the slope of a mountain and down a fearfully precipitous side, meanwhile turning gracefully on an axis, and always keeping the same level.

All over this world the horses appeared to be used for riding only, carting and agricultural work being done by motive power.

When we were crossing one of the seas, and were about in mid-ocean, we let down a series of boxes weighted so that they would sink ; we could form no idea of the density of this water, so the boxes were tied on the line at measured intervals, and the line itself was saturated with a solution of bichromate

of potash and other salts. These boxes had gratings covered by pads of rubber, which could be automatically opened or closed against the gratings, and so retain the water which had been collected at the various depths. The weight at the end of the line was exceedingly heavy, and we hoped to get some specimens of the deepest water; the line, however, went down and down and ran itself out to the stop, and still it had not reached the bed of the sea.

After remaining stationary a few moments, it began to drift ahead, proving the presence of a powerful current. The valves of the boxes were now electrically opened and closed, and the line hauled in. Instantly we saw the water was salt, the chemicals on the line having turned blue. The boxes were now detached, and put carefully aside for the contents to be examined and analysed.

We travelled completely round this world,

arriving in a short time at the very town we had first visited. No sooner did we appear in sight than the inhabitants again began to hunt and assail us—as though we were some rare game—which made it necessary for us to keep so far away that all observation was practically impossible. We therefore decided to put a safe distance between the air-ship and this inhospitable globe, on which we conferred the name “Inimicus Ingens.”

Fraser therefore gathered the full repulsive force of the enormous power of this planet, and steadily rising till almost outside its atmosphere, he then turned on the full power, and the *Regina* was hurled into space with incalculable speed.

We were now in perfect safety, as we could not collide with any of the heavenly bodies, the repulsive power we possessed being sufficient to turn us or them aside.

We now turned our attention to the examination of the food given to us by the farmer. The milk contained azotized matter,

casein, sugar, phosphate of lime, and other salts in solution. Like that of the earth, its white, opaque appearance was an optical illusion. On close examination, without the aid of a microscope, it was seen to consist of a transparent fluid, made up of minute transparent globules of an albuminous nature containing fat. These could be broken and the fat dissolved. This fat contained olein, palmitin, stearin, and butyrim. An analysis of the milk gave the following result :—

Water . . .	600%
Casein . . .	200
Milk sugar . . .	100
Butter . . .	89.80
Phosphate of lime . . .	4
„ „ magnesia . . .	1
„ „ iron . . .	.10
Soda and casein . . .	3
Chloride sodium . . .	.10
„ potassium . . .	2
	1000.00%

It will thus be seen that this milk was similar to ours, but richer in casein and milk

sugar, and with a much smaller proportion of water. We therefore considered it safe to drink some of it, so Fraser and I took about a wineglassful of it, but soon after we had swallowed it, we were both attacked with colic. This we could not understand. However, we kept the remainder of the milk and extracted all the liquid from it, and it quickly formed a dense, solid mass without pressure. The men spent many pleasant hours carving this material into various devices as souvenirs.

What we took to be bread was a luscious fruit which our bodies could not assimilate. Both Fraser and I tasted it, but even a few grains made us violently sick. We dried some of this fruit, and found that when very dry it was as dangerous and explosive as guncotton, and would not allow of being compressed or detonated without serious results following, but if the fibres were separated, they could, like guncotton, be burned harmlessly in the hand. As it was

quite impossible to keep this fruit fresh and juicy, we reluctantly had to throw it outside, the air-ship having such a repulsive power when travelling, that it cast off with tremendous force anything put outside.

There were many other varieties of food which these people—who were apparently vegetarians—had given us, but on analysing them we found they would be unsafe to even taste.

In reaching down one of the boxes to analyse the sea-water, a small animal was found on the outside of the box. How it had got there we could not tell, unless it had been brought in with the food. It was in a dormant state, and no doubt the warmth of the laboratory had imparted some slight degree of motion to it, enabling it to crawl a few inches from the stove to the box-top.

This animal was about the size of a small mouse, but jet-black in colour. It had six legs, with rudimentary claws, and a large bullet head rather smaller than the thickness

of its neck. It had great and deep chest development, with a small abdomen, from which we surmised that it belonged to a species of swift-running animal. We improvised an incubator, and purposed watching the development of this strange animal, should it not be full-grown.

The sea-water proved stronger than the saltiest brine, and contained thirty per cent. more salt than we could get in a hot saturated solution. Many curious animals, fishes, and small life had been gathered in each box, but the difference in weight of our atmosphere and that of the planet, together with the removal of the enormous pressure of water, had killed all. Some of the fishes had their eyes bulged outwards, and the bladder or vesicle distended like a bubble, literally turned inside out.

Some of this small life was put in culture tubes and Petrie dishes with food, but without avail ; all were absolutely dead.

CHAPTER XIX

LOST !

"The awful shadow of some unseen power
Floats, though unseen, among us."

SHELLEY.

OUR defiant reception by the people on "Inimicus Ingens" had somewhat nettled us all, and we had felt rather inclined to give them something drastic to remember us by, but we pocketed our irritation, and by the time we had left the planet far behind, we looked upon the adventure as a joke.

All were in the best of spirits, and we certainly had an ideal crew, willing, obedient, friendly, and highly intelligent. One day when Fraser and I were in our cabin reading, we overheard several of the men talking together, their voices reaching us with great distinctness.

"I say, old man, what do you think of that little football over there?" said Adams; "a nice old kick it would need to send it through the goal-posts."

"The governor was saying it probably weighed something over thirty billion tons," said Wilks. "I wonder which of these little balls we shall go to when we slip our cables!"

"It would be rather hot if we were transported to one of these little suns, which I suppose will be hotter than the hottest fire in a steel-smelting furnace," exclaimed Ward.

"The governor was saying he would like to find the centre of the universe," remarked Davy. "I wonder what it would be like. I should think it would be made of gold, or something as precious as radium."

"I should bring a chunk back and sell it, so as to buy a few odd things I want," said Adams.

"When we get back, shan't we have something to talk about!" exclaimed Wilks;

"I think I shall apply for a job at Greenwich observatory. I rather think *I* know as much about the stars as those johnnies there, who tell us what time it is, and make it rain and blow for the daily papers. We could tell them more than their big spy-glasses can show them."

"We aren't back yet," answered Adams ; "I rather think we shall be glad to see old England again."

"How will the governor find the earth again ?" asked Davy ; "it cannot be seen from here, and the compass is no good."

"It will be a nice joke if he cannot get us back again," said Dyson ; "and we go wandering on and on like a comet."

At this point, Colver, coming in with something, remarked, "That little animal in the incubator is growing visibly and is now as big as a rat."

"Ah ! we will have a look at him," said I ; and Fraser and I both went.

Although it was still in a torpid state, it

had so rapidly increased, that it was, as Colver said, already as large as a rat. It was a beautiful, harmless creature, sheathing its claws when stroked, and altogether behaving like a staid old cat. The men had begged to have it in their quarters as a pet, and were enraptured with it, as it really was an engaging animal, as most young animals are. We measured it carefully at frequent intervals to note the rapidity of its growth.

We had now come to a peculiar nebulous cloud, and when still a great distance off, the *Regina* automatically altered her course to go round it, proving that some resistance lay before her, and her anti-gravitating power was exerting itself. Now Fraser was very anxious to go to this nebula, in order to see if it was solid matter, gas, or purely luminous cloud, so he reduced the negative force and steered the vessel straight ahead. Then the cloud began to alter, so he was obliged to withhold the power more

and more, till we approached and entered it, to find that it was purely gaseous. By this time the vessel was going very slowly and the full power of the engines was at work, but very little negative force.

After proceeding in this manner for about eight hours, Fraser thought it would be better to rush through at once, so he put on the negative switch. Suddenly he turned deadly pale. Dragging me to the switch-board, he pointed to the switches and then dropped into a seat, burying his face in his hands, too agitated even to speak. For a moment I could not make out what had happened, until, looking at the indicator, I saw that it registered but five hundred miles per hour—which was the speed of the engines alone, when working at full pressure—and yet the negative switch was on at full. Then I realized the calamity! We had lost almost all our negative force, and now nothing could save us from utter destruction.

We remained for a few minutes speechless ; at last he exclaimed : " Oh, Jervis ! what have I done ? Why did I not think before entering this nebula ? "

" We can but die once," I replied, " and better here than anywhere else."

" My dear fellow," he said, " I can never forgive myself ! When we could travel throughout the universe safely, I, through an oversight, instead of reserving the negative power, have allowed this nebulous gas to drive it all away."

" Do not give up hope, we may perhaps be able to make a fresh start from some power near," said I, although knowing full well the hopelessness of such a suggestion.

" Never ! " he replied. " You know as well as I do, that the friction of the gas we are passing through prevents our going quickly, without negative power to scatter it, and we now have no power to withstand anything that may attract us. I have lost the lives of all the men, and our own."

I could not answer, knowing it was all too true ; for here we were, travelling at five hundred miles an hour, our full speed, the nearest large star or planet known to astronomers being hundreds of millions of miles away, as we found we had been swept far out of our course. At our low speed it would take centuries to reach a star or planet of sufficient size to give us another send-off.

We discussed the matter from all points—theoretically and practically—but nothing could we anticipate except death from ultimate starvation, unless we were destroyed by contact with some of the heavenly bodies before our three years' provisions were consumed ; and it was with leaden hearts that we walked up to the observatory. Truly we had paid very dearly for obtaining the solution of the nature of a nebula, and we should never return to relate our travels.

It was quite impossible for us to drive through the nebula horizontally, so Fraser

caused us to rise, and in a few hours we were above it and in space, but with no accelerated speed. In fact, we were now worse off than before, and at the mercy of anything, for the rising had taken practically all the remaining negative power we possessed, and we had now only just sufficient to enable us to travel in a straight line.

We tried to encourage and comfort each other, but to no purpose. We too fully realized our awful position, we were irredeemably lost, trapped by a mere matter of detail. How miserably men fail ! how utterly beaten and helpless we were, lost in the immensity of space, fated to find a grave in our ship—a truly awful doom ! perhaps, after famine had killed us, our ship, with its gruesome remains, to float for countless ages on and on through an eternity of space.

Several days passed in gloomiest forebodings. The crew, too, noticed our solemnity, which, try as we would, we could not

altogether hide. At first they did not attach much importance to this, but our gloom deepened, we grew more and more melancholy in spite of ourselves, and we were not surprised when Kennedy suddenly said: "What's the matter with you two? Are you homesick, or bilious? Every day you look bluer, and it strikes me that it is now about time to let me doctor you; the men are getting quite concerned."

Fraser and I gave each other a questioning glance, and seeing we were mutually agreed, he said: "It is not bodily, but mental ailment, which you cannot cure; but come into our cabin here, and we will tell you all."

Fraser explained the terrible position. It was plainly a great shock to Kennedy, but he bore it admirably. We then discussed the advisability of telling the men, and decided that for the present it was better they should not know.

Fraser felt the position acutely, and was

almost crushed with the thought that he alone, by an oversight, had brought such dire disaster on his friends, who had relied on him with implicit faith, and he would not be comforted. This so preyed on his mind, and he became so dejected and despairing, that the men grew alarmed at his appearance. They pressed so eagerly for an explanation and became so nervous, guessing that something was very wrong, that we felt bound at last to tell them what had befallen us. I wanted to tell them, thinking it would be too much for Fraser, but he insisted upon doing so himself ; he had brought the misfortune, and he would be the one to inform the men and bear the brunt alone.

He therefore called the crew together into our saloon, and said: "I have a terrible thing to tell you. When we entered upon this voyage, you all signed on to go with me and obey me, even unto death, so that your lives, by virtue of this, are in my hands ; but still I hold that I have no right, under any

circumstances, to place you in jeopardy. Yet I have, by a fatal mistake, sacrificed your lives and my own. I have robbed the vessel of her speed. When we entered the nebulous gas, the friction acted as a break and pulled the vessel up, and I set the propellers to work. Instead of reserving the vast energy we had, to scatter the gas of the nebula, and so continue our terrific speed, I allowed it to be driven out. Now the *Regina* is travelling at the rate of five hundred miles per hour; this, as you well know, in the immensity of space, is, in comparison, like a snail set to go round the earth. We are lost, irrevocably lost; doomed to perish by the most dreadful of all deaths, famine. We can live about two and a half years on full rations, and during that time shall not have travelled more than 10,950,000 miles; this will be useless. In addition to this, without the force I mentioned, we are at the mercy of any fixed or wandering star possessing gravity, and although, so far as we

know, it would take centuries for us to get to any body large enough to do us any good, yet there may be countless small stars near us, possessing sufficient gravitating power to attract us to them with enough force to cause our instant destruction, before we could help ourselves. There does not seem even a chance that we escape all these dangers, although I pray we may, for we may be sure the Maker of the universe has not forgotten us, although we have defied all laws of nature, and are the only earthly beings who have broken into the sanctity of space.

“As we may at any moment be annihilated, let us at once make our peace with God, and prepare to die like men.

“Should we survive to the limits of our provisions, and be doomed to die of starvation, then I propose that we shall consider ourselves justified in evading this awful and lingering death, and die quickly and together. The valves could be opened and the air allowed to escape. This would at once

asphyxiate us. The ship would be our coffin and our tomb, and our lifeless bodies would remain here in the midst of boundless space; what would happen when the engines gave out, we can only conjecture. Probably the ship would remain in equipoise, until some star or comet drew us to its surface and destroyed all trace of us."

The men listened in horrified silence; for the moment they seemed quite unable to realize the situation, and then came towards us, and we passed several hours in dreary discussion. This seemed to relieve all of us considerably, and then—brave men that they were—they went about their respective duties as usual. The only evidence of impending calamity was the unusual quiet of the ship, none of us having any heart for the songs, jokes, and games with which we usually beguiled the time.

Now we had not a grain of gravity to spare. As already mentioned, we had just sufficient to keep the aërostat steady, but no

more, the engines also working. As we had scarcely used them up to the present, we had a far greater supply of power in that direction than we were likely to need, to all appearances.

It now became necessary to keep a rigid and careful watch every moment of the time, in order to avoid the meteoric stones, small stars, and other floating bodies. This required very delicate steering, and as the various controlling switches could be worked from the observatory, Fraser and I had a couple of shake-down beds made up there. We were the only persons on board who understood the working of the switches, so we alternately slept and navigated the vessel in four-hour watches. We scarcely left the place, except to see that the air-producing apparatus was working correctly, and even that was soon placed in the hands of Kennedy, who now, for the time being, had sole charge of the men.

Fraser and I could never get more than

four hours' sleep at a time, and seldom this, for often the one sleeping was called up to help in the steering, because of many things having to be done simultaneously to prevent calamity.

We became so accustomed to these sudden awakenings, that often, at the mere whisper of the name, we would awaken, be fully occupied for perhaps half-an-hour, and then drop off to sleep instantly, to have the same thing repeated. This went on for over eight weeks, by which time our nerves were in such a state that we were as though in a dream.

One day, I was just dropping on my bed, completely exhausted, Fraser only having that moment relieved me, when he called, "Jervis, old man! the compass is going!"

Instantly I was wide awake, and we watched the needle eagerly, but there was no further movement. Hour after hour we waited, but it still remained motionless, as it

had been since leaving "Inimicus Ingens," long before our disaster. All thought of sleep had left us, and we both remained watching the needle, but it never moved, and our hopes sank lower and lower.

"It is evident," said I, "that we must have passed through the fringe of the gravity of some large star."

"I don't understand it," said Fraser. "There is nothing in sight around us that would be likely to affect us here. Have your sleep out, there's a good fellow, and then I'll have a turn. We must look after ourselves, or the pace we are going at will kill us, and then what will the crew do? And our secret will be given away!"

"If it is," said I, "it will be to dead men, or at any rate, they will be dead long before they could use it."

I was just leaving him when the needle again gave a gentle click! We rushed to the telescopes. Nothing in sight except very distant stars, and a few near us only a few

miles in extent, which had to be carefully navigated. Then the needle took a steady turn to about five points to the north-west, and stayed there. The vessel was brought round accordingly, and we were in a fever of excitement too great for words. Our hearts were going like steam-hammers, and in my head was a beating and swirling like a mill, and Fraser told me afterwards that his brain seemed beaten to a pulp. Little did the crew below know what was happening, and what hung on the balance of the next few hours, probably the next few minutes.

We had imperceptibly been drawn into some gravitating force, whose origin we could not see, and we were now going straight to it, either to safety or annihilation, God only knew which !

On we went, deviating to avoid rolling objects, but with ever-increasing speed. If the source of this power we were approaching was only a small world, we should crash

on its surface with such force as to shatter the *Regina* to atoms, even if we were not previously roasted alive with the heat caused by our friction through its atmosphere, and the observatory had already become warmer than we appreciated. If, however, the world was large enough to give us great negative force, we could then steady up as we drew nearer, until, finally, we could obtain sufficient power to again take our air-ship anywhere in the universe with safety. No wonder we scarcely breathed. How we prayed ; surely no more fervent petitions ever ascended from human hearts than those we offered at lightning speed, with brains on fire !

The room grew hotter and hotter, and all this time Fraser had the negative switch on at full, but there was not the slightest lessening of speed, in fact we were going still quicker, when, all at once, she pulled up slightly, nearly throwing us off our balance, and alarming the men also. Then

off we went as fast as ever. If we could only get the power soon enough we were safe, as there was evidently plenty of it, but it seemed impossible ; we should be roasted alive before we could approach near enough. At this crisis Kennedy telephoned to me to come and see to the air apparatus, fearing that it had gone wrong, as the men were feeling faint with the heat. I told him I would be down soon, but did not intend going, as I knew the cause was not there, and two pairs of hands were needed at the switch-board.

Then came another diminution of speed, to be quickly increased ; then another slowing down ; then urgent appeals from Kennedy that they were suffocating ; then another pull up ; and then a long slackening ; and finally, a stand—our negative and the world's positive were in equipoise !

Words cannot describe our feelings of thankfulness, the vocabulary was not written for such occasions as these. We could only

say how good God was ; but from each heart there went up a soulful of thanks and gratitude and we were sure He understood.

For a few minutes we rested, then Fraser reduced the negative force, which sent us slowly nearer this unseen source of power ; then we gathered more, which sent us off ; and so he proceeded, cautiously and safely, till he had drawn the full force of the gravity this world could give us.

We were safe !

Then, with our clothes wringing wet with perspiration, we shouted to the men that we were safe ; and, stopping the engines and making the vessel stationary, we went down to the saloon, where all had congregated ; and I am afraid if I mentioned what happened there the reader would think that every inmate of the *Regina* had gone stark, staring mad. It was a mutual congratulation society ; but we did not forget to Whom we owed our safety.

CHAPTER XX

THE *EVENING OF THE FIRST DAY*.—Genesis i. 5.

“We are the voices of the wandering wind,
Which moan for rest, and rest can never find.
Lo! as the wind is, so is mortal life—
A moan, a sigh, a sob, a storm, a strife.”

SIR EDWIN ARNOLD.

FRASER and I returned to the observatory, but we could see nothing ahead, or below, and so we very cautiously advanced.

Then we lost sight of all stars; the heavens were completely blotted out by a “something,” we could not tell what.

Before us was a mysterious veil of darkness, which the eye of human reason could not penetrate. It seemed very unreal, and to be only an expression of that gloom which rests on the prospect of futurity. When we had slowly passed through this veil,

or shield, we beheld a weird and terrible sight.

Below us, at a distance of about four hundred feet, was a world, of what proportions we could not even hazard a guess, it being so dimly lit as to be but darkness visible, and, beyond a few miles spreading immediately below us, all was as dark as pitch, our eyes failing to penetrate far through the gloom. Even at that short distance it was impossible to tell whether it was land, water, or wood we were approaching, so we slowly descended till we were about two hundred feet from the surface. From this short distance even with our glasses, nothing could be seen but very dim outlines of dreary, desolate country,—so faint indeed was it, that we were not sure that we had really seen anything. For hours we wandered about with our lights full on, but the darkness and atmosphere were so dense, that, powerful as our searchlights were, we derived little benefit from them, their beams only penetrating the air a few yards, and

reflecting back to us a wall of bright fog. Everywhere was the same lifeless solitude.

Lifeless as it appeared, we had ample proof of the enormous gravitating power of this invisible world, it having drawn us to its surface from so great a distance, and this power was no doubt being exerted in forming, not only a new system, by attracting other worlds from various portions of the universe, but also itself. The revolving of its enormous body through so dense and solid a covering would, like a potter's wheel, mould it spherically, and make it more fit for its future work, when a moving atmosphere would be given to it, in which it would then revolve with greater ease, and so be brought nearer perfection.

Could we therefore have been permitted to see a world in its early stage of development, in its "first" day, when it "was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep!" Truly the predominating wish of our hearts at all times is

for "Light," but in this case those magic words, "Let there be Light!" had not yet been pronounced, and, as with ourselves, until the finger of Divinity touched it, "and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters," this world would be like a lost and abandoned soul, doomed for an eternity of time to remain shrouded in its pall in a grave of despair.

The effect on our spirits, following that of our recent catastrophe, was depressing in the extreme.

Dead as this world seemed, it was of tremendous gravitating force and enormous bulk. We had now drawn power from it, of sufficient volume to displace the whole of our Solar System, did we care to do so, without perceptible loss. Fraser therefore decided to leave and proceed on our journey, if we could only get in a position to locate ourselves; we therefore ascended, higher and higher, until finally we rose through the veil of blackness as from a tomb.

For several hours we wandered on, trying to decide our course. Suddenly we observed a large and distant star, toward which we steered. It became more and more brilliant as we approached, its beauty filling us with hope and joy unspeakable.

CHAPTER XXI

A MAMMOTH ON BOARD

"Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie."

SHAKESPEARE.

Now we had a bonnie kettle of fish on board! The heat generated by our rapid rush to the world we had just left, had brought our strange pet on wonderfully. Already it had reached such proportions that it could scarcely pass from one cabin to another, and was visibly growing. Within a few weeks of leaving the dark world, it came into our saloon one day and could not get out again. A week after this it took up one side of the saloon and could not turn round. Its capacity for food had also become alarming, what we could give it being quite inadequate to its necessities. Nothing

came amiss to it; boots, clothing, wood, pincers, iron, saws, in fact anything which chanced to be lying about, was instantly chewed up, and apparently digested. It was certainly a novel but embarrassing acquisition—a typical white elephant. We thought it strange we had not seen any of these mammoths on “*Inimicus Ingens*,” and concluded it must have been their season for lying dormant.

Up to this time, this animal had been fairly friendly, although it had never shown the least signs of even rudimentary affection. It was now getting uncomfortable both for the animal and us, as it was at each end being slowly jammed by the walls of the saloon, having only room to grow upwards and outwards, and very little there, as we had only just sufficient space to walk past. Soon this became a squeeze, but we thought its limit of growth must surely now be attained; still it grew, and it was very fortunate for us that it was still friendly, but

not demonstrative, or we should all have fared badly in a gambol with it.

Now came the question, "What were we to do with it?" We all wanted to take it back to the earth, partly as proof of the authenticity of our travels, and partly to present it to our Zoological Gardens, but if it continued to grow like this, it would soon want the *Regina* all to itself. If we made a special journey to bring it to earth, at its present rate of growth it would have burst out the sides of the air-ship long before we could have reached home, so that plan could not be entertained. Much as we regretted it, there appeared to be no alternative but to destroy it, or be destroyed. Then came the question how to kill it; for with power to chew up and digest sharp tools, saws, and the like, trying to kill it by ordinary means might probably result in feeding it up and so making matters worse.

We held a council of war, and, after long discussion, finally decided that the quickest

and most humane mode of dispatch, would be to de-atomize it.

Fraser therefore climbed over part of it to the switch-board, whilst I tied one wire to its stumpy tail, and threw the other towards its head. As it usually swallowed everything within reach, it immediately commenced to chew this wire. Fraser waited a few seconds, till a photograph was taken of it, and then moved the switch of our static gravitating force, when, like a flash of lightning, the enormous bulk of this strange animal became a liquid mass. The laws of cohesion having been destroyed, the whole body of the animal was now a liquid pool of separate atoms, which fell on the floor like water. This was mopped into buckets and flung outside.

CHAPTER XXII

THE STAR OF LOVE

"The stars are mansions built by Nature's hand,
And, haply, there the spirits of the blest
Dwell, clothed in radiance."

WORDSWORTH.

THE brilliant star towards which we were journeying had no satellite, and because of its beautiful and dazzling light, which shone with blinding brilliancy, like our sun when reflected from burnished silver, we judged that it must be the planet Venus. On referring to a plan we had drawn of the tracks of the various planets, we found that at this particular period, Venus should be passing through the constellation Aries, as seen from the earth, and as this star would there appear in this position, it proved our surmise correct.

Viewed from the earth, this planet, as every one knows, exhibits phases like those of our moon, and at the period of her greatest brilliancy she appears in the form of a magnificent crescent.

We were approaching it from a most favourable position, seeing its surface not as a crescent, but as a hemisphere.

We drew near to it almost with reverence, for whilst we were on the earth, we, like every one else, had been unable to observe this planet very closely, owing to the great splendour which casts a blinding glare upon its surface. We on earth, therefore, know little or nothing about Venus, hence we were anticipating a visit to this planet with excited interest, and we hoped to solve many of the problems respecting which the astronomers of earth held such varied opinions. As we drew near, we saw, enveloping the planet, a dense mass of silvery cloud, which we shortly found to be the atmosphere. In a few moments we were in

it, and, applying the usual tests, found it, as we expected, like our own. There were no animalcula in the air and it was absolutely pure, so we had no hesitation in throwing open the doors, and this glorious air rushed in, permeating the ship with its benign influence. Seen in bulk, this atmosphere was of a dazzling white, exquisite to see, but in the small portion of it we had in the ship, it seemed to give a roseate hue to everything and everybody. Not only was it lovely to behold, but still more delightful to breathe and have round us. A breath of it, without exhilarating, seemed to inspire us with a longing to be perfect; to do some good thing which would benefit our fellow-creatures; to live good, noble, and true lives, and to set about doing so immediately.

So far we could see nothing but this celestial atmosphere, so Fraser caused the vessel to fall lower and lower till land was visible, or at least what we took to be land, although it looked like silver of dazzling

What
a hope!
purity. We came lower still, and finally stopped about thirty feet from the ground. At this part there was nothing to see but beautiful open country; around us were lovely hills and dales and murmuring streams; the trees—and indeed all the vegetation—were of that luscious vernal green seen on the earth in April and May only.

The propellers carried the vessel over this country, and just as we were travelling over a beautiful valley where some goats were feeding at the river's brink, there came sauntering towards them a lion, in all his majesty of strength and power. At any other place we should have shot him long before he could have done any damage; but here—probably owing to some influence of the air on this beauteous planet—no such thought entered our minds, although we did not notice this till afterwards.

The lion walked leisurely up to the feeding herd, passed through it, took a long drink at the running stream, then climbed up the

bank, and lying down, rolled over on his back, pawing the air and gurgling a little in manifest enjoyment, the goats meanwhile being apparently quite oblivious of his presence. Some lambs feeding near evidently thought they would join him in his play, so they all gambolled together, we staying to watch. The lambs were soon tired and the lion rolled over on his side, closed his eyes and seemed to sleep, whilst one of the lambs nestled in the long hair which covered the lion's massive chest. Strange as this sight was, we did not seem at all surprised.

Kennedy quoted, half under his breath, "‘They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain.’ Truly we have now got to Paradise, or at any rate to a place where enmity is not known."

"I wonder what the people will be like," said Wilks; "judging from the animals, we shall have nothing to fear from them."

On we went, still no people were to be seen, but we met many animals which on

earth would have fought each other to the death, but here they seemed to be the best of friends.

A wasp settled on Fraser's hand, but it did not sting, and he remarked, "If that had been an earthly wasp, it would have warmed me up; obviously the creatures here are vegetarians."

"It is certainly an ideal place," said Kennedy; "does it not seem to fill one with an awed reverence, as though in the presence of something sanctified?"

"Everything here, without doubt, is noble and good," said Fraser. "The glorious country, the pure light, the peaceful rest—which seems to permeate everything, even animals—recall to my mind the prophecy, 'I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land.'"

"See what comes here," said Pearson, pointing ahead; "did you ever dream of such a sight?"

We all crowded to look, and not more than a hundred yards away was a fine leopard, lying on its back, being tickled on its broad white chest by a little child, or angel, as we thought. As we drew near, the leopard rolled over and caught sight of the *Regina*. Instantly springing to its feet, it came swiftly towards us, the child following. Fraser lowered the vessel, and for the first time since leaving Derwent, we travelled on land as a car.

The leopard and child came quite close; neither seemed the least afraid, but stood curiously watching, as we leaned over the outer deck-rail. The child had one arm round the animal's neck, at the same time stroking and patting its muzzle. Whoever on earth had seen so lovely a sight in nature? and what a child! so beautiful, so ethereal; yet the picture of health; and with what grace of pose, with eyes turned full on us with unblinking innocence and wonderment.

"Who are you, my dear?" said Fraser;
"can you understand us?"

The child seemed still more surprised, and saying something in a voice of ineffable sweetness, sprang astride the leopard's back, and in a few minutes was out of sight.

"Now we shall soon have a host of inhabitants round," said Fraser; "we will follow."

Fearing to injure the beautiful turf, he elevated the *Regina* a dozen feet or so, and we went rapidly in the direction taken by the strange rider and steed. Of course we very soon overtook them, and the child, seeing us follow, evidently thought we were racing, and imbued some of the same spirit into the leopard, who doubled his exertions. Entering into the spirit of the game, we followed well behind, which mightily pleased the child.

In a short time we came to a village; here the child jumped off the wonderful steed, which at once began to nibble the

grass. Fraser had now brought the aërostat to the ground some distance away, and was ready for immediate flight, should the people appear aggressive. At the child's call many people came out ; others followed, until in a few minutes the vessel was surrounded. At the mere sight of them all thought of danger left us. Never had we imagined such people! To say they were beautiful would be too feeble ; but to even attempt to say *how* beautiful would be utterly beyond the power of an earthly mortal. They were dressed in long, flowing robes of gleaming white material, held at each shoulder by clasps made of a peculiar cord-like plant, the cream-coloured flower of which hung down at each side like an epaulet. This we noticed later ; at the first we could only gaze in adoration at their faces, so pure and good they looked ; and in their eyes there shone the calm trust of innocence and love, which a man of earth can never see, except perhaps from the eyes of those who

are nearest and dearest to him, who are the nearest approach to the Divinity which mortal man is ever permitted to see.

They signalled for us to come, and we obeyed and came towards them without the slightest apprehension. They spoke to us in soft, melodious tones, and we answered, neither understanding the other. We told them by signs that we had travelled in our vessel from earth, which we could plainly see. The sight of our own world startled us considerably, because we, on earth, can see nothing of the surface of Venus, by reason of her bright, glowing atmosphere; and yet from *this* side we could not only see our planet, but could distinguish the continents on it, in miniature, with the naked eye, the atmosphere of this planet apparently acting as a very powerful lens from *this* point of view. Casting our glances round the heavens we could also see through the dense, rolling vapour of Jupiter to the land and water lying beyond.

On our asking by signs if Mars had people on its surface, they intimated "yes"; and showed us some peculiar instruments through which we could see them quite distinctly.

They gave us to understand that they had often signalled to us, but we on earth could not answer, although they and the inhabitants of Mars and Mercury were in constant communication.

We left the vessel quite unguarded, and no mortal can ever hope, in this life, to repeat the delightful experiences of our stay on this most lovely planet. Before many minutes had passed, wealth, fame, the lust of conquest, in fact everything the earth could give, had completely vanished from our thoughts; we felt we only wanted to be good, pure, and true, and to live long, so that we could have time and opportunity to grow so.

These people seemed to know and understand everything, and we nothing, but they

willingly showed us anything we asked, and if we had a thousand years to live on earth, and power to satisfy every desire, not a single one of us but would gladly give up everything, and think it no sacrifice, if that would enable us to spend a few years on the superb planet, Venus.

As the record of this visit is made the subject of another book, I will not reiterate the narration of our visit which is therein contained, but will briefly mention a few of the striking features of this glorious planet.

One thing struck us as particularly interesting. We found that the spots seen from the earth are composed of vast stretches of bare land rich in metallic ore (samples of this may be seen in the collection already mentioned). This metal is quite unknown to us on earth, and is of a peculiar colour and vivid brightness ; when in large bulk, it reflected on the atmosphere of the planet, lighting it up brilliantly and with tremendous power. We on earth, when looking

at this light, see the shadow which it produces on her semi-opaque atmosphere, which even the rays of the sun can only partially remove.

During our stay we became acquainted with many things and could understand a great deal by signs, but the language was altogether beyond us. They tried to teach us with infinite kindness and gentleness, but our coarse tongues were not fitted for such vocal refinement as was necessary.

We surmised that they had never "fallen," but had begun and continued as the Creator intended—in His Own Image. They had no sin, in thought, word, or deed. There was no death from pain, disease, accident, or senile decay, but this came in the form of a visible translation to some still higher and nobler planet. A premonition of this was evident, as, a few weeks after our arrival, we observed signs of rejoicing, and the whole town became *en fête*. All the inhabitants assembled, with one person in their midst,

whom they conducted to the foot of a high mountain, where he bade them a tender farewell and ascended alone. Like Moses of old, he was nevermore seen.

There was no rain, but instead "there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground."

Their occupation was chiefly agriculture, and their recreations, science and the arts; consequently, as they had wonderful knowledge, their works were amazing to us.

They lived in community in the happiest way, and all the people on the planet seemed to lead a purely natural, pastoral existence, of perfect rest, contentment, and happiness.

They drank nothing but pure water in the form of dew, which they collected night and morning. No food entered their mouths except fruit, which grew in great profusion, and was eaten as gathered.

This mode of life was, of course, well suited to them, but they grew very slowly. With *us*, after our training of thousands of

years for solid food, life was not possible upon a diet of raw fruit alone, and *we* needed hot and cooked food ; but here there were no fires, the atmosphere being warm and equable. We had, therefore, to dine in the aërostat.

Meat and cooked food, whether hot or cold, did not suit us while breathing this air, and yet it was equally impossible for us to keep our health with a little raw fruit and water, and after our visit had lasted an earth month, we began to see signs of illness amongst us. This increased, till Kennedy said it was imperative we should leave, so that after a stay of two months, we bade farewell to these God-like people. The whole of the inhabitants of the village in which we were staying assembled together to give us a hearty send-off, and so we left, it might be never to return in this life.

We got a tremendous repulsive force, and we ascended higher and higher, feeling an intense sense of loss.

So we sailed out of this beautiful, but dense, atmosphere, at the under side of which—although we could not see them—we knew these good people would be still watching, and wishing us an earnest, heart-felt God-speed.

During the next few days we talked of nothing else ; indeed, even now, whenever we speak of this, the most elevating and glorious portion of our voyage, we feel our hearts burn within us, like the young men who, when going to Emmaus, had walked and talked with the Lord, and had known Him not.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SPACIOUS FIRMAMENT

“Space—the palace of the Eternal, whereof our sun is but a porch-lamp.”—CARLYLE.

WHILE still on Venus we had tried to send messages by wireless telegraphy to earth, but for some reason, probably atmospheric, this was not possible. We had tried to send to Mars and Mercury also, with a like result. Although our apparatus was the most modern and efficient known on earth, the inhabitants of Venus signed to us that it would be no good, and showed us theirs, which was too elaborate and complicated for us to even understand. It was far more delicate in mechanism than a high-class microscope, and was thousands of years in advance of our instruments. However, a

few days after we had left Venus, our Hertzian wave bell began to ring. We rushed to it in great excitement, as it was the first time it had moved since leaving the earth's atmosphere.

The answering signal was given and several words came.

"Are you there? Saxern."

Back went the reply: "Yes. This is the air-ship *Regina*. Fraser Burnley and crew. All well. Reply."

"This is Saxern, chief of *The Times*. Where are you? What are you doing? Where have you been? Reply."

"We have just left the planet Venus, on which we have spent two months, and are now going straight to Sirius."

"For many months you have been mourned as lost. Do you mean to say that you are away in space?"

"Yes, clean away, and have much wonderful news to tell. We have taken photos of every place visited, and have cleared up

dozens of disputed points, without the shadow of a doubt."

"The people do not think the air-ship has sailed at all, but believe it is simply kept secret somewhere in the country."

"Never mind, your turn will come soon ; we are going to Sirius, and shall then return straight home without any deviation, or calling at any other star or planet, so in a few weeks' time we shall be with you."

"I have said so much about the *Regina* in *The Times*, and am getting pretty well laughed at and written down about it by other papers, that if you could do anything and give me——" Then came a long pause, and then the word "proof," and then absolute silence.

We tried several times more, but there was no response ; we had passed the zone of the power of our apparatus.

Soon the great orbit of Neptune was passed, and the *Regina* entered the unknown

and unfathomable region of space which lay beyond.

For the first time this mysterious region was being explored by earthly beings.

The aërostat swept onward through this immensity of space, speeding on in the black heavens, surrounded by the glorious suns and systems of God's Creation. All around were dead and living worlds, revolving on their own axes and in orbits round their suns.

No mind can realize the space beyond Neptune ; for millions of miles no star was neared, then a group of stars was passed, then constellations and planetary bodies, then again millions of miles of space ; dark, lonely space, where nothing could be seen except far-distant stars. And so we travelled on and on amidst this awful solemnity, ever nearing the great Dog Star, which by this time had become a perceptible disc in the heavens. As this became larger and larger, its features became

apparent, fresh wonders opening out momentarily.

Fraser was an ideal commander, stern when necessary, but always kind and considerate ; without losing any of his dignity or influence as leader of the expedition, he yet met the men in every way possible. This was highly appreciated. The slightest orders were obeyed with alacrity and even anticipated, and instead of being masters and men, we were all as one happy family. This was most gratifying, and never in a single instance was there any complaint of insubordination. Never did a crew and officers pull together as on board the *Regina*. No doubt this was in a certain measure due to the peculiarity of the voyage, which, from the onset, had made us all feel "how insignificant man is."

We had been accustomed to look on "man" as the crowning work of the Universe. He *may* be of the *earth*—cer-

tainly he was last, and so *might* be considered the best ; but ever since we first left the earth, our opinions had changed, and we found that after all, "man"—at any rate an earth man—is but as a speck of dust on one of the grains of sand on a trackless, boundless shore, of no moment whatever, and, but for a wise and loving Creator, would be absolutely forgotten. We can truly ask, "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him ?"

Amongst all these wonders of nature, which our minds could not grasp although we were in their midst, how insignificant were we, and indeed our earth. What is it ? Only an atom in an infinity of space ; and, looking back, we saw our gigantic sun, with his great bulk and heat, and wonderful system, and what was it all ? Merely a handful of bright pearls, which could have been held in the palm. "Who can follow the mind of God, or the thoughts of the Most High?" that He should keep all these

living and dead worlds revolving, turning in orbits, passing so near to each other that some appeared to only escape annihilation by a few hundred yards. Yet each tranquilly pursues its own course, never deviating, never halting, only proceeding as the Divine Creator wills it,—“The Lord is mindful of His own,”—therefore, as Browning has it—

“God’s in His heaven,
All’s right with the world.”

CHAPTER XXIV

THE HARMONY OF SOUND

"They float down the infinite spaces,
A murmurous mystical throng,
With smiles or with tears on their faces,
And each is the Soul of a Song."

T. FERGUSON

Soon the *Regina* approached the giant Sirius, and from our unique position we were enabled to see many things which are not visible to the people on earth. Twenty-five new stars were counted close to Sirius, each suns, and apparently shining by *their own* light. When still nearer, other and smaller stars were seen, but these latter presented phases like the moon, thus proving that they shone by reflected light. Some of these suns may in time become visible from earth, as our instruments are perfected.

Here was seen a glorious system hitherto

unknown. Sirius, the chief star in the constellation Canis Major,—from whose rising and setting with our sun we get the term dog days, as applied to that period,—was a gigantic sun of stupendous dimensions, and had, floating round him, the twenty-five other suns already mentioned, all of great bulk and power; each of these in turn having planets moving in complicated orbits with mathematical accuracy; striking their intricate geometric curves with wonderful precision; and in the centre, with a blinding glare, shone the majestic Sirius.

“How beautiful these secondary suns appear,” said Fraser; “they are probably thrown from the surface of Sirius, but what colours! All the jewels of the earth seem here to be made into planets.”

And so it actually seemed. Some of the spheres were a beautiful yellow, others blue as sapphires, others shone like diamonds, opals, emeralds, and rubies. It was indeed a marvellous and beautiful

spectacle. As the aërostat came still nearer, we saw one sun that was so densely surrounded by planets as to appear covered with them, and some of these planets were attended by satellites.

This sublime but unexpected group of stars surrounding the Dog Star was overwhelming in its awful grandeur. It seemed like sacrilege for such as we to so intrude amongst these secrets of Nature.

One of the men exclaimed, "Here is Paradise indeed;" and another, "This must be the gate of heaven!"

Even this feeling did not deter us. Such is the intrepidity of man that all eagerly desired to enter, even if into the actual presence of the King of kings.

At last we were close to these celestial jewels, and decided to land upon one of the smallest, which was much less than the earth in volume and of a lovely blue. Seas and continents could be clearly seen, and mountains topped with light, feathery clouds.

It was quite evident there was an atmosphere, as the sudden rise in temperature proved we were rushing through and neutralizing the air of this world. Fraser quickly made the necessary drop in speed, and in a few minutes the *Regina* was floating over an island situated near the equator of the planet. Thus had our vessel again come to actual rest on an unknown planet millions of miles from home. What wonders lay below, none could yet tell.

We were full of excitement, but Fraser insisted that all should sleep except the watch, and that a landing should be made in twelve hours if the atmosphere proved safe. This was tested and proved extremely dry, but breathable by us.

All at once a change came over the surface of the planet. Up to this moment it had been a beautiful blue, like the pure colour of the lapis lazuli, but now, in a moment, it had changed to a rich, sparkling red, like that of a pure ruby, and the whole

landscape became like hot iron. The beautiful rolling waves of the sea were red—a sea of blood—with their crests a foam of red froth. This latter was not an altogether pleasant sight, although we found later that the sudden change in colour was due to the planet's being doubly lighted. In the daytime a blue sun cast on it a blue light, and at night a red sun gave it as it were a baptism of blood.

Next morning telescopes were brought out and eagerly directed to the surface of the planet in the hope that some towns or people would be visible, but we only saw land and water, the district being apparently uninhabited. The planet was only a small one, as even at the altitude of a few miles the whole hemisphere could be plainly distinguished at once.

The air-ship was brought lower and lower till within a few hundred feet of the ground. Here a wonderful sight presented itself to our gaze. Miniature trees, grass like down,

and rocks, lay bathed in beautiful blue sunshine, the shadows being strong and of a rich orange colour, turning the whole landscape into veritable fairy-land. Below were thousands of curious creatures, gaping in wonderment and reverence on the *Regina*, some being in an attitude of devout worship, the air-ship evidently being of remarkable interest to them.

Suddenly a large cloud of birds rose and darkened the sky, but as they came nearer, we found they were small beings equipped with wings. They circled round the ship, peeping in at the windows, and we saw their faces were like ours in miniature. Instead of clothing, they had a natural covering of a silken, feathery substance like fur, the wings being attached above the shoulder blades, near the collar-bone, and were manifestly a part of the body. These wings, even in the strong blue light, were gorgeously coloured, and in strange contrast to the complexion of the skin which covered the

faces, hands, and feet of these strange beings, which was of a creamy parchment hue.

These beautiful creatures flew about with the speed of swallows ; darting, turning, tumbling, and often for a few moments resting poised on the air with still and open wings. Some alighted on the dome of the observatory, and although all doors were closed, we could distinctly hear the motion of their wings, which was sweet and true, like the sighing murmur of a well-strung Æolian harp heard in the hush of an autumn evening.

The vessel was now brought to the ground, and there seemed no reason why we should not land, providing the people were friendly, as they appeared to be.

Dyson asked if he could be the first to go out, and, after much hesitation, Fraser consented ; first giving him a brace of loaded revolvers, in case this precaution was needful, and several of the crew were stationed with arms and a machine gun to cover his

retreat, if necessary. Fortunately these were not required, as these little people were too evidently pleased at our presence to be dangerous to us. The instant the doors were opened and Dyson went down the rope ladder, hundreds of these winged creatures, who were only about nine inches high, circled round him in an ecstasy of joy, some alighting on his head, hands, shoulders, arms, in fact all over him, till he was covered. They stroked his face, felt at his clothing, his watch-guard, boots, and even peeped into his pockets, all the time laughing, and uttering strange, dreamy croons, their combined sounds making beautiful concord, which was most entrancing to hear, as their notes became loud or soft, varied into many keys and many discords, all resolving into exquisite harmony, to be altered and varied in the most wonderful manner.

Occasionally they would seem to prepare a non-dominant discord, their voices working it up until it seemed a perfect chaos of

sound. This dissonance would then be transferred or held over, by the interpolation of chord after chord in which the dissonant note appeared as a consonant note, until one fell to wondering how it would end, and what would be done with it, when it would take its progression and be resolved into such harmony as thrilled us with its ravishing sweetness.

This seemed to be their way of talking to each other, simply singing in natural concord, which, although most delightful to hear, was unintelligible to Dyson as to the rest of us.

They were very friendly, but we deemed it wisest to be prepared for any emergency, and after we had each placed a brace of fully loaded revolvers in our pockets, we all came out of the vessel, Fraser making it secure as in "Silens."

Then the same thing which Dyson was experiencing, happened to us, and it was a new and delightful thing to be sung to by

such accomplished, natural musicians. We were each quite overwhelmed with their kind and demonstrative welcome, and when they had somewhat tired of their fervent attentions, we could look about us, and then we really did think we had come to fairy-land.

In the ground were thousands of holes, which, on nearing, we found to be the houses of these people. They were arranged like the cells of a honeycomb and would no doubt be cosy and comfortable. There appeared to be no individual work, nature having provided them with all they needed. There were forests of trees, and strange flowers and fruits grew in profusion, but all in miniature. These people, unlike those of earth, seemed to reverence trees and flowers and left them growing undisturbed, to be a comfort and source of delight to all, instead of breaking off boughs of blossom and plucking flowers recklessly and then casting them on the dry ground to die,

or pulling them to pieces, as seems to be the custom on earth.

There were also animals, something like our dogs, but so small as to be like toys, although they bore the same relative proportions to these creatures, as our dogs do to us.

We spent several days here, trying to find out their manners, customs, life, and above all, speech, but without avail. As regards their language, we could make nothing at all of it. When any sweet song was sung they crowded round the singer, but a sad one sent them in haste to their holes. The *words* had no effect, only the *tune* and quality of sound moved them. The songs which they enjoyed most, were those in minor keys, and where a prominence was given to the chord of the dominant seventh. They were rather frightened of the piano, a large ebony grand, but after the first fear had passed, a few chords struck would bring them crowding into the vessel to listen.

Beethoven's sonatas delighted them, Wagner's grandeur nearly sent them frantic with pleasure, but Mendelssohn's Lieder brought them all over and round the player, in ungovernable rapture, completely obliterating the music, so that the compositions had invariably to be finished from memory.

To Pearson, however, were all the honours given. When he took up the violin and played a few bars, he was lost, absolutely lost, as if alone on a desert island. We could tell as plainly as if in words, all that was passing in his mind; all his sadness, joy, hopes and fears; for the fiddle responds as no other instrument can, going out in full sympathy with the player, till it becomes alive and breathes hope and comfort into one's very soul.

These little creatures would remain silent for awhile, until they gradually worked themselves up into an excitement beyond all control, when they would follow the tune in excellent concord. This was sur-

prising, considering that our classical music was unknown to them, and no matter what the tune might be, the most intricate passages were fitted with harmonious chords of marvellous quality and construction, which rose and fell as their feelings were swayed by the music of the strings. When the tune ceased, Pearson would be overwhelmed with such musical thanks, as nearly suffocated him.

Music evidently touched the hearts of these people as nothing else could. Monotonous words made them afraid, and they fled at any sound not musically good, such as harsh, improper discords, but a correctly composed dissonance would be immediately answered by them in being perfectly resolved into true harmony. This little was the utmost we could make out of their conversational powers.

They took no notice whatever of anything in the ship, beyond the musical instruments, nor of the ship itself except in so far that it contained *us*. No object of art, either in

ornaments, decorations, or pictures, appealed to them in the least. The only thing that would entice them inside the *Regina* was music, and they flew outside the instant that was over, the saloon and fittings of the ship inspiring in their minds a curious fear. The piano and violin they took to be some kind of living being, as they would croon to and fondle them, and bestow on them all possible evidences of affection.

After staying amongst these people four days, we again embarked, and left this musical "World of Holes."

We should have much liked to bring some of these curious people home with us, but it would have been cruel, as they could not eat our food and soon they must have died, as we did not see how they could have been kept alive without their constant blue and red lights, and exceedingly dry atmosphere, which we found very trying, and after the food (fruit) we could have carried for them was exhausted.

We therefore left them to themselves, thousands of them flying after us for some distance, with many cries and tokens of regret, and proceeded onward towards our goal.

At last, right before us, but with a great intervening space, was Sirius, a glorious Sun, emitting such heat that we dared not approach nearer.

For several days we contemplated his resplendent surface through sun-glasses, and found the solutions to many difficulties and theories which could not be detailed here, but which will be dealt with at a future date.

Fraser now turned the *Regina* toward the Solar System and home, and with a mighty impetus from the great Dog Star, the vessel was launched through trackless space, with a speed compared with which lightning is but as the progress of the snail.

So our voyage home commenced.

CHAPTER XXV

A WARM RECEPTION

"It is a painful fact, but there is no denying it, the masses *are* the tools of circumstance."—KINGSLEY.

SIRIUS rapidly receded in the distance, and entrancing as our adventures had been, we none of us felt any regret at turning our faces homeward. The excitement of the last twelve months or more had been so intense and continuous, that it was beginning to tell on us. Although we could have continued with safety for two years longer, we felt the need of rest, and with the feelings which are implanted in every human breast, we longed for the quiet and repose of home.

We had witnessed so many marvels, that their very multiplicity had almost bewildered

us ; the recollection was one confused blur. Wonders upon wonders had followed each other in rapid succession, and were all, as it were, photographed on our brains, but we needed time and quiet reflection to develop them.

One day in conversation, Adams said : " I am afraid it will be difficult to make our friends believe that we have actually made this voyage, when we return."

" I expect they will laugh at all our assertions," said Kennedy.

" That will be what Saxern meant in his last unfinished message," said Fraser.

" They are bound to believe the curios we have brought with us," said Wilks.

" Not necessarily," said I ; " people are notoriously sceptical. They already refuse to believe we are here, and would also refuse to accept curios as proofs."

" Well, but everything we have, except the gold, is unknown on earth, so they are bound to believe, or how could they

account for our possessing them?" argued Wilks.

"In spite of evidence to the contrary," I replied, "people are very slow to believe what they don't know about, and to give others credit for doing what is difficult or impossible to them. It will have to be something which will affect their pockets, or convenience, before they will be convinced. What do you say, Fraser?"

He laughed and said: "I think you're not far wrong, and they would be sure to say that some one had manufactured these things for us, in order to delude them. We must have stronger proof than this."

"If we could take one of these little suns back with us," said Adams, "they are bound to believe that."

"I do not see why we should not do even that," replied Fraser. "There are numbers of planetoids between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter—which we shall shortly come to—of small bulk and volume, and I

think if we were to attract one of them, we could throw it from its orbit, and bring it towards the earth. We could then launch it in a new orbit, just outside the earth's atmosphere, so that not only would all the inhabitants of earth be able to view it with the naked eye, but the astronomers, with their telescopes, would plainly see our air-ship attached."

"That would be too convincing to admit of the least doubt!" said Kennedy. "It is a splendid idea."

We were all highly delighted at this possible solution of the difficulty, and talked of nothing but the surprise in store for our earth friends, and, like typical Britishers, we were now constantly on the look-out for something to annex.

Fraser took great care to steer clear of luminosities and gases, which could readily be distinguished, and in a short time we again crossed the orbit of Neptune. Then we crossed the orbit of Uranus, and later, that of Jupiter.

The air-ship came comparatively near this planet. His moons were beautifully distinct, and showed much larger than our moon as seen from the earth. His belts and snowy poles were clearly visible.

A tremendous impetus was obtained from this planet, and the *Regina* rushed forward with so terrific a speed, that in the course of a few hours Jupiter began to rapidly diminish in volume.

The astronomically inferior planets, Mercury and Venus, were barely perceptible, and the earth was now visible as a very small star. Through the air-ship's most powerful refracting telescope, we could just discern a faint outline of land and water, like a map.

As we again gazed on this little sphere, calmly and serenely floating in the starry heavens, we were quite overcome, and at once felt thoroughly home-sick. We were eager to once more tread on our native soil, to converse with, and see our fellow-men.

Under the influence of this feeling, Fraser

said to me: "Suppose we try to speak with Saxern, and hear the news."

I went to the telegraphic instrument, and what was our delight to have the reply to my message asking for Saxern, that he was there, and had for weeks been trying to get us.

"Where are you now?" was the question.

Back went the reply: "We are now within the orbits of Jupiter and Mars, wending our way through thousands of planetoids. How are the friends of the earth going on? What is the news of to-day?"

"The greatest news of to-day is that an air-ship has been constructed which has positively flown two hundred yards with safety, and then brought up in a hay-stack. The petrol motors fired the stack, causing the death of the inventor and total ruin of ship and stack. Nothing special in England. Government defeated, and consequent change of politics. Our newspaper has been ridiculed for making positive assertions *re*

Regina. Astronomers have proved beyond doubt, that the appearance on the day you sailed, was a meteoric phenomenon, and the *Regina* air-ship only a fable invented by *The Times*. If you would save our paper, I would beg you to do something to prove you are actually in space."

"Thanks for all you have already done. You shall be justified in the eyes of the whole earth. We will bring you a new satellite, so near to the earth, that it shall be visible to the naked eyes. It shall be placed in a new orbit, and revolve just outside the earth's atmosphere. This will take some little time. At midnight, three weeks from to-day, Jupiter will be in the south, below Pisces, moving to the right in Aquarius, and the moon will pass over him. Now, if you will train your telescopes towards Jupiter, you will be able to see, coming between him and the constellation Aquarius, a large body, bigger than the moon, and half illuminated by the rays of the sun. If you care-

fully inspect the same, you will be able to discern our air-ship."

"What you say is impossible. I dare not write such things in *The Times*. I am afraid the populace would pull down the building."

"Whatever is the consequence, it should be done. After that day your paper will be more powerful than ever. You will be vindicated in the sight of all people, for we shall approach the earth in such a way, that the sun in the daytime will show this new satellite to the earth as a dark mass, like an eclipsed moon, and in the night like a full moon.

"Please station a clerk at the telegraph night and day, so that we can be in constant communication, and we will transmit to you the wonders of the heavens we are passing through."

Saxern promised to comply, but privately decided to wait until he saw the appearance in the sky, as he really had not the moral

courage to defy public opinion by publishing such details.

He waited eight days, ten days ; two days after, he received a wire from Greenwich, asking him to publish the announcement that a small star or planet, presenting a non-luminous face to the earth, was travelling towards it. It was then just discernible as a black disc in the heavens.

Again were the most marvellous theories propounded to account for this wonderful object travelling with such terrific speed, but when, alongside this statement, appeared Saxern's article describing the voyage of the *Regina* and what was being brought, the wonder, excitement and disbelief were at fever height. It was as though a mighty shell had been exploded and shaken the British Isles.

The astronomers were indignant. They explained the utter impossibility and absurdity of such a thing. Every newspaper joined in writing down and ridiculing

The Times, but yet the black object grew greater in the heavens.

Saxern had published the day and hour when the sphere would begin to revolve in its new orbit. Excitement grew daily, and the planet loomed greater in the sky, until it became the size of a full moon. In the daytime it was a black, opaque body; at night it was luminous like the moon. Already the astronomers had made out that it was surrounded by an atmosphere. That continents, seas, islands and oceans were observed upon its surface. Already they had found that the planet rotated on its axis once every three hours.

Shortly, the interest and wonder gave place to a great fear. Here, with lightning speed, was a cannon-ball flying towards the earth, straight for the great metropolis. The astronomers admitted that a mighty catastrophe was imminent; that nothing short of a miracle could save the world.

By this time the planet had grown to

such an enormous bulk, as to blot out the whole of the stars and constellations, and shone with the blinding light of a thousand full moons ; and in the daytime, to considerably darken the earth. The astronomers described it as being already near the earth, and as having near its surface, some object which *might* be an air-ship, and they finally admitted that at the day and time mentioned by Saxern, the planet would be one thousand miles from the earth's surface.

This was a crowning triumph for *The Times* and completely restored its credit.

Previous to this, Saxern had been in daily communication with the *Regina* and had published the messages verbatim, but these had been scoffed at, as inventions of himself and staff. Now, however, he was vindicated, and although the people scarcely yet believed it possible for an air-ship to have power to displace a world, yet on the evidence before them they were almost compelled to the belief, against their will.

What had been considered a serious astronomical phenomenon, was therefore only the mad freak of a shipful of men, and consequently, every one rose up in arms against the whole crew, and only desired to have them at their mercy for all the disasters that were multiplying every day.

As the fateful hour approached, the object in the sky became more and more terrible, as if the whole heavens had become turned into a sweltering furnace. Almost every one who was not bedridden went into the streets, from the highest to the lowest. Many nervous people became ill from sheer fright, whilst others became insane, and prayers for safety went up from many churches and chapels all over the country.

At last, exactly as Big Ben solemnly tolled the first stroke of midnight, what had been a stationary sea of fire, began to move in its new orbit across the zodiacal plane.

A great sigh of relief from the millions of people gathered together below ascended towards heaven in a sound like the surge of angry breakers in a cave, and a few minutes afterwards there was a blaze of light in the heavens, and the *Regina*, with all her lights full on, and looking like a silver meteor, swooped down from the clouds and stood over Trafalgar Square. A rope ladder was let down, and Fraser was once more upon the earth. Immediately the vessel rose and ascended in the air for several thousand feet and then remained stationary, with all her searchlights on, turning the night over the whole of London into day.

So quickly had this been done, that in the blinding glare no one had seen Fraser alight, and all thought the vessel had merely come to earth and then shot back again; consequently, here was Fraser in the heart of London and no one the wiser. He mixed with the crowd, jostled and jostling, and

made his way to Printing House Square, and asked for Saxern, handing in his card.

It is strange that the right of entry to the presence of great personages should usually be in the hands of a youth, of that particular age when, finding brains are likely to develop, he thinks and feels that every one is a fool except himself, and so it rests with *him* and *his* discretion whether the applicant shall be admitted.

This specimen was no exception to the rule and refused to take up the card, but a hand on the back of his collar, and the bump of a knee where he usually sat down, made him think there might be some reason in the request, so he went forward, with the card in one hand, the other being engaged in administering warmth and comfort to a portion of his anatomy.

Saxern, cool as he was, lost all his calm, and in very undignified haste rushed forward to Fraser, shook him by the hands, and dragged him to his office; then telling

the astonished boy to clear out and keep the visitor's name to himself, he locked the door. For some moments the friends almost forgot themselves in the exuberance of their happy meeting, when Saxern said: "Be thankful, old man, that no one knows you are here! You have brought the most terrible disasters on us all; and were it known you were here, you would be mobbed and your life not worth a moment's purchase."

"Now what's the matter?" asked Fraser.

"Do you know that satellite of yours has run away with all the water in the seas and drawn it into mid-ocean? All the English and continental shores are dry, and probably the same all over the world. Anyway, you could walk across the Straits of Dover. The greater part of the British Navy, and thousands of other vessels, are hard and fast aground."

"Good gracious!" cried Fraser, "I have made another slight mistake. I made one

on the voyage, and this is evidently another. I had quite forgotten what an enormous tide this planet would create, apart from other damage it would do. His gravitating pull is equal to one thousand full moons. What a spring tide !”

Saxern replied: “It is no laughing matter, and you will find it is not.”

“It can soon be remedied,” remarked Fraser. “Where’s your telegraph ?”

The operator, not knowing he had landed, looked in amazement when Fraser sent a telegram to the *Regina* for it to swoop down in Hyde Park, near the Marble Arch, in one hour from then, finishing with “Fraser.”

Fraser made his way by cab as rapidly as the crowd would permit, Saxern going with him. The crowd was so dense, that at last the cab could not proceed, and the two friends had to alight and fight their way as hard as possible, as time was very pressing.

In the struggle to push through the crowd they became separated. Knowing it was hopeless to look about in such a crush for his friend, Fraser pushed on till he came to the Marble Arch. The gate was closed, so he climbed over the rails, and in a second was running as fast as he could to the rendezvous, only having a few minutes left. A policeman, seeing his undue haste, and thinking, from the manner of his entrance, he was a marauder who had been busy in the crowd passing along Oxford Street, came after him and unfortunately effected the capture.

Fraser told him who he was, but the arm of the law requested him to "tell that to the Marines."

Fraser replied that if he would let him go, he would be much pleased to do so, when the captor, with strange inconsistency, became angry, and commenced to drag Fraser back. During the struggle there came a swish and a blinding glare, and

there, about a hundred yards away, was the *Regina*, with a rope ladder hanging over the side.

With a wrench Fraser was free and did that hundred yards in record time. The policeman, with proverbial tenacity, gave chase ; he reached the bottom of the ladder when Fraser was nearly at the top, and held on like grim death. The air-ship was instantly sent upwards and the ladder hauled in, with the policeman hanging to it like a lobster on a string. The instant he felt something solid under his feet, he rushed to Fraser, and in a trice had presented him with a pair of handcuffs, and was evidently going to lock him up there and then ; but on going to the window, he was horrified to find himself in space, with a twinkling map of the length and breadth of London far below. Of course he insisted on being set down immediately, at which every one laughed.

“ I say ! ” cried Fraser ; “ when you have

recovered your senses, perhaps you will remove these bracelets."

Although the policeman was terrified, he refused to remove them and, in fact, turned very stupid and nasty. At last he became so insolent, that the men were anxious to give him a good trouncing and get the key from him, but that could not be thought of.

"Just show him a little experiment, Jervis, old man," said Fraser, pointing to the switch-board.

His hands and wrists were then insulated, and wires connected with the bracelets, and the policeman made to hold his hands under those of Fraser. Then the contact was made; the steel became de-atomized, and, like mercury, dropped in a running stream into the hands of the majesty of the law.

He looked anything but majestic at that moment, as he nearly fainted with fear. Fraser pointed to what looked like a pool of quicksilver, and said: "There are your

handcuffs, my man, you see a key was not necessary."

This was too much ; the poor man in his terror would have rushed outside and jumped overboard, had all not been secure. When this was not possible, he flung himself bodily at one of the windows, but nothing could break that glass, and he finally became calmer, although the sight of the planet so near to us nearly turned his brain, for by this time we had reached the new satellite, and the *Regina* was slowly drawing it away from the earth. This was continued for seven hours, when, giving it all the impetus possible, by turning on the full negative force, it was launched into space with terrific speed.

It continued to travel until it reached the orbit of Jupiter, whose gigantic mass—acting on the principle that might is right—seized upon it, and this planet is now added to the satellites of Jupiter and becomes its seventh moon.

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In spite of all this evidence to the contrary, when there is no further danger to fear, the astronomers discover this satellite, which, according to their calculations, must have been rotating round Jupiter for thousands of years.

CHAPTER XXVI

WAR AND PEACE

"Heat not a furnace for your foe, so hot
That it do singe yourself,"

SHAKESPEARE.

HAVING made Jupiter a handsome present of a seventh moon, we decided to return to earth and set our prisoner at liberty. Although he had been almost frightened into insanity, yet now the planet was gone he somewhat recovered his spirits, and made himself quite comfortable. He listened with patronizing indulgence to the stories of the men of where they had been ; but it was plain to see he believed nothing.

As we again approached the earth we communicated with Saxern. He was first informed that the planet had disappeared, which, of course, he knew already. Then

followed the message, "Police Constable Taikupp, No. C.W. 304, is all right ; says he wants you to tell his missis that he will not be home for dinner, as he is a matter of 300,000 miles away."

Saxern then wired us some startling news—that Fraser's solicitor had reported to him that there was a crowd of men staying in the town of Derwent, waiting to serve writs upon Fraser immediately he returned.

"What for? Get to know all about it."

Some hours after Saxern replied: "They are mostly from shipowners and traders, whose vessels were stranded by the waters leaving the British and continental shores, and are to be served on you as commander of the *Regina*. At present they total over nine millions sterling, and this amount is being rapidly added to."

This was anything but refreshing news, and we were at a loss what to do. There was little doubt but that the instant we

landed we should be arrested, and perhaps killed by the angry rabble, and yet we must land somewhere. It was impossible to stay up for ever.

Some suggested going back to Venus and settling down there ; but, delightful as that might be for a time, we could not live there ; and how could we replenish our stores? Truly we were in a terrible position.

We had thought that, seeing the planet had been taken away, every one would be satisfied, but instead of this they seemed really ungrateful, and it was quite evident there were few kindly feelings towards us.

We came to within a few miles of the earth, and floated over the Houses of Parliament. The news was telegraphed all over the country, and soon train-loads of writ-servers came from all parts of the country, particularly from Derwent. The news of our probable landing had spread, till visitors poured up to town in such numbers that accommodation could not be found for half

of them, and thousands had to sleep in the streets night after night.

At last Saxern wired that we must do something—either come down and be arrested, every one of us, or go to some other and more friendly planet. This gave us an idea, which we discussed and then determined to adopt.

Saxern was telegraphed : “Get the King and Parliament to grant every one of us an absolute indemnity, to protect all of us from legal proceedings of any kind. If not, we will leave the earth and go to some other world ; but if you drive us to this we will take your moon with us. We give you forty-eight hours to decide.”

This was anything but a *bon-bon* ; we had already shown what the *Regina* could do, and that it was no idle threat the people felt assured.

All in the United Kingdom, and many countries of the continent of Europe, joined in a petition to the King to grant our

request. All knew that the purifying of the shores and water depended on the inflowing and outflowing of the tides, and the stoppage of this action by the absence of the moon would be a universal disaster; stagnation and disease would then take possession of the world. Many parts of the world would become uninhabitable; the whole commerce of the British Isles would be destroyed, and the seas become a mighty cesspool. In hundreds of other ways this threat, if allowed to be carried out, would bring calamity on all.

So serious was this matter that Parliament held special sittings to debate, but the members would not be forced into such an unusual course, and a division resulted in a refusal. They then agreed to grant our request on the undertaking that the secrets were sold to the Government. This we refused, and insisted that we should be permitted to keep the secrets to ourselves, and that no pressure should be brought to

bear on us to make us reveal them against our wishes, which Parliament refused to consider.

The first evening the *Regina* was brought lower, and remained stationary just over Big Ben all through the night, sending blinding rays of light like a menace of evil.

Daylight came at last, but still no answer. Twenty-four hours had passed—thirty hours—forty hours passed—still nothing definite.

Then the people became frantic ; they flocked to the Houses of Parliament in a very aggressive manner. They poured into London from all parts of the country. The honourable members only represent the people, and here the whole country, and in fact the world, was in perfect unison. In one mighty, unanimous voice they demanded this indemnity, and demanded it in a way which admitted of no refusal, and the command was obeyed.

The matter was rushed through ; Saxern, as our representative, held the document,

and saw that all was in order, and that it contained an absolutely free pardon to every one on board the *Regina*, and also stated that no criminal or civil proceedings could be taken against any one of us for any act of omission or commission during the voyage and return.

Thus did we return to our native land, stepping off the dear vessel with free and easy minds. The policeman went to his expectant family, much relieved to get out, and pleased to hear the metallic jingle which came from the region of his trouser-pockets at each vigorous step. Fraser and I parted with our crew—our brave and splendid crew—each of them having the wherewithal to make them rich men, whilst we took the vessel to Derwent and placed it in its own shed.

All the mechanism of this great discovery of gravity-control was taken out, and nothing left except the mere shell of the vessel.

The air-ship was further guarded by a gigantic current of electricity, which was so arranged that any person coming within a few yards of it received a powerful shock, which would make any close approach impossible. It was also protected by a constant wave of de-atomizing current, which would melt a bullet, or any person or thing just before coming in actual contact.

Fraser and myself were the only persons who understood the connections of these wonderful electric forces, and, consequently, we were the only beings who could approach the ship with safety.

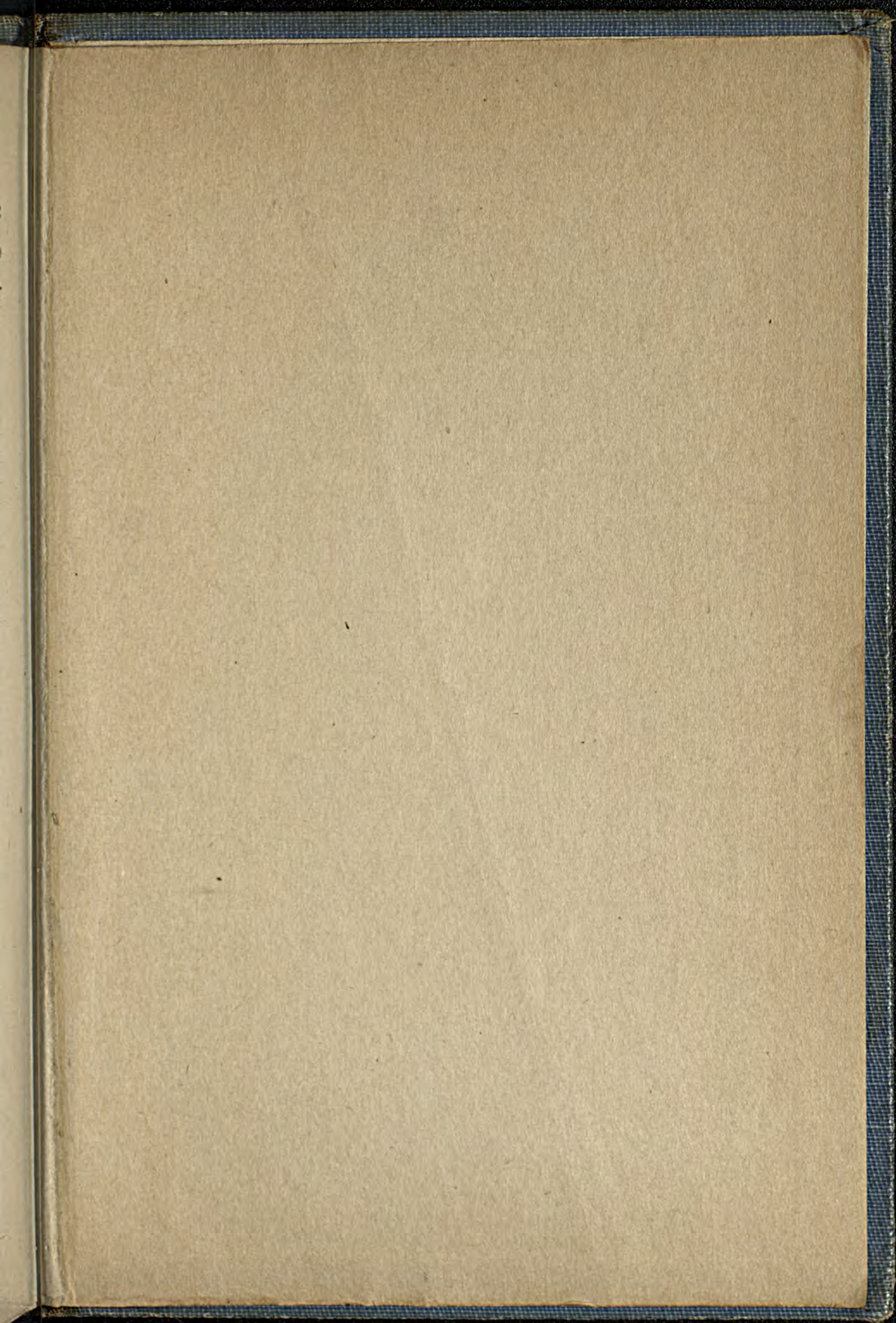
Feeling the great mental and physical strain which we had been undergoing during the last eighteen months to have been rather trying, we settled down in the quiet of our respective homes, but could not help planning another voyage in the heavens, the next time to go over a wider area.

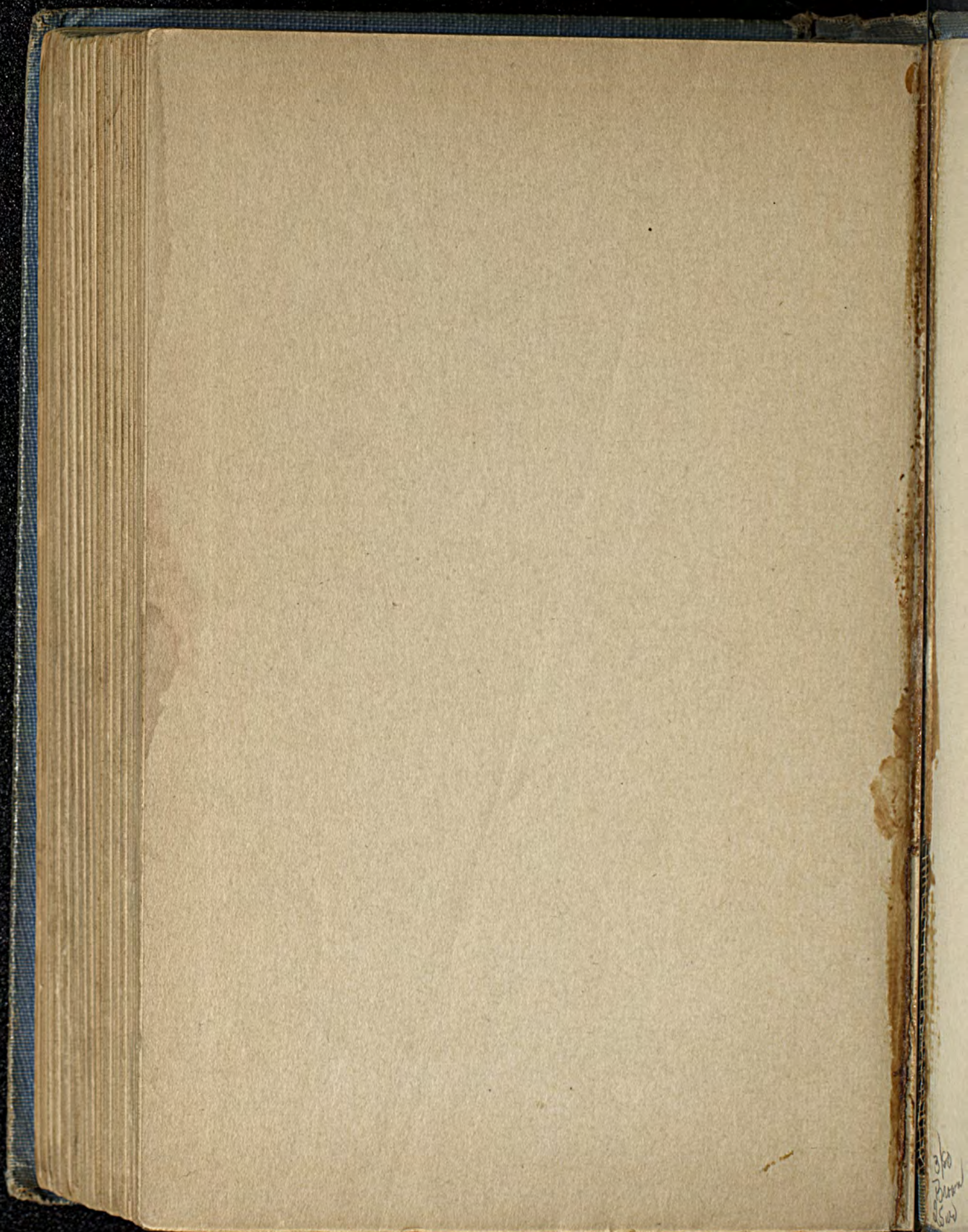
In conclusion, I can only compliment the reader on his perseverance, and refer him to the explanatory chapter as my reason for submitting this narrative.

“And what is writ is writ ;
Would it were worthier.”

BYRON.

THE END





aka
Brown
2500

