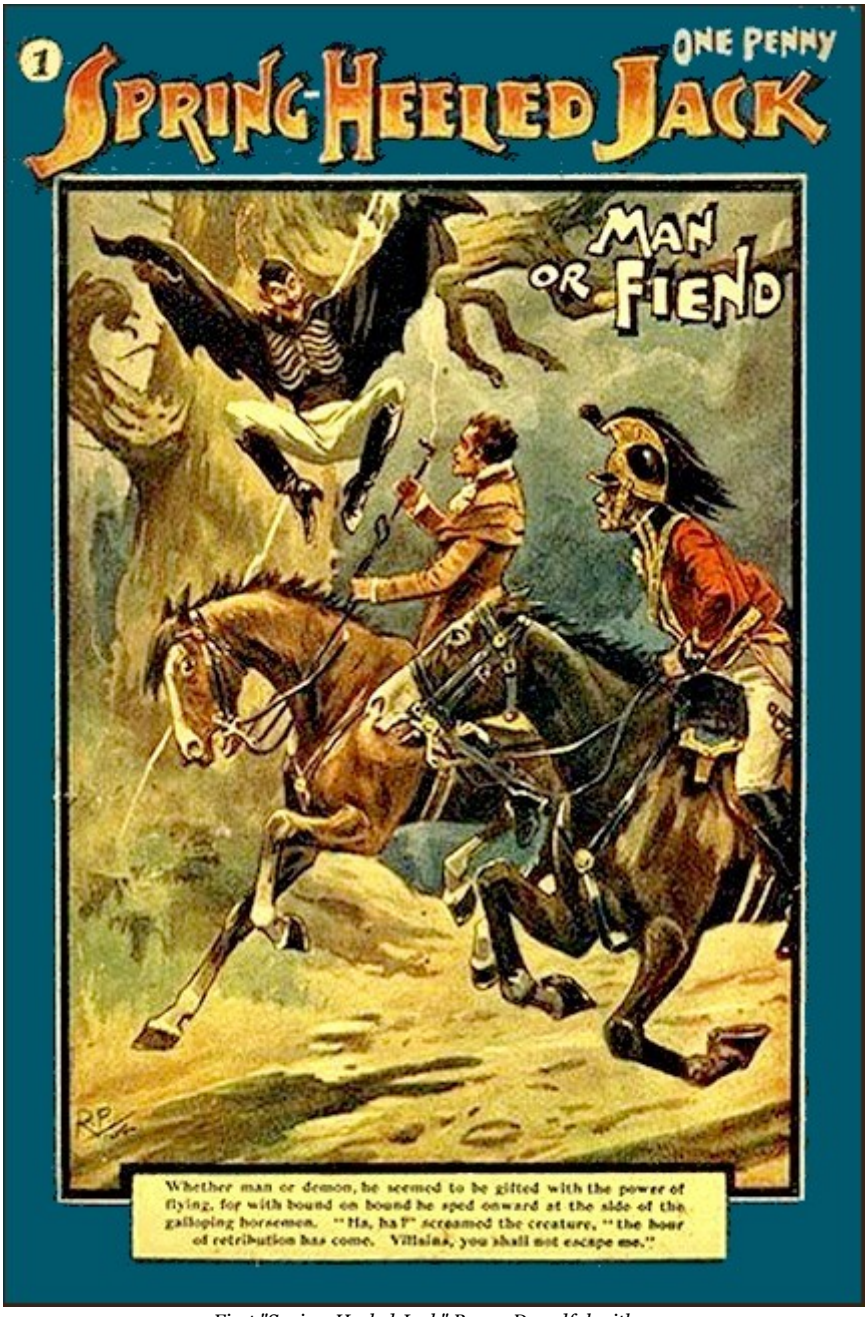
First published in *The Boy's Standard*, London, in the 1840's



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INTRODUCTORY

FROM "WIKIPEDIA"
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spring-heeled_Jack)

THERE are many theories about the nature and identity of Spring-Heeled Jack. This urban legend was very popular in its time, due to the tales of his bizarre appearance and ability to make extraordinary leaps, to the point that he became the topic of several works of fiction.

Spring-Heeled Jack was described by people who claimed to have seen him as having a terrifying and frightful appearance, with diabolical physiognomy, clawed hands, and eyes that "resembled red balls of fire". One report claimed that, beneath a black cloak, he wore a helmet and a tight-fitting white garment like an oilskin. Many stories also mention a "Devil-like" aspect. Others said he was tall and thin, with the appearance of a gentleman. Several reports mention that he could breathe out blue and white flames and that he wore sharp metallic claws at his fingertips. At least two people claimed that he was able to speak comprehensible English.

SPRING-HEELED JACK AND FICTION

FROM "THE COMPLETE SPRING HEELED JACK PAGE"
(https://web.archive.org/web/20160110133711/http://www.dionysos.org.uk/SHJ1.html)

NOT surprisingly Spring Heeled Jack caused a wave of panic to spread not only across 19th century London but the whole country, the result being that any odd occurrence was quickly attributed to him, and local traditional bogey men were often eclipsed or absorbed into the new stereotype. Such a figure was bound to capture the imagination of creative artists and from as early as the 1840's he would be adopted as the subject of various gothic horror plays, and the subject of those early graphic novels called *Penny Dreadfuls*.

This would in turn shape the subsequent public perception of Jack, and generations later ... it became quite hard to seperate the historical and fictional Jack within the cultural memory. But this was not just a secondary phenomena. As early as the initial attacks in Barnes the first Penny Dreadfuls were being published. At first consisting of popular gothic tales of murderers and highwaymen, by the time of the Spring-Heeled Jack scare was at its height they were publishing strange stories of ghosts, and even vampires, in short cliff hanger installments for a penny each. These were the cheapest publications on the market and all the rage among the enthralled populace. These undoubtedly played a role in the escalating panic and probably shaped the public perception of the phenomena. It is thus not surprising that Jack should in turn be absorbed into them. From the very beginning there was a dialectic between fiction and fact in the Spring Heeled Jack saga.

The first fictional account seems to have been as early as 1840, a play called *Spring-Heeled Jack, the Terror of London*, by John Thomas Haines, in which Jack is a dastardly villain who attacks women after he is jilted by his sweetheart. It was soon followed a few years later by the W.G. Willis play *The Curse of the Wraydons*, in which Jack is a traitor during the Napoleonic War who spies for Napoleon, and stages murderous stunts to deflect attention.

Later in the 1840s came the first Penny Dreadful to feature Jack, also entitled *Spring-Heeled Jack, the Terror of London* which appeared in weekly episodes and was written anonymously. It too made Jack a villain, and drew as much from the plays as it did reality. An earlier Penny Dreadful from 1843, *The Old Tar and the Vampire* had featured a mysterious fiend who leapt around the streets of the East End of London, and set at least one person alight with his pyromaniacal skills, but he was not overtly identified with Spring Heel Jack.

In 1863 another play, *Spring-Heel'd Jack: or, The Felon's Wrongs*, was written by Frederick Hazleton.

Between 1864 and 1867 *Spring-Heeled Jack, the Terror of London* was reissued in a rewritten version.

1878 saw the third Penny Dreadful, which appeared in 48 weekly instalments, probably written by George A. Sala or Alfred Burrage under the pseudonym of Charlton Lea. It kept the same title, but totally transformed the story. Jack is no villain in these stories; he uses his powers to right wrongs, and save the innocent from the wicked. Here he is in fact a nobleman by birth, cheated of his inheritance, and his amazing leaps are due to compressed springs in the heels of his boots. He is dressed in a skin-tight glossy red outfit, with bat's wings, a lion's mane, horns, talons, massive cloven hoofs, and a sulphurous breath, he makes spectacular leaps, easily jumping over rooftops or rivers, and is immensely strong.

In 1889 this version was reprinted, and in 1904 Charles Burrage's version was published.

Finally a remake of *The Curse of the Wraydons* was written in 1928 by surrealist Swiss author Maurice Sandoz, and later made into a film.

Jack has appeared in a variety of fictional media ever since, including an award-winning multi-part radio play, *The Strange Case of Spring Heel'd Jack*.

PART I

OUT of the enormous army of highwaymen, footpads, and housebreakers, who have made themselves famous or infamous in the annals of English crime, probably not one ever succeeded in gaining such a large amount of notoriety in so short a space of time as the subject of our present sketch, Spring-Heeled Jack.

This quickly acquired reputation was the result, probably, of the veil of mystery which shrouded the identity of the man who was known on all hands as the Terror of London.

It was at one time generally believed that Spring-Heeled Jack was no less a personage than the then Marquis of Waterford.

The 3rd Marquis of Waterford (1811-1859)

This, however, was distinctly proved not to be the case, although the manner of proving it does not redound to the noble marquis's credit.

That the Marquis of Waterford and Jack could not be identical is proved conclusively by the fact that the terrible apparition showed itself to many persons on the 4th, 5th, and 6th, of April, 1837.

At this time we find from an indictment which was tried at the Derby assizes on Aug. 31st, 1837, that the Marquis of Waterford, Sir F. Johnstone, Bart., the Hon. A. C. H. Villiers, and E. H. Reynard, Esq., were charged with having committed an assault on April 5th, 1837.

On that day it was proved that the defendants were at the Croxton Park Races, about five miles from Melton Mowbray.

The whole of the four had been dining out at Melton on the evening of that day, and about two in the morning of the following day the watchmen on duty, hearing a noise, proceeded to the market place, and near Lord Rosebery's place saw several gentlemen attempting to overturn a caravan, a man being inside at the time.

The watchmen eventually succeeded in preventing this.

The marquis immediately challenged one of them to fight.

That worthy, however, having heard something about the nobleman's proficiency in the "noble art," at once declined.

On this the four swells took their departure.

Subsequently the same watchmen heard a noise in the direction of the toll bar.

They proceeded there at once, when they found that the gatekeeper had been screwed up in his house, and had been for some time calling out—

"Murder! come and release me."

The watchmen released the toll-keeper and started in pursuit of the roysterers.

When the "Charlies," as the guardians of the peace were called in those days, came up with the marquis's party for the second time, the watchman who had declined the challenge to fight observed that one of the swells carried a pot of red paint while the other carried a paint brush.

The man who had by this time grown a little more valorous, managed to wrest the paint brush from the hand of the person who held it.

But his triumph was of short duration, the four swells surrounded him, threw him on his back, stripped him, and ten minutes later the unfortunate man was painted a bright red from head to foot.

They then continued their "lark," painting the doors and windows of different houses red.

Some time later or rather earlier, Mr. Reynard was captured and put in the lock up.

The marquis and his two remaining companions succeeded in making an entrance to the constable's room.

Once there they had little difficulty in forcing him to give up his keys.

Once having obtained possession of these they had little difficulty in releasing the prisoner.

This done they bore their living trophy back to their lodgings in state, and the little town resumed its normal condition of quiet repose.

The jury found the defendants (who were all identified as having taken part in the affray) guilty of a common assault, and they were sentenced to pay a fine of £100 each, and to be imprisoned until such fine was paid.

It is hardly necessary to add that the money was at once forthcoming.

So our readers will see that this disgraceful affair proves conclusively that the Marquis of Waterford and Spring-Heeled Jack had a separate existence, unless the marquis was gifted with the power of being in two places at once.

In the *Annual Register*, Feb. 20th, 1837, we find the following—

> "OUTRAGE ON A YOUNG LADY.—Frequent representations have of late been made to the Lord Mayor, of the alarm excited by a miscreant, who haunted the lanes and lonely places in the neighbourhood of the metropolis for the purpose of terrifying women and children."
>
> "For some time these statements were supposed to be greatly exaggerated."
>
> "However, the matter was put beyond a doubt by the following circumstance:—"
>
> "A Mr. Alsop, who resided in Bearbind-lane, a lonely spot between the villages of Bow and Old Ford, attended at Lambeth-street Office, with his three daughters, to state the particulars of an outrageous assault upon one of his daughters, by a fellow who goes by the name of the suburban ghost, or 'Spring-Heeled Jack.'"
>
> "Miss Jane Alsop, one of the young ladies, gave the following evidence:—"
>
> "About a quarter to nine o'clock on the preceding night she heard a violent ringing at the gate in front of the house; and on going to the door to see what was the matter, she saw a man standing outside, of whom she inquired what was the matter."
>
> "The person instantly replied that he was a policeman, and said, 'For Heaven's sake bring me a light, for we have caught Spring-Heeled Jack here in the lane.'"
>
> "She returned into the house and brought a candle and handed it to the person, who appeared enveloped in a large cloak."

"The instant she had done so, however, he threw off his outer garment, and applying the lighted candle to his breast, presented a most hideous and frightful appearance, and vomited forth a quantity of blue and white flame from his mouth, and his eyes resembled red balls of fire."

"From the hasty glance which her fright enabled her to get at his person, she observed that he wore a large helmet, and his dress, which appeared to fit him very tight, seemed to her to resemble white oilskin."

"Without uttering a sentence he darted at her, and catching her partly by her dress and the back part of her neck, placed her head under one of his arms, and commenced bearing her down with his claws, which she was certain were of some metallic substance."

"She screamed out as loud as she could for assistance, and by considerable exertion got away from him, and ran towards the house to get in."

"Her assailant, however, followed her, and caught her on the steps leading to the hall door, when he again used considerable violence, tore her neck and arms with his claws, as well as a quantity of hair from her head; but she was at length rescued from his grasp by one of her sisters."

"Miss Alsop added that she had suffered considerably all night from the shock she had sustained, and was then in extreme pain, both from the injury done to her arm, and the wounds and scratches inflicted by the miscreant on her shoulders and neck, with his claws or hands."

This story was fully confirmed by Mr. Alsop, and his other daughter said —

"That the fellow kept knocking and ringing at the gate after she had dragged her sister away from him, but scampered off when she shouted from an upper window for a policeman."

"He left his cloak behind him, which someone else picked up, and ran off with."

And again on Feb. 26th, of the same year, we find the following:—

"'THE GHOST, alias 'SPRING-HEELED JACK' AGAIN.—At Lambeth-street office, Mr. Scales, a respectable butcher, residing in Narrow-street, Limehouse, accompanied by his sister, a young woman eighteen years of age, made the following statement relative to the further gambols of Spring-Heeled Jack:—"

"Miss Scales stated that on the evening of Wednesday last, at about half-past eight o'clock, as she and her sister were returning from the house of their brother, and while passing along Green Dragon-alley, they observed some, person standing in an angle in the passage."

"She was in advance of her sister at the time, and just as she came up to the person, who was enveloped in a large cloak, he spurted a quantity of blue flame right in her face, which deprived her of her sight, and so alarmed her, that she instantly dropped to the ground, and was seized with violent fits, which continued for several hours."

> "Mr. Scales said that on the evening in question, in a few minutes after his sisters had left the house, he heard the loud screams of one of them, and on running up Green Dragon-alley he found his sister Lucy, who had just given her statement, on the ground in a fit, and his other sister endeavoring to hold and support her."
>
> "She was removed home, and he then learned from his other sister what had happened."
>
> "She described the person to be of tall, thin, and gentlemanly appearance, enveloped in a large cloak, and carried in front of his person a small lamp, or bull's eye, similar to those in possession of the police."
>
> "The individual did not utter a word, nor did he attempt to lay hands on them, but walked away in an instant."
>
> "Every effort was subsequently made by the police to discover the author of these and similar outrages, and several persons were taken up and underwent lengthened examinations, but were finally set at liberty, nothing being elicited to fix the offence upon them."

Articles and paragraphs of this nature were of almost daily occurrence at this period, and the public excitement rose to such a pitch that "Vigilance Committees" were formed in various parts of London to try and put a stop to the Terror's pranks and depredations, even if they could not succeed in securing his apprehension. There could be no possible doubt that there was very little exaggeration in the extraordinary statements as to Spring-Heeled Jack's antics.

A bet of two hundred pounds, which became the talk of the clubs and coffee-houses, did more to add to Jack's reputation for supernatural powers than all the talk of mail-coach guards, market people, and servant girls.

A party of gentlemen were travelling by the then newly-opened London and North-Western Railway.

As they neared the northern end of the Primrose Hill tunnel they observed the figure of Jack sitting on a post, looking exactly as his Satanic Majesty is usually represented in picture books or on the stage.

"By Jove! there's Spring-Heeled Jack," cried Colonel Fortescue, one of the travellers.

"Yes," cried Major Howard, one of his companions, "and I'll bet you two hundred pounds even that he's at the other end of the tunnel when we arrive there."

"Done!" cried the colonel.

And sure enough as the train emerged once more into the open air there was Spring-Heeled Jack at the side of the line, his long moustaches twirled up the sides of his prominent nose, and stream of sulphurous flame seeming to pour out from between his lips.

Another instant and he had disappeared.

The whole party in the train were almost paralysed for a time, although most of them had "set their squadron in the field," and hardly knew what fear meant.

Colonel Fortescue handed the major the two hundred pounds, and the affair became a nine-days' wonder.

The solution was, no doubt, simple enough.

Spring-Heeled Jack had sprung on to the moving train at the rear, and during its passage through the tunnel had made his way to the front, and then, with a bound, had made his appearance in front of the advancing train.

Be this as it may, the unimpeachable evidence of men of position, like the gallant officers, backed up, as it was, by the payment and receipt of the two hundred pounds, brought Jack with a bound, like one from his own spring heels, to the utmost pinnacle of notorious fame.

We have no particulars of the exact mechanism that enabled Spring-heeled Jack to make such extraordinary bounds.

To jump clear over a stage coach, with its usual complement of passengers on top, was as easy to him as stepping across a gutter would be to any ordinary man.

The secret of these boots had died with the inventor, and perhaps it is as well.

We have no doubt that if those boots were purchasable articles many of our readers would be tempted to leave off taking in *The Boy's Standard*, so as to be able to save up more pennies towards the purchase of a pair.

Fancy, if you can, what would be the consequence of a small army of Spring-heels in every district.

To return, however, to our hero.

His dress was most striking.

It consisted of a tight-fitting garment, which covered him from his neck to his feet.

This garment was of a blood-red colour.

One foot was encased in a high-heeled, pointed shoe, while the other was hidden in a peculiar affair, something like a cow's hoof, in imitation, no doubt, of the "cloven hoof" of Satan. It was generally supposed that the "springing" mechanism was contained in that hoof.

He wore a very small black cap on his head, in which was fastened one bright crimson feather.

The upper part of his face was covered with black domino.

When not in action the whole was concealed by an enormous black cloak, with one hood, and which literally covered him from head to foot.

He did not always confine himself to this dress though, for sometimes he would place the head of an animal, constructed out of paper and plaster, over his own, and make changes in his attire.

Still, the above was his favourite costume, and our readers may imagine it was a most effective one for Jack's purpose.

These are almost all the published facts about this extraordinary man.

But we have been favoured by the descendants of Spring-Heeled Jack with the perusal of his "Journal" or "Confessions," call it which you will.

The only condition imposed upon us in return for this very great favour is that we shall conceal the real name of the hero of this truly extraordinary story.

The reason for this secresy is obvious.

The descendants of Spring-Heeled Jack are at the present time large landed proprietors in South of England, and although had it not been for our hero's exploits they would not at the present time be occupying that position, still one can hardly wonder at their not wishing the real name of Spring-Heeled Jack to become known.

As it will, however, be necessary for the proper unravelling of our story that some name should be used we will bestow upon our hero the name of Dacre.

Jack Dacre was the son of a baronet whose creation went back as far back as 1619.

Jack's father had been a younger son, and, as was frequently the case in those days, he had been sent out to India to see what he could do for himself.

This was rendered necessary by the fact that I although the Dacres possessed a considerable amount of land the whole of it was strictly entailed.

This fact was added to the perhaps more important one that each individual Dacre in possession of the title and estates seemed to consider that it was his duty to live close up to his income, and to give his younger sons nothing to start in life with, save a good education.

That is to say, the younger sons had the run of the house.

They were taught to shoot by the keepers; to ride by the grooms; to throw a fly, perhaps, by the gardener; and to pick up what little "book-learning" they could.

Not altogether a bad education, perhaps, in those days when fortunes could be made in India by any who had fair connections, plenty of pluck, and plenty of industry.

Jack's father was early told that he could expect no money out of the estate, and he was also informed that he could choose his own path in life.

This did not take him long.

Sidney Dacre was a plucky young fellow, and thought that India would afford the widest scope for his talents, which were not of the most brilliant order, as may be expected from his early training.

To India he therefore went, and managed to shake the "pagoda tree" to a pretty fair extent.

In 1837 he thought he was justified in taking to himself a wife, and of this union Jack, who was born in the year of Waterloo, was the only result.

Fifteen years later Sidney Dacre received the intelligence that his father and his two brothers had perished in a storm near Bantry Bay, where they had gone to assist as volunteers in repelling a supposed French invading party which it was anticipated would attempt to effect a landing there.

This untimely death of his three relatives left Sidney Dacre the heir to the baronetcy and estates; and although he had plantation after plantation in the Presidencies, he made up his mind that he would at once return to the old country.

He therefore placed his Indian plantations in the hands of one Alfred Morgan, a clerk, in whom he had always placed implicit confidence.

This man, by the way, had been the sole witness to his marriage with Jack's mother.

A month later, and Sir Sidney and Lady Dacre, with their son, set sail in the good ship *Hydaspes* on their way to England.

Nothing of any importance occurred on the voyage, and the *Hydaspes* was within sight of the white cliffs of old Albion when a storm came on, and almost within gunshot of home the brave old ship which had weathered many a storm went to pieces.

All that were saved out of passengers and crew were two souls.

One, our hero Jack Dacre, afterwards to become the notorious Spring-Heeled Jack; the other, a common sailor, Ned Chump, a man who is destined to play a not unimportant part in this history, even if the part he had already played did not entitle him to mention in our columns.

And when we tell our readers that had it not been for the friendly office of Ned Chump our hero must inevitably have perished with the rest, we think they will agree that they owe the jolly sailor a certain amount of gratitude.

Ned Chump had taken very great interest in our hero on the voyage home.

Jack was such a handsome, bright-looking lad, that everyone seemed to take to him at first sight.

Ned's devotion to him more resembled that of a faithful mastiff to his master than any other simile that we can call to mind.

When Ned saw that the fate of the *Hydaspes* was inevitable he made up his mind that Master Jack and he should be saved if there was any possibility of such a thing.

The jolly tar bound Jack Dacre fast to a hen coop, and then attached his belt to it with a leather thong.

This done Ned threw the lad, the coop, and himself into the sea, and beating out bravely managed to get clear of the ship as she went down head first.

Had he not have done this they must inevitably have been drawn into the vortex caused by the sinking ship.

Fortunately for both of them Jack had become unconscious, or it is not likely that he would have deserted his father and mother, even at this critical juncture.

However, the *Hydaspes* and all on board, including Sir Sidney and Lady Dacre, had gone to the bottom of the sea ere Jack recovered consciousness and found himself on the shore of Kent, with his faithful companion in adversity bending over him with loving care.

As soon as Jack Dacre was sufficiently recovered, Ned proceeded to "take his bearings" as he expressed it, and knowing that Jack's ancestral home was somewhere in the county of Sussex, he suggested that they should move in a westerly direction until they should find some native of the soil who could inform them of the locality they were in.

They found upon inquiry that they had been cast ashore at a little village called Worth, in the neighbourhood of Sandwich, and that the good ship *Hydaspes* had fallen a victim to the insatiable voracity of the Goodwin Sands.

Shipwrecked mariners are always well treated in England, the old stories of wreckers and their doings notwithstanding, and Jack Dacre and the trusty Ned Chump had little difficulty in making their way to Dacre Hall in Sussex, though neither had sixpence in his pocket, so sudden had their departure from the wrecked ship been.

When Jack arrived at the home of his forefathers he found one Michael Dacre, who informed our hero that he was his father's first cousin, in possession.

"Yes, my lad," went on Michael Dacre, in a particularly unpleasant manner, "Sir Sidney's cousin; and failing his lawful issue I am the heir to Dacre Hall and the baronetcy."

"Failing his lawful issue!" cried Jack, with all the impetuosity of youth. "Am I not my father's only son, and therefore heir to the family honours and estates?"

"Softly, young man—softly," cringed Michael, "I do not want to anger you. Of course you have the proof with you that your father and mother were married, and that you are the issue of that union?"

"Proof!" cried Jack, fairly losing his temper. "Do you think one swims ashore from a doomed ship with his family archives tied round his waist?"

"There—there, my boy," said the wily Michael, "don't lose your temper; for you must see that it would have been better for you if you had have taken the precaution to have brought the papers with you."

"But," said Jack, quite non-plussed by his cousin's coolness, "Ned Chump, here, knows who I am, and that everything is straight and above board."

"Yes, yes, my boy," replied Michael; "and pray how long has Mr. Chump, as I think you call him, known you? Was he present at your father's marriage? I do not suppose he was present at your birth," and Michael Dacre concluded his speech with a quiet but diabolical chuckle.

"I have known him ever since the day we left India—" began the lad.

But Michael interrupted him by saying, in a somewhat harsher tone than he had used before—

"That is equal to not knowing you at all. I am an acknowledged Dacre, and until you can prove your right to that name I shall remain in possession of Dacre Hall; for the honour of my family I could not do otherwise."

"But what am I? Where am I to go? What am I to do?" stammered Jack.

Meanwhile, Ned Chump looked on with kindling eyes, and a fierce light in his face that boded ill for Michael Dacre should it come to blows between them.

Michael caught the look, and felt that perhaps it would be better to temporise, he therefore said—

"Oh! Dacre Hall is large enough for us all. While I am making the necessary enquiries in India, you and this common sailor here can knock about the place. It will, perhaps, be quite as well that I have you under my eye, so that if you turn out to be an impostor you may be punished as you deserve."

After a short consultation, Jack and Ned Chump made up their mind that it would be best to accept the churlish offer.

"After all," said Ned, "you know that you are the rightful heir. And when the proofs come over from India you will easily be able to claim your own."

"Yes, Ned, I suppose we had better remain on the spot."

"Of course we had," said Ned. "There is only one thing against it, and that is that if I ever saw murder in anyone's eye it was in your cousin's just now. But never mind, lad, we'll stick together, and we shall circumvent the old villain, never you fear."

So it was arranged, and Ned Chump and Jack Dacre soon seemed to have become part and parcel of the establishment at Dacre Hall.

The sailor's ready ingenuity and willingness to oblige made him rapidly a great favourite among the servants and employés generally, while Jack's sunny face, and flow of anecdote about the strange places he had been in and the strange sights he had seen, rendered him a decided acquisition to what was, under the circumstances, a somewhat sombre household.

So time passed on, and the first reply was received from India.

This reply came from Alfred Morgan, the late Sir Sidney's trusted representative.

This letter destroyed in an instant any hope, if such ever existed, in Michael Dacre's breast that Jack might be an impostor.

But there was one gleam of hope in the cautiously-worded postscript to the letter.

"Do not mention this to anyone. I am on my way to England, and I may identify the boy and produce the necessary papers—or I may not. It will depend a great deal upon the first interview I have with you; and that interview must take place before I see the boy."

"What did this mean?" thought Michael Dacre. "Did it mean that here was a tool ready to his hand, who would swear away his cousin's birthright?"

Time alone would show.

Then again the improbability of such a thing occurring would sweep over him with tenfold force, and he decided to take time by the fore-lock and remove Jack from his path.

Michael Dacre had not the pluck to do this fell deed himself, but he had more than one tool at hand who would fulfil his foul bidding for a price.

The man he chose on this occasion was one Black Ralph, a ruffian who had been everything by turns, but nothing long.

He was strongly suspected of obtaining his living at the time of which we are writing by poaching, but nothing had ever been proved against him.

In the days when Jack's grandfather had been alive, Michael Dacre, who acted as steward and agent on the estate, always pooh-poohed any suggestion of the kind, and sent the complaining gamekeepers away, literally "with a flea in their ears."

The arrangement was soon made between Michael Dacre and Black Ralph.

The former was to admit the latter to the house, and he was to ransack the plate pantry, taking sufficient to repay him for his trouble.

He was then to pass to Jack's bedroom, which Michael pointed out, and to settle him at once.

He was then to proceed to Newhaven, where a lugger was to be in waiting, and so make his way with his booty over to France.

This the cousin thought would make all secure.

But he had reckoned without his host.

Or shall we say his guest, as it was in that light that he regarded the real Sir John Dacre?

The lad was a light sleeper, and on the night planned for the attack he became aware of the presence of Black Ralph in his chamber almost as soon as the would-be assassin had entered it.

Brave though Jack was, he felt a thrill of terror run through him as he thought of his utterly helpless condition, for Ned Chump had been sent on some cunningly-contrived errand to keep him out of the way, and he had not yet returned.

That murder was the object of the midnight intruder Jack Dacre never doubted.

There was but one way out of it, and that was to rush up into the bell tower which communicated with a staircase abutting on his chamber.

Once here he could ring the bell, if he could only keep his assailant at bay.

At the worst, he could but jump into the moat below, and stand a chance of saving his life.

In an instant he had left his bed, and dashed for the door.

But the assassin was upon him.

Jack just managed to bound up the stairs, and enter the tower.

Ere he could seize the bell-rope he felt Black Ralph's hot breath upon his neck. In an instant the lad had sprang upon the parapet. Then an instant later he was speeding on his way to the moat below, having made the terrible leap with a grace and daring which he never afterwards eclipsed, even when assisted by the mechanical appliances which he used in the adventures we are about to describe in his assumed character of Spring-Heeled Jack.

Our hero suffered nothing from his perilous jump worse than a ducking.

And it is very probable that this did him more good than harm, as it served to restore his somewhat scattered thoughts.

By the time Jack Dacre had managed to clamber out of the moat, Black Ralph had put a considerable distance between himself and Dacre Hall.

He had got his share of the booty, and whether Master Jack survived the fall or not mattered little to him.

He could rely upon Michael Dacre's promise that the lugger should be waiting for him at Newhaven, and once in France he could soon find a melting-pot for his treasure, and live, for a time at least, a life of riotous extravagance.

When Jack reached the house he found the hall door open, and without fear he entered; bent upon going straight to his cousin's room and informing him of what had happened.

Before he could reach the corridor which contained the state bedroom in which Michael Dacre had ensconced himself, Jack heard a low—

"Hist!"

He turned round and saw Ned Chump beckoning to him and pointing to the flight of stairs that led to their common chamber, and from thence to the bell tower.

Our hero having perfect confidence in his sailor friend obeyed the signal.

When the two were safely seated in their bedroom, Ned said, eagerly—

"Tell me, boy, what has happened?"

In a very few words Jack told him.

"My eye!" ejaculated Ned with a low whistle, "that was a jump indeed."

Then he continued—

"But who was your assailant? Could you not see his face?"

"No; it was too dark," replied Jack; "but there was a something about his figure that seemed familiar to me."

"Yes, lad, there was," said honest Ned Chump. "I met the ruffian but now, making the best of his way to Newhaven, no doubt."

"Who was it?" asked the lad.

"Why that poaching scoundrel, Black Ralph," answered Ned; "and you may depend upon it that your worthy cousin has laid this plant to kill you, and so prevent any chance of a bother about the property."

"What had I better do?" asked Jack. "I will act entirely under your advice."

"Well, my boy," said Ned, "take no notice; let matters take their course. We are sure to find out something or other in the morning."

And the two firm friends carefully fastened their door and turned in to rest.

In the morning the alarm of the robbery was given, but neither Jack nor Ned uttered one word to indicate that they knew aught about it.

"How did you get in?" asked Michael Dacre, roughly, as he turned towards Chump.

The would-be baronet's rage at the appearance of Jack Dacre unharmed, although his plate-chest (as he chose to consider it) had been ransacked, knew no bounds.

But Ned had his answer ready.

"I thought the door was left open for me, sir," he said, "so I simply entered and bolted the door behind me, and made my way up to bed."

"This is indeed a mysterious affair," said Michael Dacre, "but I have reasons of my own for not letting the officers of justice know about this affair. I have my suspicions as to who the guilty party is, and I think, if all is kept quiet, I can see my way to recovering my lost plate."

"Your lost plate!" said Jack, contemptuously. "Say, rather, my lost plate."

"I thought that subject was to be tabooed between us until Mr. Morgan arrives with the proofs of your identity, or imposture, as the case may be."

"Very well, sir," replied Jack; "so be it. But I cannot help thinking that Mr. Morgan ought to have arrived long before this."

However, in due course the long-looked for one arrived.

But instead of coming straight on to Dacre Hall, as one would have expected a trustworthy agent to have done, he took up his quarters at the Dacre Arms, and sent word to Michael Dacre that Mr. Alfred wanted to see hint on important business.

The message, of course, was a written one, as the people belonging to the inn would have thought it strange had an unknown man sent such a message to one so powerful as Michael Dacre was now making himself out to be.

In an hour's time the two men were seated over a bottle of brandy, discussing the position of affairs.

"And if I prove to the law's satisfaction—never mind about yours, for you know the truth—that the boy is illegitimate, what is to be my share?"

"A thousand pounds," said Michael.

"A thousand fiddlesticks," replied Morgan, grinding his teeth. "Without my aid you are a penniless beggar, kicked out of Dacre Hall; and with no profession to turn your hands to. Make it worth my while, and what are you? Why Sir Michael Dacre, the owner of this fine estate, and one of the

most powerful landowners in this part of the county of Sussex. A thousand pounds—bah!"

The would-be owner of Dacre Hall looked aghast at Morgan's vehemence, and with an imploring gesture he placed his finger on his lip and pointed at the door.

Then under his breath he muttered—

"Five thousand, then?"

"No, not five thousand, nor yet ten thousand," said Morgan.

"Now look you here, Mr. Michael Dacre," he went on with a strong emphasis upon the prefix.

"Now look here—my only terms are these: You to take the Dacre estates in England, and I to have the Indian plantations. That's my ultimatum. Answer, 'yes' or 'no.'"

For an instant Michael Dacre hesitated, but he saw no hope in the cold grey eye of Alfred Morgan, and at last consented.

The two now separated, but met again the following day, when the necessary agreements were signed, and Mr. Alfred retired to Brighton to make his appearance two days later as Mr. Alfred Morgan, the Indian representative of the late Sir Sidney Dacre.

"My poor boy," he said, sympathetically, when he first met our hero. "My poor boy, this is a terrible blow for you."

"What do you mean?" asked Jack; "it was a terrible blow to me when my father and my mother went down in the *Hydaspes*—but Time, the great Healer, has softened that blow so that I should hardly feel it now, were it not for the doubts that my cousin here has cast upon my identity."

"Ah! of your identity there can be no doubt, poor boy," sighed Alfred Morgan; "and that's where lies the pity of it."

"How do you mean?" cried Jack, an angry flush mantling his handsome features.

"How do mean, poor boy?" went on the merciless scoundrel. "Why, the pity of it is that, although I know so well that you are the son of your father and mother, the law refuses to recognise you as such."

"And why?" yelled Jack, with a sudden and overwhelming outburst of fury.

"Because," meekly replied the villain, "your father and mother were never married."

"But," cried Jack, thoroughly taken aback by this assertion, "you were the witness to the marriage. I have heard my father say so scores of times."

"Aye, my poor lad; but your mother had a husband living at the time," and Mr. Alfred handed a bundle of papers to the family solicitor, who had not yet spoken, the whole conversation having taken place between Jack and Mr. Alfred Morgan.

A silence like that of the tomb fell upon the fell upon the occupants of the room as the lawyer examined the papers.

Ten minutes or a quarter of an hour passed, then, with a sigh, the kind-hearted solicitor turned to Jack and said, with tears in his—

"Alas, my lad; it is too true; you have no right to the name of Dacre."

Without a word Jack caught hold of Ned's hand, and, turning to his cousin, said, in a voice of thunder—

"There is some villainy here, which, please Heaven, I will yet unravel. Once already you have tried to murder my body, now you are trying to murder my mother's reputation; but as I escaped from the first plot by a clean pair of heels and a good spring from the bell tower, so on occasion I feel that I shall eventually conquer. Come, Ned, we will leave this, and make our plans for the future."

"Aye, Master Spring-Heels, make yourself scarce, or I will have you lashed and kicked from the door, you wretched impostor!"

"Yes, cousin, I will go," answered Jack, impressively; "and I will accept the name you have given me, as you say I have no right to any other. But, beware! false Sir Michael Dacre, the time will come, and that ere long, when the tortures of the damned shall be implanted in your heart by me—the wretched, despised outcast whom you have christened Spring-Heeled-Jack!"

PART II

AS our hero uttered these words Michael Dacre's cheek paled visibly.

And indeed there was good cause for his apparent fear.

Jack Dacre had thrown such an amount of expression into his words and gestures as seemed to render them truly prophetic.

At this moment Mr. Reece, the solicitor, advanced towards Jack and, holding out a well filled purse to him, said—

"Take this, my lad; it shall never be said that Sam Reece allowed the son of his old playmate, Sid Dacre, to be turned out of house and home without a penny in his pocket, legitimate or not."

Jack, responding to a nudge from Ned Chump, took the purse and said—

"Thank you, sir, for your kindness. That there is some villainy afloat I am convinced, but whether I eventually succeed in proving my claim or not this money shall be faithfully returned. Once more, thank you, sir, and good-bye."

With this Jack and Ned left the room. As soon as they had taken their departure the "baronet," as we must style him for a time, recovered his self-possession to a certain extent.

Turning to the solicitor, he said—

"How much was there in that purse, Mr. Reece? Of course I cannot allow you to lose your money over the unfortunate whelp."

The lawyer, who, although the documentary evidence was so plain, could not help thinking with Jack Dacre that some villainy was afloat, answered the baronet very shortly.

"What I gave the lad, I gave him out of pure good feeling, I want no repayment from anyone. And, mark my words, Sir Michael Dacre, that boy will return my loan sooner or later, and if there is anything wrong about these papers I feel assured that he will carry out his threat with regard to yourself."

"What do you mean, insolent—" cried the baronet.

But ere he could finish the sentence, Mr. Reece calmly said—

"You do not suppose that the matter will drop here? The poor lad has no friends, and I was stupid in not having detained him when he proposed to leave this house. However, I missed that opportunity of questioning him as to his life in India, and the relations that existed between his father and his mother. One thing is certain, however, and that is he will appear here again."

"Well, and if he does!" asked the angry baronet.

"Well, and if he does he will find a firm friend in Sam Reece," answered the lawyer. "I shall retain these papers—not by virtue of any legal right that I can claim to possess. So, if you want them, you have only to apply to the courts of law to recover possession of them."

"Then you shall do no more business for me," cried Michael Dacre.

"I should have thought," replied the solicitor, "that my few words had effectually severed all business relations between us. As it appears that you do not take this view, allow me to say that all the gold in the Indies would not tempt me to act as your legal adviser for another hour. A man who can behave to an unfortunate boy-cousin in the manner you have behaved to Jack Dacre, legitimate or not, can hold no business communications with Sam Reece."

"But how about my papers?" quoth the now half-frightened baronet.

"I will send you your bill, and on receipt of a cheque for my costs I will return you all the papers of yours that I hold—save and except, mark you, those relating to the marriage of the late baronet and the birth and baptism of his son."

The new baronet looked at his ally, Mr. Alfred Morgan, but saw very little that was consoling in that worthy man's face.

He therefore accepted the position, and with as haughty a bow as he could possibly make under the circumstances, he allowed Mr. Reece to take his departure.

By this time Jack Dacre and Ned Chump were more than a mile away from the hall.

Ned, although far more experienced in the ways of the world than Jack Dacre, tacitly allowed the latter to take the lead of the "expedition," if such a word may be used.

Jack, boy as he was, was in no way deficient in common sense, so perhaps Ned was justified in accepting the youngster as his leader.

For some miles not a word escaped Jack Dacre's lips.

At last they arrived at the old-fashioned town of Arundel, and here Jack suddenly turned to his companion, and said—

"We'll stop here and rest, and think over what will be our best course to pursue."

"All serene, skipper," answered Ned, "I am quite content."

Jack gave a melancholy smile as he replied to the sailor's salutation—

"Oh! then you don't object to calling me your skipper, although you have heard that I am base born, and have no right to bear any name at all."

"Never fear, Master Jack—or Sir John, perhaps, I ought to say—there is some rascality at work, and I believe that that Mr. Alfred Morgan is at the

bottom of it. But we shall circumvent the villains, I am sure, never fear."

"Yes," replied Jack, "I think we shall."

"Ah!" said Ned, "but how?"

"I have not been idle during our long walk," said Jack, as the two entered the hospitable portals of the Bridge House Hotel.

"I have not been idle, and if we can get a private room we will talk the matter over, and see how much money the good lawyer was kind enough to give us."

"To give you, you mean," said Chump, with a chuckle. "It's precious little he'd have given me, I reckon."

They managed to obtain a private room, and over a plain but substantial repast they counted the contents of the lawyer's purse.

To the intense surprise of both, and to the extreme delight of Ned Chump, it was found to contain very little short of fifty guineas.

The sailor had never in the whole of his life had a chance of sharing in such a prize as this.

With Jack, of course, the thing was different.

In India he had been accustomed to see money thrown about by lavish hands.

Between the ideas of Ned Chump, the common sailor, and those of the son of the rich planter, there could hardly be anything in common as far as regarded the appreciation of wealth.

But, nevertheless, the friendship that had sprung up between them in so short a time, never faded until death, the great divider, stepped in and made all human friendship impossible.

As soon as Jack had satisfied himself as to the actual strength of their available capital, he turned to Ned Chump and said—

"This money will not last long, and I do not see how I can do anything in the way of working for a living, if I am ever to hope to prove my title to the Dacre baronetcy and estates."

"That's as it may be, skipper," said Ned, "but I don't quite see how we are to live without work when this here fifty pounds has gone."

"That's just the point I have been thinking over," said Jack. "I am not yet sixteen, but, thanks to my Oriental birth, I look more like twenty."

"That you do, skipper," chimed in Ned.

"Well, then, I'll tell you what I intend to do."

"Go on, sir," cried the anxious sailor.

"Some year or two ago I had for a tutor an old Moonshee, who had formerly been connected with a troop of conjurors—and you must have heard how clever the Indian conjurors are."

"Yes," replied Ned, "and I have seen for myself as well."

"Then," said Jack, "you will not be surprised at what I am going to tell you."

"Perhaps not, skipper—fire away," said Ned.

"Well, this Moonshee taught me the mechanism of a boot which one member of his band had constructed, and which boot enabled him to spring fifteen or twenty feet up in the air, and from thirty to forty feet in a horizontal direction."

"Lor!" was the only exclamation that the open-mouthed and open-eared sailor could make use of.

"Yes," continued our hero, "and I intend to invest a portion of this money in making a boot like it."

"Yes; but," stammered the half-bewildered sailor—"but when you have made it, of what use will it be to us, or, rather, how will it enable you to regain your rights?"

"I have formed my plan," answered Jack, "and it is this. I'll make the boot, and then startle the world with a novel highwayman. My cousin twitted me about my spring into the moat and my nimble heels. I'll hunt him down and keep him in a perpetual state of deadly torment, under the style and title of Spring-Heeled Jack."

"But," asked the sailor, "you will not turn thief?"

"I shall not call myself a thief," said Jack, proudly. "The world may dub me so if it likes. I shall take little but what belongs to me, I shall confine my depredations as much as possible to assisting my cousin in collecting my rents."

"Oh! I see," said Ned, only half-convinced.

The faithful tar had the sailor's natural respect for honesty, and did not quite like his "skipper's" plan for securing a livelihood.

But Jack, who had been brought up under the shadow of the East India Company, had not many scruples as to the course of life he had resolved to adopt.

To him pillage and robbery seemed to be the right of the well-born.

He had seen so much of this sort of thing amongst his father's friends and acquaintances that his moral sense was entirely warped.

So speciously did he put forth his arguments that Ned at last yielded.

The sailor simply stipulated that he should take no active part in any robbery.

For the faithful salt could find no other term for the operation.

To this Jack readily consented, and a compact was entered into between them as to what each was expected to do.

Ned promised faithfully to do all he could to assist his master in escaping, should he at any time be in danger of arrest.

Jack, on his part, promising Ned Chump a fair share of the plunder gained by Spring-Heeled Jack.

This arrangement entered into, the next thing was to make the spring boot.

Jack, who was possessed with an intelligence as well as physique far beyond his years, suggested that they should make their way to Southampton.

There, he argued, they could procure all they wanted without exciting suspicion.

Ned, of course, had no hesitation in falling in with this proposal.

A fortnight later and the boot was completed.

Completed, that is, so far as the actual manufacture was concerned.

Whether it would act or not remained to be seen.

To have tried its power in any ordinary house would have been absurdly ridiculous.

There was no place where it would be safe to make the trial spring save in the open air.

Jack had manufactured the boot strictly according to the old Moonshee's directions, but he could not tell to what length the mechanism might hurl him, and he was a great deal too sensible to attempt to ascertain the extent of its power in any enclosed space.

So one morning, Ned and Jack started off from the inn where they were staying, for a ramble in the country, taking the magic boot with them.

Ned had by this time managed to allay his scruples and went into the affair with as much spirit as did Jack himself.

In due course they reached a spot which Jack pronounced to be a suitable one for the important trial.

The spot was an old quarry, or rather chalk pit, where at one spot the soil had only been removed for a depth of about twelve feet.

Descending this pit Jack placed the boot on his foot.

Ned looked on in the utmost wonderment.

He could hardly conceive that it was possible such a simple contrivance should possess such magical attributes.

To his astonishment, however, he saw his young master, for as such Ned regarded Jack Dacre, suddenly rise in the air and settle down quietly on the upper land some twelve or fourteen feet above.

Ned, who, although a Protestant, if anything, had lived long enough amongst Catholics on board ship and elsewhere to have imbibed some of their customs, made the sign of the cross and ejaculated something that was meant for a prayer.

To his untutored mind the whole thing savoured strongly of sorcery.

An instant later and Jack Dacre, who had thus easily earned the right to be called Spring-Heeled Jack, had sprung down into the quarry again, and stood by the side of his faithful henchman.

"Well, skipper," cried Ned, "I've heard of mermaids and sea-serpents, and whales that have swallowed men without killing them, but this boot of yours bangs anything I have ever heard of, though you must know, it isn't all gospel that is preached in the forecastle."

"It's all right, Ned," said Jack, "and with this simple contrivance you will see that I shall spring myself into what I feel convinced is my lawful inheritance."

"I'm with you," said Ned, as keen in the affair now as Jack Dacre himself.

"I'm with you, and where shall we go now."

"Well, old friend, I must purchase one or two articles of disguise, and then I think we will make our way towards Dorking."

"To Dorking?" queried Ned. "I thought you would have made your way towards Dacre Hall, especially as you said you wished to assist your cousin to collect his rents. Ha! ha! ha!" and the jolly tar finished his sentence by bursting into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

"Well, you see," replied Jack, "that's just where it is. Although my poor father never dreamed that he would inherit the family estates, he had sufficient pride of birth to keep me, his own son, in spite of all that they say, well posted in the geography of the entailed estates of the Dacres. I consequently know that more than one goodly farm in the neighborhood of Dorking belongs to me by right; and, therefore, to that place I mean to start to make my first rent collection, as I am determined to call my operations; for the terms robbery and thief are quite as repugnant to me as they are to you, Ned Chump."

"But, skipper, I never thought of you as a real thief," said Ned, "it was merely because I could not see how you could take that which belonged other people without robbery, that made me speak as I did. But if you are

really only going to collect that which is your own, why there can be no harm in it, I am sure."

"That's right, Ned, and if I ever I do kick over the traces and make mistake, you may depend I'll do more good than harm with the money I capture, even if it should not be legally my own."

Four days later the two had arrived at Dorking.

Jack had provided himself with a most efficient disguise.

His tall and well-developed, although youthful, figure suited the tight-fitting garb of the theatrical Mephistopheles to a nicety.

Ned was perfectly enraptured at his appearance, and declared that he could not possibly fail to strike terror into the guilty breast of his cousin, the false baronet, should they ever meet again.

Jack merely laughed, and said that that was an event which would assuredly come to pass sooner or later.

It was an easy task, in a place like Dorking, to ascertain which were the lands that belonged to the Dacres.

The first farm that Jack chose as the one for his maiden rent collection was at a small place called Newdigate.

Jack chose this for his first attempt, partly because of the isolated situation of the farm, and partly because the tenant bore a very evil reputation in the neighbourhood.

Our hero, it must be remembered, was at that romantic period of life when youth is apt to consider it is its duty to become as far as possible the protector of virtue and the avenger of injustice.

It was currently reported that the tenant in question, whom we will call Farmer Brown (all names in this veracious chronicle it must be understood are assumed) had possessed himself of the lease in an unlawful manner.

It was also said that his niece, Selina Brown, who was the rightful owner of the farm, was kept a prisoner somewhere within the walls of the solitary farmhouse.

Rumour also added that she was a maniac.

To one of Jack's ardent and romantic temperament this story was, as our readers may easily conjecture, a great inducement for him to make his first venture a call at Brown's farm.

Ned received strict injunctions to remain at the inn where they had taken up their abode, and to be ready to admit our hero without a moment's delay upon his return.

The night was a truly splendid one.

As Jack set out on his errand, an errand which might as a result land him in goal, he felt not one tittle of fear.

"Thrice armed is he who has hit cause aright," runs the old saying, and Jack certainly believed that he was perfectly justified in the course he was pursuing.

Modern moralists would doubtless differ; but we must remember what his early training had been, and make excuses accordingly.

He arrived at Brown's Farm, Newdigate, in due course.

Now came the most critical point in the career of Spring-Heeled Jack.

This was his first venture.

Failure meant ruin—ruin pure and simple.

If his wonderful contrivance refused to act in the manner in which it had acted at the rehearsal, what would be the result?

There could be but one answer to that question.

Capture, ruin to all his plans, and the infinite shame of a public trial.

But our hero had well weighed the odds and was quite prepared to face them.

Arrived at the farm he had no difficulty in finding out the window of the room in which Mr. Brown usually slept.

This window had been so clearly described to him by the Dorking people that there was no fear of Jack making a mistake.

With one spring he alighted on the broad, old-fashioned window-sill, and an instant later he had opened the casement.

The farmer was seated in a comfortable armchair in front of a large old-fashioned bureau.

He had evidently been counting his money and appropriating it in special portions for the payment perhaps of his landlord, his seed merchant, and so on.

The noise that Jack made as he opened the window caused the farmer to turn swiftly round.

Judge, if you can, his dismay when he found what kind of a visitor had made a call upon him.

On this, his first adventure in the garb of Spring-Heeled Jack, our hero had not called the aid of phosphorus into requisition.

His appearance, however, was well calculated to strike terror into the breast of any one.

Still more so, therefore, into the heart of one, who, like the farmer, was depriving his orphan niece of her legal rights, as well as of her liberty.

With a yell like that of a man in an epileptic fit, Farmer Brown sprang to his feet.

In another instant, however, he had sunk back again into his chair-rendered for the time hopelessly insane.

Jack, without any consideration of the amount which might or might not be due to the owner of the Dacre estates, calmly took possession of all the cash that he could find in the bureau, and then thought it was time to turn his attention to the alleged prisoner, Selina Brown.

Satisfying himself that the bureau contained no money save that which he had already secured, Jack was overjoyed at finding a document, hidden away in a corner of a pigeon hole.

This document bore upon it the superscription—"The last will and testament of Richard Brown, farmer."

In an instant our hero pieced together the story he had heard in Dorking, and arrived at the conclusion that the present Farmer Brown, although he had usurped his niece's position and concealed his brother's will, had at the same time, actuated by some strange fear, such as does occasionally possess criminals, dared not destroy the important document.

And here it was in Jack's hands.

There seemed no chance of immediate recovery by the farmer of his lost senses, so our hero coolly opened the document and read it through.

"As I thought," he muttered to himself.

"As I thought, the whole farm belongs to this girl, and this rascally uncle, one of the same kidney as my precious cousin, has simply swindled her out of her inheritance."

"However, I will see if I cannot manage to find her, and if I do, I think it will go hard if she does not recover her own again."

Then, taking up a pen, he selected a sheet of paper, and wrote upon it in bold characters—

> *Received of the tenant of Brown's Farm, Surrey, the sum of £120. And I hereby acknowledge that the above sum has been so received by me in payment of any rent now due for the said farm, or which may afterwards accrue until such sum is exhausted.*
>
> *(Signed) SPRING-HEELED JACK.*
>
> *N.B.—If this receipt is shown to Sir Michael Dacre, as he calls himself, its validity will be accepted without question, otherwise let him beware.*

With a quiet chuckle Jack read this over to himself, then he laid it down in front of the jabbering lunatic, Farmer Brown.

"Now for the girl." Jack said, as he carefully put the will in one of the pockets of his capacious cloak.

The search for the girl did not take long.

The farmhouse was not a large one, and our hero's ears soon discovered a low moaning sound that evidently came from a garret which could only be approached by a rickety ladder.

In an instant Jack was at the top of the frail structure.

There, right in front of him, lay the object of his search.

She was a young and lovely girl about his own age.

Jack's heart gave one bound as he looked at her, then with a grateful sigh he said, fervently—

"Thank Heaven! I have come here. I take this as an augury that even if there is any wrong in the life I have chosen, I shall gain absolution for the evil by the good that will come out of it."

This philosophy was undoubtedly rather Jesuitical, but allowance must be made for the manner and place in which he had been brought up.

The girl seemed perfectly dazed when she saw Jack, but she betrayed not the slightest sign of fear.

She advanced towards our hero as far as a chain which was passed round her waist and fastened with a staple to the floor, would allow her, and with a child-like innocence, said—

"Ah! I know you, but I am not frightened at you. You have come to take me away from this. I do so long to see the green fields again. Take me away. I am not afraid of you."

For an instant and an instant only Jack hesitated.

His hesitation was only caused by his self inquiry as to what course he had better pursue under the circumstances.

He soon made up his mind, however.

With Jack to think was to act.

He had heard that one Squire Popham, a local justice of the peace, had expressed strong doubts as to the right of the present Farmer Brown to hold the farm.

To this worthy man's house our hero determined to convey the lovely child whom we have called by the unromantic name of Selina Brown.

To remove the chain from the girl's waist was work of no little difficulty, but perseverance, as it usually does, conquered in the end, and half an

hour later Jack had carried the girl to Squire Popham's house, where, with a furious ring at the bell, he had left her, having first chalked on the door of the mansion the following words—

"This girl is the daughter of the late Farmer Brown, of Newdigate."

"Her father's will is in her pocket."

"Her wretched uncle is a jabbering idiot at the farm."

"See that the girl enjoys her rights, or dread the vengeance of 'SPRING-HEELED JACK.'"

In another instant, and before the hall-door had opened to admit the half-unconscious girl, Jack gave one bound and disappeared from sight, and so for the time ended the first adventure of Spring-Heeled Jack.

PART III

BEFORE we follow our hero any further on his extraordinary career we may as well finish the story of Farmer Brown and his niece.

When Squire Popham's footman opened the hall door he at first failed to see the girl so strangely rescued by Spring-Heeled Jack.

He, however, saw the chalk marks on the door, but was unable to read them—no extraordinary circumstance with a man of his class in the early part of the present century.

Then, turning round, he saw the poor girl.

There was a vacant look on her face that told the footman, untutored as he was, that she was "a button short," as he expressed it to himself.

The mysterious chalk marks and the "daft" girl were a little too much for the footman, and he hastened to call the butler.

This worthy could read, and as soon as he made his appearance, and had deciphered Jack's message, he directed his subordinate to call the squire.

When Mr. Popham, a typical country gentleman of the period, made his appearance, and read the inscription and saw the girl, his sympathies were immediately enlisted on her behalf.

"Confound Mr. Spring-Heeled Jack, whoever he may be, and his impudence, too!" cried the irate squire.

"Does he think that it requires threats to make an English magistrate see justice done?"

Then bidding the butler to call all the men servants together, he instructed the housekeeper to see after the welfare of the poor girl.

As soon as the men had assembled Mr. Popham read Spring-Heeled Jack's message to them, and then for the first time recollected that he had not secured the will.

He told one of the men to go to the housekeeper's room, and ask for the document which was in the girl's pocket.

During the man's brief absence the squire told the men what he intended doing, and that was to go over to Brown's farm, and, of the wording of the will proved Jack's tale was correct, to seize the unworthy uncle there and then, and clap him in the Dorking watch-house.

A hasty glance at the will soon informed Mr. Popham that Jack had not exaggerated the facts of the case.

"Now, my men," he said, "we will get over to Newgate at once. It is as I suspected. The present holder of Brown's farm has no more title to it than

I have. Let us go and seize him at once. You have all been sworn in as constables, so we have the law entirely on our side."

We may inform our readers that this was commonly the case in those days, when the guardians of the peace we few and far between, and immeasurably inferior to our present police, both in intelligence and physique.

The journey took some three-quarters of an hour—a much longer time than had been occupied by our hero, in spite of the burden which he had to bear.

The squire ordered the butler to knock loudly at the door, and his commands were instantly obeyed.

After a brief interval—so short, in fact, that it proved that the inmates of the house were up and dressed in spite of the lateness of the hour—the door was opened by a frightened-looking old woman.

"Who is it! What do you want?" she asked.

"I am James Popham, one of his Majesty's justices of the peace, and I want to see your master. Where is he?"

"Please, sir, he is in his bedroom," answered the old woman. "He has had a fit, and has only just recovered. Hadn't you better wait till the morning?"

"What ho!" thundered the angry squire. "We come in the name of the law. Lead us to your master's chamber at once."

At this juncture a querulous voice somewhere in the distance was heard to ask what was the matter.

Mr. Popham answered the query in person, for, pushing the woman on one side, he hastily ascended the stairs, two steps at a time, until he came to the door of the room from which the voice had apparently come.

Throwing open the door, Mr. Popham strode into the room, followed by his men servants.

"Mr. Brown," said the squire, "I arrest you in the name of the king, for suppressing your brother's will, and keeping his daughter, your own niece, in captivity since that brother's death."

Farmer Brown literally shook with fear.

Jack's sudden appearance had temporarily turned his brain, and he had hardly recovered his senses when this new and terrible surprise awaited him.

"It is false," he faltered. "My brother left the farm to me."

"Then what about the girl!" asked the squire. "Even if your brother did leave the farm to you where is his daughter now? Produce her at once, or

you may be put upon your trial for murder instead of the lighter offence with which I have charged you."

Mumbling a few indistinct words, and still trembling violently, the farmer led the way to the foot of the ladder leading to the room where his niece had been for so long a time imprisoned.

Here he paused, as if he did not care to go up the ladder himself.

"Go on," said the squire, sternly, "and bring the girl down without any further delay."

Very unwillingly, but compelled by the force of circumstances, the farmer made the ascent.

As he entered the room a loud yell of terror and astonishment burst from his lips.

"She's gone!" he cried; "that must have been the foul fiend himself who called on me tonight, and he has spirited the girl away with him."

"What do you mean?" asked the squire.

In a few words the thoroughly cowed and frightened farmer explained the occurrences of the night to the squire, winding up by giving a description of Spring-Heeled Jack's personal appearance.

"This is indeed strange," said Mr. Popham. "But if it will be any satisfaction to you I may tell you that your poor niece is safe at my house, and I have her father's will in my pocket. You are my prisoner, and my men will at once take you to the lock-up at Dorking."

The crest-fallen farmer could not frame an inquiry as to how his crimes had been brought to light, and in silence he allowed himself to be carried off to the watch house.

Farmer Brown was tried at the next assizes, found guilty, and sentenced to fourteen years' transportation, from which he never returned.

His niece through kind treatment eventually recovered her senses, and subsequently married and became the mother of a large family of children in the very farm-house where she had been imprisoned in solitude until the light of reason had fled.

When Sir Michael Dacre's agent called at the farm when the rent became due, he found Squire Popham's people in possession, for that worthy man was not one to do things by halves, and he had made up his mind that his own farm bailiff should look after the interests of the poor girl until such time as she might recover her reason.

The agent was shown the receipt that Jack had given for the money.

That worthy was immensely puzzled, but seeing that there was nothing to be done save to take a copy of the receipt and return with it to Dacre Hall for further instructions, at once adopted that course.

When the baronet saw the receipt, and heard his agent's description of our hero—somewhat exaggerated as such things are apt to be by passing from mouth to mouth—his rage knew no bounds.

Of course he instantly recognised in the hero of the adventure his cousin, Jack Dacre.

Instantly summoning Mr. Morgan to his presence, for the unctuous agent had not yet returned to India, the two fellow-conspirators had a consultation as to what had better be done under the circumstances.

"My opinion," said Alfred Morgan, "is that you must grin and bear it. If you take any steps to secure the lad's apprehension and he is brought to trial, there is likely to be such a stir made over it as may bring witnesses over from the East, who may—mind you I do not say they will—but who may oust you from Dacre Hall, the title, and the other property which you possess.

"You must recollect that your late cousin was immensely popular in India, and his son would find a host of friends there to take up his cause."

The baronet had made many hasty exclamations during the delivery of this speech, but Mr. Morgan would not allow himself to be interrupted, and calmly continued to the end.

When he had finished, the baronet broke out rapidly—

"What do you intend to do, then? If the case is as you state, how do you intend to obtain possession of the plantations?"

"Oh! that's all right," coolly replied Morgan. "I care nothing for the barren honour of being called the owner of the Dacre plantations. I shall go back to India just as if I was acting for the rightful owner of the property—but with this important difference, that the rents and profits of the plantations will go into the pockets of Mr. Alfred Morgan."

"Then you won't help me to get rid of this spawn?"

"What time I am in England is entirely at your disposal," said Morgan; "but you must remember that my employer's interests require that I should return to India as soon as possible to look after his plantations."

And the wily villain concluded with a horrible chuckle.

"What course would you propose, then?" asked Sir Michael.

"Well, I think if I were in your place I would call on each tenant and warn him that some one is collecting your rents in a peculiar and perfectly unauthorised manner. Tell them the story of Spring-Heeled Jack at Brown's farm, but without disclosing your suspicions as to the identity of the depredator."

"Suspicions! Certainty, man," cried Sir Michael.

"Well, certainty, then," went on Morgan. "This will put them on their guard, and in the meantime you must wait and hope. If the boy continues this career much longer he is tolerably certain to get a stray bullet through his brains one of these days."

"I will start to-morrow," the baronet promptly said.

"And I will accompany you," said Alfred Morgan, with equal promptitude.

"Thank you, Morgan," replied Sir Michael. "I'll tell my man to go over to Arundel at once, and book two seats to London. We will go there first, as I have considerable property in the neighbourhood of Hammersmith."

"Have you?" sneered Morgan, with special emphasis on the pronoun.

The baronet coloured and bit his lip; but he dared not reply.

This was not the first time by many that his chains had galled him, and he heartily wished that Morgan were back again in India, although he knew that he should feel awfully lonely when the agent went away.

To return to our hero, whom we left as he was hurrying away from Squire Popham's house on the night of the rescue of Selina Brown.

Jack reached home in safety, and found the faithful Ned Chump waiting up for him.

The sailor's astonishment was as unbounded as his admiration when Jack gave him the history of the evening's adventures and showed him the money.

"£120!" said Ned. "My stars! and you haven't been away three hours altogether. Why, we shall make our fortunes fast!"

"Ah! Ned, Ned, where are your conscientious scruples now? But, never fear, I do not want to get rich in this fashion. I merely want to obtain my own—and this, my maiden adventure, has been so successful that I feel certain I shall do so."

Ned, recollecting what he had said to our hero regarding the morality of their proposed course of life, looked rather sheepish, but he made no reply, and a little while later the two separated, and made their way to their respective couches.

In the morning Ned asked Jack what their next step was to be.

"I think we will go back to Arundel, and take up our quarters there for the present. From that place I shall be able to reconnoitre and find out what my precious cousin is about. And the very first opportunity that offers I will show him a sight that will raise the hair on his head."

"All right, sir," cheerfully replied the sailor.

PART IV

IN the comparatively short time that the two had been together, Ned Chump had had ample opportunity of finding out that he had enlisted under a captain who was pretty well sure to lead him ultimately to victory, and the tar had therefore fully made up his mind that under no circumstances would he attempt to question Jack's plans or schemes.

Arrived at Arundel, they took up their quarters at the Bridge House Hotel, and passed some time in comparative quietude.

Jack managed to keep himself well posted up in all relating to Dacre Hall and its usurping tenant.

This he was enabled to do by reason of a disguise which he had assumed.

No one would have recognised in the dashing young buck, apparently four or five and twenty years of age, the lad who had so lately been turned out of Dacre Hall as an illegitimate scion of the ancient house.

Ned had contrived to give himself something of the appearance of a gentleman's body servant or valet, and the two represented themselves to be a Mr. Turnbull, a young gentleman who had recently come into a fine property, and his servant, who had come down into Sussex to rest after a course of dissipation into which Mr. Turnbull had plunged on having come into his inheritance.

Jack, however, did not find out anything of importance for some days, and then, quite by accident, he made a discovery which promised to make an interview between Spring-Heeled Jack and Sir Michael Dacre a very easy matter.

This discovery was made under the following circumstances.

Our hero was standing one evening in the entrance hall of the hotel, passing an occasional remark to the farmers and others who passed in and out, when he saw one of the gigs from the Hall drive up.

Jack was on the alert in a moment.

The man who had driven the gig was one of servants at Dacre Hall, who had shown a special liking for our hero, and this accidental encounter would give Jack an excellent opportunity of proving the strength or weakness of his disguise, even if nothing else came of it.

As the man descended from the gig and threw the reins to an attendant ostler, Jack advanced to the door of the hotel and met the servant from the Hall face to face.

The man looked at him full in the face, but not the slightest sign of recognition passed over his features.

Jack gave a quiet chuckle.

If this man who had shown him so many tokens of friendly feeling during his short sojourn at Dacre Hall failed to recognize him, surely he was perfectly safe from detection!

Not that Jack had anything to fear even if he was identified, but he felt that with such an adversary as he had in the person of Sir Michael Dacre, his only chance of success was to meet his cousin with his own weapons, and so long as he could preserve his incognito the chances were greatly in his favour.

But this chance encounter led to much greater results than the mere testing of the strength of his disguise.

As the man entered the hotel Jack turned round and followed him to the bar.

"I want to book two seats to London by to-morrow's coach," said the man.

"All right," was the reply; "inside or out, the box seat is already taken."

"Oh, inside," replied the servant. "Sir Michael does not care about outside travelling at this time of the year."

"Oh, then, Sir Michael is going up to town, is he?" asked the attendant.

"Yes," was the answer, "and the gentleman from India is going with him."

"Rather a strange time for him to go to town, isn't it?" asked the hotel official, with the usual curiosity of his class.

"Well, yes, it is; but I fancy there is something wrong with his rent collector, and I think he is going up to take his London rents himself."

"Oh! I see," said the attendant as he handed over the receipt; "I suppose you'll take your usual pint of October?"

The man smacked his lips with an affirmative gesture, and the liquor having been drawn and consumed, remounted his gig and took his departure. As soon as the gig had been driven off Jack turned to the barman and said—

"If my man comes in, tell him I have gone along the river towards Pulborough, and ask him to follow me as I want him particularly."

"Yes, sir," said the obsequious attendant, and Jack strolled out of the hotel.

As soon as he had left the inn he turned into the park, and made his way to a secluded nook.

This was a spot which had been chosen as a meeting place for Ned Chump and our hero.

They were precluded from intercourse at the hotel, as it would have seemed singular for a gentleman and his servant—no matter how confidential the latter might be—to have held much private converse at a place like the Bridge House Hotel.

This spot had therefore been chosen, and it had been arranged that when Jack left word that he had gone towards Pulborough, Ned was to make the best of his way to the cosy corner of the park, where our hero awaited his advent.

When Ned made his appearance Jack plunged into the middle of the question at once.

"Which way does the London coach go?"

"Through Brighton, sir," said that worthy, "and then straight along the London-road."

"If we went post from here after she had started could we get to London before she did!"

"Lor, yes," said Ned; "why, we could give her three hours' good start, and then get to London first."

"That's what we'll do, Ned," went on Jack; "but say nothing about this until the coach has started. There will be plenty of time then to order the post-chaise, and there are some people going by the coach who might be suspicious if they heard of an intended trip to town."

"Yes, sir," replied Ned.

"Why, Ned, old fellow, have you no curiosity? I should have thought you would have been in a burning fever to know the meaning of this sudden change in my plans."

"So I am, sir."

"Then why not have asked? Surely you know I have every confidence in you?"

"Yes. I know that, skipper; and that's the very reason why I did not ask. I knew you would tell me all in good time."

"All right, Ned," said our hero.

And he proceeded to inform the sailor of what he had overheard in the bar of the hotel.

"So," he went on, "we'll get to London first, track them from the coach to whatever hotel or house they may put up at, then we will dodge their movements well."

"But what good will this do?" asked Ned, who did not quite see how his young master was to benefit by this.

"Why, don't you see? As soon as my unworthy cousin has collected the rents he is bound to take coach again, either for Arundel or to some other place where my property lies."

"Yes, sir?" queried Ned.

"Well, I intend to stop that coach, and make my rascally cousin hand over to me the proceeds of his rent audit, and I think that will prove a very good haul."

Ned, now thoroughly enlightened, grinned and wished our hero good luck in his enterprise.

The two now parted, and did not meet again until nightfall.

In the morning Sir Michael and Morgan made their appearance in due course, and Jack surveyed the departure of the coach from an upper window.

He met his cousin's eye more than once, but the latter utterly failed to recognise in the dashing young man about town the lad he had virtually kicked out of his ancestral hall.

Alfred Morgan, however, favoured Jack with a prolonged stare, and our hero more than once fancied he was recognised, but whatever suspicion might have existed in his mind was allayed when he asked the guard—

"Who is that young spark at yonder window?"

"He's a young fellow just come in for a lot of money, and mighty free he is with it too, sir, I can tell you," replied the guard.

"What's his name?" asked Morgan.

"Mr. Turnbull, sir," said the guard, as he proceeded to adjust his horn for the final blast.

This answer, so coolly given, speedily quenched any latent spark of suspicion that might have existed in the agent's subtle brain.

The coach started on her journey.

Two hours and a-half later Jack and his faithful henchman were bowling along at a rapid pace in the direction of London.

Arrived at Croydon, they inquired whether the Arundel coach had passed, and were informed that it had not.

The last stage of their journey was therefore performed at a slightly reduced pace, and the post-chaise arrived at the coaching-house fully half-an-hour before the arrival of Sir Michael and Morgan.

This enabled Jack to order a private room, which he desired might look out into the yard into which the coach would be driven.

The two were shown to a room which most admirably suited the purpose of our hero.

When the coach arrived there was Jack, snugly ensconced within a dozen feet of the top of the coach, but perfectly invisible to anyone outside, while himself able to see and hear everything. The coach arrived.

Jack had no difficulty in ascertaining his cousin's destination in London; for, in an imperious voice, Sir Michael shouted—

"Get me a private coach at once, and tell the coachman to drive me to the Hummum's, Covent Garden, and look sharp about it."

This was his first visit to London since he had usurped the title, and he meant to make the most of his importance.

Bidding Ned follow, Jack swiftly descended the stairs, paid the score, and passed out into the streets.

Here he hailed a passing hackney coach, and arrived at the Hummum's some time before Sir Michael.

Jack engaged a couple of rooms, and then proceeded to make some slight changes in his disguise, so that Morgan might not recognise him as the man who had watched the departure of the Arundel coach that morning.

For the best part of a week Jack tracked his cousin with the persistency of a sleuth hound, until he felt convinced that the last batch of London rents was collected.

It was during this period that the supposed unearthly visitant first made his appearance in Hammersmith.

Although the newspapers of the time inform us that Jack committed many robberies, there is no doubt that this is incorrect.

All that he did was to visit each successive tenant after his cousin's departure, and ascertain from the terrified people how much money they had paid to the landlord.

PART V

THERE is no doubt that Jack caused an immense amount of harm by frightening servant-girls and children, and even people who ought to have known better; but we are not writing to justify Jack's conduct, but merely to extract as much from the diary or confession of Spring-Heeled Jack as will enable our readers to form some idea of what manner of man our hero was.

By these nocturnal visits on the Dacre tenants Jack soon found out how much money his cousin was likely to be taking home with him.

This sum was approximately £250.

A nice little haul for our hero if he could only land it.

During Jack's nightly absences the faithful Ned kept watch over the baronet and his friend.

One night on Jack's return Ned informed him that the baronet had sent the hotel boots to book two seats for the morrow's coach to Arundel.

"Then he is going straight home," said Jack. "Well, perhaps, it is better so. If he had been going further afield he might have banked the money. As it is, I know he will have it with him, and I'll stick him and the mail up somewhere in the neighbourhood of Horley, or I'll acknowledge that Michael is right, and my name is not Jack Dacre."

The following morning Jack ordered a postchaise to proceed to Horley.

From thence, after discharging one passenger, Jack, it was to take the other one on to Worth, and there to await until "Mr. Turnbull" made his appearance.

This programme was carried out to the letter.

Jack got out at Horley.

The carriage rattled on.

Jack took up his position at a fork in the roads, where he could see the stage coach some time before it would reach him, and at the same time be himself unseen.

In due course the coach came in sight.

Jack's heart beat nervously, but not with fear.

This was his first highway adventure, and who can wonder at his excitement!

In another instant the coach was upon him, and with a spring and a yell that threw the horses back upon their haunches, he rose in the air right over the top of the coach, passengers and all, shouting—

"Hand out your money and your jewellery—I am SPRING-HEELED JACK."

The coachman in his terror threw himself upon the ground, and hid his face in the dust, as if he thought he could insure his safety by that course.

The guard discharged his huge blunderbuss harmlessly in the air, thereby adding tenfold to the agony of fear from which the coach-load of passengers were without exception suffering.

Having performed this deed of bravery, the guard took to his heels and speedily disappeared from sight.

Jack's tall, well-built figure, dressed in its weird garb, was one that could not fail to strike terror into the breasts of the startled travellers.

One by one they threw their purses and other valuables at Jack's feet.

Our hero received the tribute as though he had been an emperor.

When the last passenger had deposited his valuables in front of Jack, that worthy youth said, with a sardonic laugh—

"Now you can all pick your money and jewellery up again, and return them to your pockets—all save Michael Dacre and Alfred Morgan."

In an instant the passengers sprang from the coach and collected their valuables, too utterly surprised by the turn events had taken to utter a word.

Sir Dacre looked at his confederate, and Morgan returned the look, but neither of them could force their lips to articulate a sound.

Jack stared steadily at his cousin through the two holes in his mask, and to the guilty man's fevered imagination they seemed to emit flashes of supernatural fire.

Pointing a long, claw-like finger at the would-be baronet, Jack said, in the most sepulchral tone he could assume—

"Beware, Michael Dacre; your cousin's last words to you shall be brought home to you with full force. From this day forth until you render up possession of the title and estates you have usurped, you shall not know one hour's peace of mind by reason of the dread you will feel at the appearance of Spring-Heeled Jack."

"Who I am matters not to you. My powers are unlimited, I can appear and disappear when and where I will."

Then turning to Alfred Morgan, he said—

"Ungrateful servant of one of the kindest masters that ever lived, your fate shall be one of such nameless horror, that, could you but foresee what that fate would be, you would put an end to your wretched career of crime by your own hand."

Then gathering up the money and jewellery belonging to the two conspirators, Jack said—

"Good-day, friends. A pleasant journey to you. Just to prove to you that I can disappear when I like, look at me now."

In another second Jack had indeed disappeared, leaving behind him, as more than one of the bewildered passengers subsequently averred, a strong sulphurous odour.

The mystery of our hero's disappearance on this occasion is not difficult to explain.

While waiting for the coach he had discovered a convenient chalk pit—no rare occurrence in that part of the country—and into this he had sprung after uttering his parting words, which were of course intended for Sir Michael and Morgan.

After Jack's departure the panic-stricken passengers endeavoured to rouse the coachman from his prostrate position on the dusty road.

But for some time their efforts were vain, the man had fainted from sheer fright.

The guard, too, had totally disappeared. What were they to do?

At last one of the passengers volunteered to drive, and placing the still insensible driver inside, the coach proceeded on its way to its destination.

All the inmates of the coach looked askance at the baronet and his companion.

They looked upon these two as the Jonahs of the expedition, and it would probably have gone hard with both of them had anyone simply have suggested their expulsion.

Sir Michael was not slow to perceive this, and at the next halting place he resolved to leave the coach.

This resolution he communicated to Morgan.

"But," said the agent, "we have no money. How shall we get on so far away from home?"

"Oh! that's all right," replied Sir Michael. "I am well enough known about here—and even if I were not," he continued, in a whisper, "I'd risk everything to get rid of these cursed people who heard the fearful words that spectral-looking being uttered."

Morgan was about to reply, but a warning "Hush!" from the baronet stopped him in time, for more than one of the occupants of the coach seemed to be listening intently to the conversation between the confederates, although it was carried on in very low tones.

The guilty pair took their departure from the coach at Balcombe much to the satisfaction of their fellow travellers.

Sir Michael directed the landlord of the inn to show them into a private room.

The command was at once obeyed, for Sir Michael had not exaggerated when he informed Morgan that he was well known in that part of the country.

As Mr. Michael Dacre, the agent to the large and valuable Dacre estates, he had been well known.

As Sir Michael Dacre, the present owner of those said estates, he was of course much more widely known.

That is to say that people who would not have recognised the agent sought by every means in their power to scrape acquaintance with the baronet.

Once within the private room, and left alone with his companion in crime, the baronet breathed a sigh of relief.

"Phew!" he said, "I almost dreaded to enter this room, for fear that imp of darkness might have been here before me."

Morgan gave forth a nervous little laugh, as much as to say that he had no fears upon the subject, but he could not control his features, and if ever fright and cowardice were depicted on a human face, they might have been discerned on the not too prepossessing countenance of Mr. Alfred Morgan, the some-time agent to the Dacre Plantations in India.

"What is there to laugh at?" growled Sir Michael. "I have lost some £260, two rings, a gold repeater, and a bunch of seals."

Our readers will remember that gold watch chains were seldom worn in those days, the watch being usually attached to a piece of silk ribbon from which depended a bunch of seals. The time-keeper, a little smaller than one of the American clocks of the present day, was placed in a fob pocket, and the ribbon and seals depended on the outside of the waistcoat or breeches as the case may be.

"And I," answered the agent, "am in quite as sorry a plight, for I have lost £60, all the money I had left in England, besides my watch and chain."

This chain being a magnificent piece of oriental gold carving which Morgan had absolutely "stolen" from Jack's father, and consequently from Jack himself.

"Well," cried Sir Michael, testily, "it's no use crying over spilt milk; and still less use for us to quarrel. I will be your banker until you can draw upon your Indian property."

"None of your sneer, Sir Michael Dacre," began the agent, angrily.

"Tut, tut! man, let's make a truce of it, and if we cannot continue friends, let us at least avoid any resemblance to open hostilities."

"All right," sulkily assented Morgan.

"It is our only chance," went on Sir Michael. "I don't know who or what in the fiend's name this Spring-Heeled Jack may be, but I must confess that my nerves are terribly shaken by the events that have occurred since I turned my illegitimate cousin out of Dacre Hall."

"Illegitimate?" said Alfred Morgan with a sneer.

"That this so-called Spring-Heeled Jack," continued the baronet, ignoring the interruption, "is not an ordinary highwayman is self-evident, or he would not have returned some hundreds of pounds in money, and as much more in jewellery, to our fellow passengers by the Arundel coach."

"And it is also equally certain," said Morgan, "that this stalwart man who can spring over the top of a mail-coach, horses, driver, passengers and all, cannot be that puny lad who laid claim to the Dacre title and lands."

"Then who can it be?" cried Dacre, half in despair. "It cannot be that sailor, Clump, or whatever his name was."

"Chump, my dear Sir Michael, Ned Chump!" rejoined Morgan, who could hardly repress his sneering manner. "No, I do not see how it could possibly be the sailor; but one thing is certain—and that is that this individual is acting on behalf of your cousin, and although I have too much sense to believe in the supernatural, the whole thing passes all comprehension. First this Spring-Heeled Jack—and, recollect, your cousin adopted that name out of your own lips—appears at Dorking, puts a half-lunatic girl back in the possession of her property, collects more than the rent due to you from Brown's farm, but at the same time leaves a strangely worded receipt, which prevents you from doing anything but grin and bear it."

"True," broke in Sir Michael, angrily.

"Then we hear that a supernatural being has appeared to your Hammersmith tenants in turn, and has put to one and all the identical question—"

"How much rent have you paid to Michael Dacre?"

"True again," replied Dacre.

"You will notice," said Morgan, with what was meant to be cutting irony, "the absence of the 'Sir' in the formula."

"Yes, yes, proceed," snarled the unhappy wretch.

"Then we take the coach on our way to your ancestral halls—and what happens? Why this mysterious being about whom we have heard so much, and about whom we know so little, stopped our coach in a manner hitherto unheard of, half frightened the driver to death, takes all the money and valuables the coach contains, then calmly returns each of the other passengers their property, only retaining for his own use that which belongs to Sir Michael Dacre, the present head of that proud house, and that which

belongs to Mr. Alfred Morgan, at your service, the agent for the Dacre plantations in the East Indies."

"Well, and what do you suggest, Morgan?" said the pseudo-baronet, growing pale as the agent went on with his cool and matter-of-fact statement.

"Well," answered Morgan; "I hardly know at present what to suggest. To one thing, however, I have made up my mind."

"And that is?" queried Dacre, anxiously.

"To remain in England till this ghost is laid," replied Morgan.

The baronet gave a sigh of relief.

"Yes," the agent continued, "I am not going to run the risk of losing my hard-earned Indian estates—and that is what I feel sure I must ensue if I leave you to cope single-handed with the trio who are in league against you —maybe against me."

"Trio!" cried the baronet, faintly.

"Yes, trio! Jack Dacre, Ned Chump, and last, but not least, Spring-Heeled Jack."

To carry on our extraordinary story in a perfectly intelligible form it is necessary that we should leave the conspirators at the inn at Balcombe, and look out for our hero and his faithful comrade.

Jack, thanks to his ample cloak, had no difficulty in reaching the appointed place of meeting at Worth.

Ned Chump, who had been worrying himself into a state of nervous anxiety almost bordering upon madness, received our hero literally with open arms.

"How did you get on, sir?" asked the tar.

"Don't 'sir' me," replied Jack, banteringly.

"Well, then, skipper, if that will suit you."

"Oh, I got on prime, Ned," replied our hero, and he broke out into such a peal of laughter as astonished even Ned, who had already had many experiences of his young master's gaiety and exuberance of spirits.

Ned, as was his wont, remained silent, and Jack, who by this time perfectly understood his henchman's manner, went on to explain the events that had occurred since they had parted at Harley.

"And now," said Jack, "I will change myself into Mr. Turnbull again for a short time."

"Yes, skipper," said Ned, as he laid Jack's private clothes out for him.

"And then we will make for the Fox, at Balcombe, where the Arundel coach must have stopped after I had left it."

"Yes, sir," said Ned, in a matter-of-fact tone, as if his interest in the affair was a very minute one.

"If my surmise is correct," went on Jack, "Michael Dacre and the rascal Morgan will be resting there."

"Why so, skipper?" asked Ned.

"Because, after my word of warning, the passengers by the Arundel coach would not look with very favourable eyes upon those two arch conspirators, and I take it that they will have been only too glad to leave the coach at the first opportunity, and that must most undoubtedly be the Fox Inn."

"All right, skipper," replied the sailor. "I'm on."

By this time our hero had changed his clothes, or rather had put those belonging to the supposed Mr. Turnbull on over his mephistophilean garb.

Some refreshments which had been previously ordered were now brought in, and after discussing these and settling the bill, Jack and his attendant left the house, the former telling the host that he might be back that way later on, but he was not quite sure, as if he met a friend of his at the Fox he might pass the night there, but, under any circumstances, he should return to Worth the following day, as his one object in coming there was to inspect the famous old church, the only object of general interest which the village possessed.

Jack had made this explanation as he did not want to carry his and Ned's luggage about with him on this reconnoitring expedition.

The landlord, only too pleased at the thought of seeing his liberal guest and his servant once again, gladly took charge of the travelling trunks, and Jack and Ned were soon far on their way toward a the Fox.

Entering the inn, Jack called for two flagons of ale, and in paying for the same took good care to expose the contents of his purse.

The host's eye caught a glimpse of the gold pieces it contained, and he instantly made up his mind that our hero should leave some if not all of them behind him.

"Fine day, sir," said mine host, by way of opening a conversation.

"Very," replied Jack, who wanted nothing better.

"Have you come down here to attend the coming of age of Squire Thornhill's eldest son?" asked the innkeeper.

"No," replied Jack. "My servant and myself are on a walking tour. We have left our luggage at Worth, and have merely strolled over here to see if my friend, Lord Amberly, is staying here or in the neighbourhood."

"No, sir," said the now obtrusively obsequious host, quite won over by "my friend, Lord Amberly," added to the sight of the gold in Jack's purse.

"Lord Amberly is not staying here; but we are not quite devoid of quality, for Sir Michael Dacre, one of our county magistrates, and a friend of his are at this moment inmates of my house."

"Sir Michael Dacre?" queried Jack, suppressing his excitement. "Why his hall is not more than twenty miles from here is it, how comes he to be staying at an inn so near his own home?"

"Twenty-five miles, sir," said the landlord, correctingly, "and the reason that he is staying here is that the Arundel coach was stuck up by a strange sort of highwayman."

"A strange sort of highwayman?" said Jack, in tones of well assumed surprise.

"Yes, sir, a strange sort of highwayman," replied the landlord.

And the worthy host proceeded to give Jack a highly embellished account of the attack upon the mail coach, adding—

"And as this strange joker, who calls himself Spring-Heeled Jack, only robbed the baronet and his friend, the other passengers seemed to think as how they weren't much good, and so were glad to get rid of them, when they decided to stop here."

"And how do you know that they are any good?" asked Jack.

"Oh!" replied the loquacious landlord, "I knowed Sir Michael when he was the late baronet's agent—he's all right as far as I am concerned, whatever he may be to others."

"What do you mean?" said Jack, who had noticed something peculiar in the host's utterance of the last words.

"Oh! nothing, sir. Nothing!" replied the man, evidently discovering for the first time that his tongue had been wagging a little too fast.

Collecting his somewhat discomposed faculties as quickly as he could, the landlord put the question to Jack once more—

"Then you have not come here to see the grand doings at Thornhill Hall?"

"No," replied our hero, "I did not come with that purpose, but as my friend Lord Amberly is not here, I may as well stop until I hear from him, and in the meantime the Thornhill festivities will serve to prevent my getting the vapours. That is," he went on, "if you can accommodate my servant and myself with a bed."

"Yes, sir," said the landlord, with a bright twinkle in his eye, as he thought of the contents of our hero's purse, to say nothing of the prestige

that would attach to his house if only Lord Amberly should turn up to meet his young friend.

"Yes, sir," he said, "that is if you do not mind occupying a double-bedded room."

Then he continued in an apologetic manner—

"Sir Michael and his friend particularly stipulated for a double-bedded room sir, and indeed we have only one other in the house."

"Ha! afraid to sleep alone," said Jack to himself; "but I think I'll take a still further rise out of them to-night."

Then turning to the landlord, he said—

"Oh! a double bedded-room will suit me. We've been through too many adventures together to mind that, haven't we, Ned?"

"Yes, sir," replied the sailor with a suppressed chuckle.

With a fulsome bow the host ushered Jack and Ned to their apartments, indicating as he did so the one already occupied by the baronet and his friend.

Our hero ordered dinner for seven o'clock, and leaving Ned in the bedroom, proceeded down into the bar again.

Finishing his ale he strode out of the door and rapidly took in the geography of the house.

He had no difficulty in fixing the position of the baronet's room, and to his intense delight saw that the windows were mere frail casements of lead and glass, that hardly served to keep out the elements.

It was rapidly getting dusk, and re-entering the house Jack said to the landlord—

"I'm going for a little stroll, give my man all he wants, and put the charges down to me, and mind my dinner is ready at seven."

The host humbly bowed his acquiescence, and Jack again left the house.

He had about an hour in hand before dinner, and it was absolutely necessary for the success of his scheme that he should be back punctually to time, and he had a lot to do in that single hour.

To return to the would-be baronet and his fellow conspirator, who were still seated in the private room.

With Spring-Heeled Jack's name upon his lips—for that was the only topic of conversation between the guilty men—the baronet rose to ring the bell for lights.

Even as he did so a crash of glass was heard, and the object of their fears stood before them in the middle of the room.

"Strip yourselves, both of you," cried Jack in fearful accents, "strip yourselves to the skin. I told you I was ubiquitous—and I am here. Strip at once, or dread the dire vengeance of Spring-Heeled Jack!"

Too thoroughly frightened to ring the bell for assistance, Sir Michael and Morgan stood as if turned to stone, looking at the weird intruder into the privacy of their room.

Our hero found it difficult to restrain a smile, so ludicrous was the terror exhibited by his unworthy cousin and the agent.

But the faint ripple of enjoyment which passed over his face was not noticed by either of the conspirators.

Jack knew that he could not afford to waste a moment, even though the prolongation of his cousin's fright would have afforded him exquisite enjoyment.

"Strip yourselves," he therefore repeated, in still louder tones, "and quickly, too, or it will fare badly with both of you."

Sir Michael looked at his fellow conspirator, but, seeing nothing of an encouraging nature in his face, he commenced to take off his coat.

Morgan, accepting the inevitable, proceeded to follow the baronet's example.

Jack watched them closely, and every time one or the other of them paused he threatened them with horrible penalties if they dared delay any longer.

At last the two worthies stood in front of our hero as naked as they were when they first entered this world.

Bidding them roll their garments into a bundle Jack prepared to take his departure.

He unfastened what remained of the casement through which he had so unceremoniously made his way into the apartment, and threw the broken frames wide open.

When the clothes had been made into a rather unwieldy-looking parcel, Jack caught hold of it, and, placing it on his shoulder, sprang literally over head and heels out of the window.

For some five minutes after Jack's departure neither of the naked men could move to call for assistance, so utterly cowed were they by the suddenness of the weird apparition's appearance.

Morgan was the first to recover anything like self-possession, and with an unearthly yell he sprang towards the bell-rope, and gave such frantic tugs at it that it very soon broke under his vigorous hand.

But he had succeeded in making noise enough to rouse the whole house, and a minute later the room was half-filled by the landlord and his ser-

vants and many of his customers.

"What is the matter, gentlemen?" asked Boniface.

"Matter, indeed!" cried Sir Michael, who had by this time somewhat recovered his normal faculties. "Matter enough I should think. That scoundrel who robbed the coach we came down by, has been here and has taken away all our clothes."

The titters and smiles that had been heard and seen among the domestics suddenly stopped.

Dim rumours had already reached Balcombe of the existence of Spring-Heeled Jack, and now here he was, or had just been, right in their midst.

A great terror seemed to have crept into the hearts of all of them, and none seemed inclined to stir.

"Someone of you rush after him," cried Dacre, angrily. "The bundle is a heavy one, and he cannot have got far with it."

But no one offered to start in pursuit.

"Confound it!" cried Morgan; "if one of you had had the sense to start off directly I summoned you the thief would have been caught by this time, or, at least, our clothes would have been recovered," he added, as the thought flashed through his brain that, perhaps, it would be well for his employer and himself if Jack were not caught.

"I don't think we could have done much good," said the landlord, rather nettled at the tone affairs were taking. "If this Spring-Heeled Jack, as you call him, is good enough to stick up and rob a coach-load of people, and is clever enough to come here and take the very clothes from off your backs, I don't quite see what chance I or any of my people would have against him even if one of us had started off immediately in pursuit."

The two sufferers, who had by this time entirely come to their senses, both immediately acknowledged that the landlord of the Fox was right.

Sir Michael, therefore, putting the best face on the matter that he could, said—

"True, landlord, true; and now, like a good fellow, see if you cannot get us some clothes, anything like a fit. Our present garb is not a pleasant one."

And indeed it was not, for Sir Michael was clothed toga-wise in a large tablecloth, which he had thrown over his shoulders in haste while Morgan was ringing the bell, and Morgan himself had only been able to secure the hearth-rug, with which he had enveloped his body, so as to preserve some semblance of decency.

Ordering the crowd of frightened servants and guests to leave the room, the landlord turned to Sir Michael, when they were alone, and said—

"I trust, Sir Michael, that you and your friend will leave my house as speedily as possible. I have my living to get, and this sort of thing is calculated to give a house a bad name."

"Insolent scoundrel—" began Dacre.

"No names, Sir Michael," answered the landlord. "I pay my rent and my brewers regularly. There has been no complaint made against the Fox since I have had it, and I do not fear anything that you can do to me. As to you yourself, the case is different."

"What do you mean?" angrily asked Dacre.

"What do I mean? Well, it is strange that this mysterious Spring-Heeled Jack should be always on your track. I have heard that he collected rents in your name at Dorking. Then you tell me that he robs you on the Arundel coach; and, by-the-bye, all the passengers by that coach put you down as the cause of the stoppage, and now you tell me that this mysterious being has entered your room by your window, some twenty feet from the ground, and, though you were two and he only one, he managed to strip and leave you as naked as you were when you were born."

Morgan nudged Dacre, and Jack's cousin had sense enough to see that there was no good to come by continuing the argument.

"Very well," Dacre replied, in a gruff manner. "Let us have what clothes you have, and we will leave your house the first thing in the morning. It is too late to think of going on to Dacre Hall to-night."

The landlord acquiesced in a sullen manner, muttering—

"If Master Spring-Heeled Jack takes it into his head to return here before the morning out you shall both turn, no matter what the time or the weather may be."

With this Boniface left the room.

"This is getting serious," said Morgan, as soon as he was left alone with the baronet.

"Serious, indeed," said Dacre, testily. "I fully believe, Morgan, that the foul thing's threats will come true, and that he will make our lives a curse to us."

"What can we do in the matter?" asked Morgan. "Can you not suggest something? Recollect what you have gained by denying your cousin's legitimacy, and pull yourself together and let us see what had better be done, under the circumstances."

"Better be done, forsooth," said Sir Michael. "How can we arrange to do anything when we do not know whether our adversary is mortal or not. If he is mortal we dare not lock him up, as he evidently knows the secret of the Dacre succession; and if he is not mortal, of what I avail our struggles against him?"

"Not mortal, pshaw!" replied Morgan.

"The man's mortal enough, though there is something mysterious about him, I'll allow. We'll provide ourselves with a pair of pistols, and when next we are favoured by a visit we will test with half an ounce of lead whether Spring-Heeled Jack is mortal or not."

As the agent concluded, a wild, wailing shriek, ending in a peal of demoniacal laughter, struck upon their ears, and, rushing to the window, they beheld, standing on the top of the pump in front of the Inn, the awful figure of their hated foe.

With another unearthly scream Jack turned a somersault from the top of the pump, and long ere any of the inmates of the inn who had heard the taunting laugh had time to pass out of doors, Spring-Heeled Jack had disappeared, the gathering gloom leaving no trace behind.

Ten minutes later, and "Mr. Turnbull," looking as cool and calm as it is possible for a young English gentleman to look, returned to the Fox, and as he called for a glass of sherry and bitters he asked if his dinner was ready.

With a thousand apologies the landlord explained to him that, owing to the state of excitement into which the whole house had been thrown by the appearance of Spring—Heeled Jack, the dinner was not quite ready.

Jack, of course, asked for particulars, and the garrulous host gave the chief actor such a highly-embellished narrative of what had actually occurred, that our hero absolutely suffered in his endeavour to keep from laughing.

He succeeded, however, and bidding the landlord hasten the dinner as much as possible, he entered the room reserved for himself and Ned Chump.

Here he found his faithful follower, and that jolly salt broke into a peal of uncontrollable laughter as Jack narrated the story of the last hour's adventure, winding up the tale by explaining that he had quietly dropped the bundle of clothes down a neighbouring disused well.

In the meantime a very dissimilar scene was being enacted in the room occupied by Sir Michael Dacre and Alfred Morgan.

Both of the conspirators felt dissatisfied.

Morgan inwardly accused Dacre of cowardice, and felt certain that eventually John Dacre would gain his own.

The usurping baronet, on the other hand, blamed Morgan for all the ills and evils that had arisen.

The two passed the night somehow, but it is comparatively certain that neither of them enjoyed even one half-hour's sleep.

Our hero and his henchman, on the contrary, partook of a capital dinner, smoked and drank and enjoyed themselves, and then slept the sleep of the just.

In the morning, much to the delight of the landlord of the Fox, Sir Michael Dacre and Alfred Morgan took their departure from the inn.

Our hero and Ned Chump, who had been informed that they were about to leave, had secured a position from which they could obtain a good view of the two disconsolate men.

And a pretty pair of beauties they looked.

Sir Michael was attired in a suit of clothes belonging to the landlord, and which was almost large enough to have accommodated his companion in crime as well as himself.

Morgan's borrowed suit fitted him a little better, but as the original owner occupied the position of ostler, gardener, and general factotum, it may easily be imagined that the garments were not particularly becoming.

"Well, skipper," cried Ned, as the post-chaise drove off, "no disrespect to you, but a more ugly, hang-dog fellow than your cousin I never saw; he looks well enough when he is dressed spick and span, but now he looks what he really is."

And Jack could not dissent, for it would have been difficult to find a more despicable-looking man than the mock baronet decked in the innkeeper's clothes.

Jack thought it advisable to stop at the Fox for another night, and then sent over to Worth for the luggage.

"Not the slightest suspicion had been aroused in anyone's mind that this sedate Mr. Turnbull had had anything to do with the stoppage of the Arundel coach or the robbery of the clothes of the two guests at the Fox Inn."

Jack and Ned left a very pleasant impression behind them when they took their departure for Arundel.

PART VI

OUR hero had resolved to make the Bridge House his headquarters, as he had had such remarkable piece of luck there already.

For was it not owing to what he had heard while staying there that he was enabled to relieve his cousin and Mr. Alfred Morgan of their superfluous cash?

If our hero had known what important results his resolve to go back to the hotel at Arundel would have, he would have literally danced for joy.

This visit to Arundel led to an adventure which introduced him to his future wife, and we may safely say that hardly ever was man blessed with such a helpmate as was the wife of Spring-Heeled Jack.

The manner of our hero's introduction to his future wife was as follows.

The day after the arrival of Jack Dacre and Ned at the hotel a carriage drawn by four horses drove up to the inn door.

The occupants were an old gentleman and lady, apparently his wife; in addition there were two younger women, one might have been a servant or companion, the other was evidently the daughter of the old gentleman, so great was the likeness between the two.

Jack was lounging about in front of the hotel when the carriage drove up, and a strange but almost indescribable thrill passed through his whole body at the sight of the girl we have just alluded to.

People may laugh at love at first sight, but in the case of Jack Dacre it was an undoubted fact.

Our hero pressed forward to get a better view of the young lady who had made such a strange impression upon his ardent imagination, and as he did so he had the satisfaction of hearing the old gentleman say to the host that he intended to pass the night in the house if beds were available.

Mine host informed the traveller that there was plenty of room, and to Jack's intense delight the party entered the hotel.

"Hang it!" said Jack to himself, "she's a stunner, and no mistake. Now, how can I contrive to get an introduction to her? I wonder whether the old gentleman will go to sleep after dinner, and if she will go for a walk? I must keep my eyes open, and chance may befriend me."

And chance did indeed befriend Jack, for after the old gentleman and his family had dined, the young lady and her companion (for such the third female of the party turned out to be) started off for a walk.

Jack, affecting a nonchalance which he was far from feeling, sauntered out after them, keeping, however, at a respectful distance.

The two girls made their way down to the side of the river Arun, and choosing a quiet spot looked about for a seat.

A few yards further on they spied a tree, a large branch of which stretched right across the towing-path till it reached nearly half way across the river.

Surely no more delightful seat could have been devised.

The two girls at once proceeded to take advantage of this charming resting-place.

Jack ensconced himself close by, just out of hearing, but where he could see every movement they made.

Once the two girls had made themselves comfortable a very animated conversation seemed to commence between them; then suddenly, whether by accident or design Jack did not at the time know, the companion placed her hand on the young lady's shoulder, and an instant later the only girl who had ever found her way to Jack's heart was being rapidly carried towards the sea in the swirling waters of the Arun.

Without waiting to see what became of the girl who had caused the catastrophe, Jack threw off his coat and sprang into the water.

Strong and steady was his stroke, and the girl had only just come to the surface for the first time when our hero was beside her.

One minute later and she was on shore, and Jack had the supreme satisfaction of seeing the rich glowing tint of life return to her pallid cheeks.

She opened her eyes and stared at Jack in wonder.

"Where is my maid, Ellen Clarke?" she asked, as she glanced hastily around.

"I don't know," answered Jack. "I was so anxious to be of service to you that I did not see what became of her. And, what is more, I don't think you need care much, for it certainly seemed to me that but for her you would not have been subjected to such a ducking. But come, let me carry you to the hotel. The sooner you get out of those wet clothes the better."

And without waiting for a reply Jack caught her in his arms and started off towards the hotel with her at a gentle trot.

To his sturdy young frame such a burden counted next to nothing.

Jack could see by the look half of terror and half of curiosity in her face that there was something to be accounted for in the manner in which she had fallen into the river; but he wisely refrained from worrying her with any questions at the moment.

Before Jack reached the hotel with his fair burden they met the maid, accompanied by three or four of the hotel attendants, making their way towards the river.

The maid's face flushed crimson, and then as suddenly paled, as she caught sight of Jack and her young mistress.

Our hero's quick, shrewd glance marked her manner, and he had no need to ask any question.

Whatever might have been her motive, beyond all doubt the companion had pushed her mistress into the river.

Young Dacre had gone through so much since his inopportune arrival in England that he had acquired an amount of worldly wisdom far beyond his years.

He, therefore, wisely held his tongue, and did not tell the girl that he had seen the "accident" and its cause.

The companion recovered her self-composure in a moment when she found that Jack did not accuse her of attempting to murder her mistress.

"Oh! Miss Lucy," she cried, "thank Heaven you are saved. I should never have forgiven myself had you been drowned. It was my fault that you fell in. I must have leant too heavily on your shoulder, and caused you to lose your balance."

These last few words were accompanied by a swift, sly glance at our hero.

Although Jack caught the look he took no notice of it, but simply strode on towards the Bridge House.

Surrendering his charge to her father, he proceeded upstairs to change his clothes.

While so engaged a knock was heard at the door, and a waiter handed in a card on which was written—

"Major-General Sir Charles Grahame will be pleased to see the saviour of his child at the earliest opportunity."

Our hero with a bright smile told the man that he would wait upon the general immediately, and he was vain enough to take a little extra care over brushing his hair, and so on, in case he should have the felicity of seeing the lovely girl whom he had just rescued from a watery grave.

Finding his way to the general's room, Jack's courage nearly deserted him.

He who had shown so much daring in endeavouring to checkmate his rascally cousin, felt as nervous as a young girl at her first ball, at the idea of meeting the lovely creature who had made such an impression upon him.

But his nervousness was entirely unnecessary, for on entering the room he found it tenanted by the general and a lady who was certainly some dozen years older than the charming girl he hoped and yet feared to see.

"Permit me to present to you my wife, Lady Grahame, Mr.—," said the general with a pause.

"Turnbull, sir, Jack Turnbull, at your service," replied our hero with a guilty blush, for he absolutely hated himself at that moment for the deception, innocent as it was, that he was practising on the father of the girl with whom he had so madly and so unaccountably fallen in love.

The formality of introduction having been gone through, the general, who had noticed the flush on Jack's cheek, but who had attributed it to a far different cause, endeavoured to place Jack entirely at his ease.

Thanking our hero cordially, but not fulsomely, for having saved his daughter's life, the general wound up by saying—

"But Lucy shall thank you herself in the morning."

"Then she is in no danger?" asked Jack.

"Oh! dear no," replied the general. "The doctor has seen her, and he says that it wants nothing but a good night's rest to put her right."

The lady had not spoken until now, having merely curtseyed when Jack was presented to her, but now she seemed compelled to say something, and, smiling in a manner that caused our hero to shudder, she said—

"Oh! yes, my dear daughter shall thank you herself in the morning, Mr. Turnbull."

"Your daughter?" said Jack, in accents of surprise, for the general's wife could not, by any possibility, have been the mother of the fair girl he had saved.

"Well, my stepdaughter," she said, with a self-satisfied smirk, for she took Jack's exclamation of surprise as a compliment.

After a few more words our hero returned to his own room, and gave Ned an account of his adventure, winding up the story by saying—

"And I cannot help thinking that Lady Grahame and the companion have leagued together to destroy that lovely girl's life."

"Monstrous!" cried Ned.

"Yes; monstrous, indeed. But I will spoil their little game. I shall keep close watch upon them, and if I find them in conversation together to-night I will treat them to a view of Spring-Heeled Jack, and in their terror find an opportunity of extracting a confession from one or both of them."

Our hero speedily changed his attire for his demoniacal garb, and, wrapping himself in his huge cloak, he passed down the stairs, and left the hotel without attracting any undue attention.

It was now quite dark, and, making his way round to the back of the house, where the general's suite of rooms was situated, Jack with one spring landed in the balcony which ran round that side of the house.

He looked in at the first window he came to, and the only occupant of the room was the old general, who was taking an after-dinner nap.

The next room he passed he did not look through the window. Something subtle seemed to tell him that this was where his loved one lay at rest.

But at the next window he paused and listened.

The words that fell upon his ears literally burnt themselves into his brain.

"Heavens!" he cried; "I am only just in time."

Another instant, and the occupants of the room, Lady Grahame and Ellen Clarke, beheld standing before them the terrible figure of Spring-Heeled Jack.

"HA! ha!" cried Jack, "your intended crime is such a monstrous one, that even I, Spring—Heeled Jack, fiend though I may be, am bound to prevent its consummation."

Only one of the two women heard these words, for Ellen Clarke had fainted at the appearance of the fearful apparition.

Lady Grahame was possessed of stronger nerves, or she would never have been able to plan the death of her lovely and innocent step-daughter.

For that was the purport of the conversation which Jack had overheard whilst standing outside the window.

It appeared that the whole of General Grahame's private fortune must pass, by the provisions of his father's will, to Lucy Grahame, but if she died before the general, then he would have absolute control over the property and could leave it to whomsoever he pleased.

Lady Grahame had argued to herself that if she could but remove Lucy from her path she could easily work upon the general to make a will in her sole favour.

This once accomplished how easy it would be to rid herself of her elderly husband, and with the wealth that would then be at her disposal she would easily be able to marry a younger and handsomer man, and spend the rest of her days in riotous luxury and dissipation—for such was the bent of her mind, and the general's quiet mode of life did not at all meet her views.

All this Jack had been able to gather whilst standing in the balcony before the window of Lady Grahame's chamber.

No wonder, then, that the sudden appearance of Jack in the midst of such a conversation should have sent the lady's maid into a fainting fit.

Upon the hardened Lady Grahame, however, his appearance produced no outward appearance of fear.

What amount of trepidation was at her heart Heaven alone could tell.

She stood erect and looked Jack dauntlessly in the face.

"I fear not fiend nor man," she cried; "the former I doubt the existence of, therefore you must be the latter. So name your price, Spring-Heeled Jack, I will pay it whatever it is, and trust to your honour to hold your tongue when you have received it."

Jack gave a demoniacal grin.

"Not that you could do me any harm by repeating the words that you have doubtless overheard," she went on.

Again Jack smiled his fearful smile.

"Who would take the word of a highwayman and midnight thief against that of Lady Grahame?" she cried, defiantly, now thoroughly convinced that she did stand in some amount of danger at the hands of this extraordinary being.

Jack made no reply, but seizing her by the wrist drew her towards the chamber door.

Vainly she struggled, Jack's powerful grasp bound her too fast for any chance of escape.

Surely but slowly she felt herself approaching the door that would lead her straight into the presence of her husband.

She was about to offer Jack money once more, though she felt certain from his manner that it would be of no avail, when the door suddenly opened and the general stood in the doorway.

With a startled look he took in the whole scene.

Ere he had time to inquire the meaning of the strange drama being enacted before his very eyes Jack had released his hold upon Lady Grahame's wrist, and bowing gravely to the general, said—

"Pardon this intrusion, Sir Charles Grahame."

The baronet started slightly as he heard his name mentioned, but said nothing.

"Pardon this intrusion; but I am here on a very serious mission, and I must kindly ask you to answer any questions which I may put to you."

Again the baronet bowed, for he was strangely impressed by Jack's manner, and felt that our hero's presence in that room was caused by no sinister motive.

"Go on, mysterious being; whatever you may be, go on, and anything consistent with honour I will tell you."

"You have a daughter, Lucy?" said Jack.

"I have," answered Sir Charles.

"By the terms of your father's will she is entitled to the whole of your estates at your death, and you cannot alter it?"

"By the terms of the entail of the Grahame estate, which are bound to descend to the eldest daughter in the absence of male issue, Lucy is irrevocably entitled to my estates at my death; all that I have power over is any money which I may have saved."

The baronet answered freely and fully, for he was more than ever confident now that Jack was here for the good of himself and his daughter.

"If she died before you it would be in your power to dispose of the property as you chose?" asked Jack.

"Yes, for the entail would cease then. We two, my daughter and I, are the only living representatives of our branch of the Grahames, and the time-honoured baronetcy must die with me."

"Then let me tell you," cried Jack, rising to his full height and pointing his long claw-like finger at the still defiant, although silent, Lady Grahame. "Let me tell you that I have heard this night a plot—a plot so fiend-like that I cannot doubt but that you will feel incredulous at first, but a plot the existence of which you are bound eventually to believe."

"Go on, for Heaven's sake!" cried the baronet, hoarsely.

"At any rate," said Jack, "whether you believe my words or not I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that I have saved your lovely daughter's life; for after hearing what I am going to tell you, doubt it as you may, you will be put upon your guard, and that will be quite sufficient."

At the mention of his daughter's name the baronet gave a gasp, but he could not articulate the words he desired to.

Briefly but impressively Jack told the baronet how he had witnessed the attempted murder on the Arun, of course concealing his identity with Jack Turnbull.

Lady Grahame now for the first time spoke.

"Why listen to this midnight thief?" cried she.

"Silence!" thundered Jack.

Then turning to the baronet he explained that his suspicions being aroused he had listened outside the window, and he repeated word by word the conversation he had overheard between Lady Grahame and Ellen Clarke.

Horror, doubt, and uncertainty were expressed on the baronet's face as Lady Grahame vehemently denied the charge, showering every kind of vituperation upon the head of Spring-Heeled Jack.

Our hero stood motionless, the satanic grin on his face.

He knew full well that whether the old soldier believed his story or not, Lucy's life was at least safe from the machinations of her murderous step-mother.

Before the baronet had time to open his lips to reply to his wife, a fresh voice broke upon his ear.

The girl Ellen Clarke had recovered her senses, and had thrown herself upon her knees at the feet of the general.

"Oh! forgive me, Sir Charles," cried the girl, as she grovelled on the ground in front of the astonished baronet. "It is all true; but I was sorely tempted by Lady Grahame, who had me in her power, as I had once stolen a diamond ring belonging to her, and she threatened me with imprisonment if I did not comply with her request, or rather commands. Pray—pray forgive me."

The poor old man, who had faced the enemy on many a well-fought field, thoroughly broke down at this, and agonising sobs thrilled his manly chest.

Lady Grahame stood pale and silent.

She knew the game was up.

She had played her last card, and had lost.

Well, she must accept the inevitable.

She had not much fear of any earthly punishment for her meditated crime.

She knew full well that Sir Charles's keen sense of honour would never permit him to blazon his shame abroad.

For shame it would be for one who bore the honoured name of Grahame to stand at a criminal bar, charged with conspiracy and attempt to murder a step-daughter.

Jack surveyed the scene for a moment in silence.

Then he moved towards the window.

Turning to the baronet, he said—

"My work is done; I have saved your daughter's life; with the punishment you may mete out to these two wretched women I have nothing to do. Farewell!"

"Stay!" cried the baronet, recovering his self-possession, after a struggle. "Who are you, mysterious man? At least let me thank you for my child's life."

"I want no thanks," said Jack; "and as to who I am that I cannot at present tell, for there are reasons why my identity should be concealed. Some day, perhaps, I may present myself to you in proper person."

"But how shall I know that whoever presents himself to me is really yourself?" asked Sir Charles.

"Give me your signet ring," said Jack; "and rest assured that whoever hands it back to you will be Spring-Heeled Jack in person."

The general at once complied, and endeavoured to shake Jack by the hand, but our hero dexterously contrived to wrench it away just as he received the ring.

"No, Sir Charles," said he; "I cannot shake you or any honest man by the hand just now. A time may come—nay, it shall come—when I can do so. Till then, farewell!"

Another instant and Jack had left the room as suddenly as he had entered it.

We will leave the two guilty women and the baronet together for the present, and follow Jack.

Taking his cloak from the balcony, where he had placed it, our hero pulled it closely round him, and, with a spring, alighted on Mother Earth once more.

Hastening round to the front of the hotel, he ordered some brandy to be sent to his room, and calling to Ned, who was in one of the side bars, used as a tap, Jack proceeded to his own room.

Ned Chump followed immediately afterwards, and our hero soon put him in possession of the extraordinary event of the last hour.

"Well, Ned," said he, "I shall commence direct and final operations at once. I have just about time to reach Dacre Hall a couple of hours before daylight."

"Dacre Hall!" cried the astounded salt. "Why, does your honour recollect how far it is?"

"Yes, perfectly," was the reply.

Ned, seeing that his master had made up his mind thoroughly for the adventure, did not further attempt to dissuade him from it.

"I have reckoned the distance," then went on Jack, "and I have ample time to perform all that I intend to do long before the sun peeps above the horizon. Meanwhile give me a glass of that brandy which the waiter has just I brought in, and put the rest in my flask. I shall probably have need of it ere my return. In case I am not back till late in the day, which might make my absence noticed, you had better tell the landlord in the morning that I am slightly indisposed, and you can order my meals to be brought to my room just as if I really was confined to my bed."

"But how about your return? How will you get in?"

"Ha! ha!" laughed Jack. "Why, Ned, you have only to leave the casement of the bedroom wide open, and when I come back surely I can vault on the sill, and so make my entry without being seen."

"Well, you are a wonder, skipper, you are a wonder. Talk about what's his name, Baron—-Baron—"

"Munchausen," put in our hero.

"Yes, skipper, that's the name, but I cannot pronounce it. But talk about he, why, nothing that he wrote about is half so wonderful as what you have already done, let alone what you are going to do."

"Well, good-bye for the present, Ned, I must be off now."

And shaking Ned warmly by the hand the sailor said—

"And may all good luck follow you."

Jack sprang lightly from the casement window, and a quarter of an hour later was considerably over a mile on his way to Dacre Hall, so rapid was the pace at which he was proceeding.

Ned's wondering admiration at his master's powers and good generalship was in no way misplaced, for even while the conversation just narrated was taking place Jack had packed the garments usually worn by Mr. Turnbull into a compact parcel which he attached by a hook to the lining of his capacious cloak.

This he had done because he knew that after his mission at Dacre Hall was performed some hours must elapse before he could regain his quarters at the Bridge House Hotel, Arundel.

By taking the plain clothes with him he could make everything safe.

All he had to do was to deposit the bundle in some convenient nook, and then, when his mission was accomplished, he could regain possession of the clothes, and, by placing them over his tight-fitting disguise, and removing his mask and other facial disfigurements, he could speedily transform himself from Spring-Heeled Jack into Jack Turnbull.

In the garb of that young gentleman, and with the cloak slung over his arm, he could go anywhere he pleased during the time which must elapse ere he could return to his hotel.

About a mile from Dacre Hall he met with the only adventure which befel him on his midnight journey.

He heard, apparently some little way in front of him, the sound of a horse's hoofs quietly ambling along the road.

Jack thought to himself—

"That's a farmer going to Lewes market, I'll be bound. Shall I give him a fright, or not?"

Our readers must recollect that Jack was young, and blessed with health and excellent spirits (or he could never have fought against fate as he did), so they will, undoubtedly, excuse the temptation which passed through his mind to frighten the approaching traveller, be he farmer or be he squire.

But ere he had made up his mind whether he should play one of his practical jokes or not, he heard a loud voice cry—

"Stand and deliver!"

This was by no means an uncommon cry in those days, but it was the first time that our hero had had the pleasure of beholding a real live highwayman, so he pushed rapidly along the road until a bend in it revealed a strange spectacle.

An apparently well-to-do farmer, on a smart and sleek-looking cob, was in the middle of the road.

At the side, where a retired lane branched off, stood what seemed to Jack one of the grandest sights he had ever beheld.

The sight in question was worthy of the pencil of Frith, whose picture of Claude Duval, the highwayman, dancing a coranto with a lady in Hounslow Heath, is doubtless well known to most of our readers.

One of the grandest thoroughbreds Jack had ever seen stood motionless at the mouth of the lane, from the ambuscade of which it had evidently just emerged.

Mounted on the back of this magnificent charger was a man who might have stood as model for the greatest sculptor the world ever produced.

His whole form, save his lips, was as motionless as that of the noble animal he bestrode.

His dress was picturesque in the extreme.

He had eschewed the orthodox scarlet, save that in his three-cornered hat he wore the bright red feather of a flamingo.

His tunic, however, was of a beautiful blue, relieved here and there with silver.

His white buckskin breeches, and his well-blacked boots, rising far above his knees, stood out sharply and well-defined in the cold glare of the moon.

His right arm was pointed straight at the head of the unhappy-looking farmer, and that right arm ended in a hand containing a handsomely mounted pistol.

"Good Mr. Highwayman, spare me! I have but little money about me, and that I am going to take over to my landlord's agent, who threatens to turn me out of my farm unless I pay him something by eight o'clock in the

morning, and I have now only just got time to get to his house by that hour."

"Liar!" thundered the highwayman. "I know you are loaded with money, for you are off to Lewes market to buy cattle. Hand over your money, or you are a dead man."

Here was an opportunity for our hero's practical joke, too good to be resisted.

He grasped the situation in an instant, and ere the highwayman had time to fire his pistol, or the farmer to produce his cash, Spring-Heeled Jack, with an awful cry, sprang in the air clean over the heads of the highwayman and his destined victim.

It would be utterly impossible to find words to describe Jack's appearance as he went over the heads of the two horsemen.

The rapidity of his flight in the air distended the flaps of his coat, until they resembled a pair of wings.

His peculiar costume, fitting so tightly to his skin, made him look like a huge bat, with a body of brilliant scarlet.

With a yell of fear from the farmer, and a screech of unearthly sound from the animal he bestrode, horse and rider disappeared along the road to Lewes.

The highwayman on the other hand did not stir, and as well trained was his beautiful steed, that although it trembled with fear for an instant, it did not attempt to bolt as the farmer's horse had done.

As Jack touched the ground again the highwayman took aim at our hero and fired.

The part which he had intended to hit was Jack's forehead, and had the forehead have been where it was apparently situated, the bullet must have gone crashing straight through our hero's skull.

As it was, however, Jack's mask was so constructed as to make his face look about two inches longer than it really was.

This two inches of added matter formed the supposed cranium through which the highwayman's bullet had sped.

With another shriek more supernatural than the first Jack wheeled round, and sprang once more over his adversary's head.

This was too much even for the highwayman, who up till now had not known what fear was.

He had watched the track of his bullet clean through the uncanny-looking being's brain, and felt that it would be impossible to cope with an enemy possessing such extraordinary if not unearthly attributes.

Digging his spurs right up to the hilt in his steed's sides, he lifted the reins, and just as our hero gave a loud mocking laugh of defiance, and waved his plumed cap in the air, the highwayman gave his horse a cut, and leaping the hedge at the roadside, the noble steed and its rider were soon lost to view.

"Well, that was a lark," said Jack to himself as he rapidly strode on in the direction of Dacre Hall; "but it was a close shave, though, for I felt that bullet graze the top of my scalp in a most decidedly unpleasant manner."

Half-an-hour later, and he was at the lodge-gates of his ancestral home.

Everything now depended upon his caution, and Jack was resolved that no fault of his should mar the performance of his plans.

He knew the room which had been allotted to Morgan when he first took up his abode at the Hall, but still that room might have been changed, and it would have been fatal to our hero's scheme to have made a mistake on that score.

The only thing, therefore, was to rouse up the lodge-keeper, and find from him in his certain fright the position of the room occupied by Mr. Alfred Morgan.

The lodge consisted of only two rooms—one up and one downstairs.

In the former Jack knew that the lodge-keeper slept.

There was a stone ballustrade outside the window of the bedroom, and on to this Jack lightly sprang.

To open the casement was an easy task.

This done, Jack cried out, in sepulchral tones—

"Awake, awake, awake! old man, awake!"

The lodge-keeper woke with a start, but he was not so frightened as Jack had expected him to be.

The fact of the matter was, Michael Dacre was not at all popular with the servants, and they had heard with some amount of delight of the various adventures he and Morgan had had with Jack.

"Good Mr. Spring-Heeled Jack," cried the lodge-keeper, "what do you want? If it is anything I can do for you tell me, and consider it done."

"I merely want to know in which room Mr. Morgan sleeps," replied Jack, highly delighted at the turn things had taken.

"In the blue room, sir," answered the lodge-keeper.

"Can I trust you not to raise an alarm for an hour or so? I have important business with Mr. Alfred Morgan, but shall not trouble your master."

"Aye, Mr. Spring-Heeled Jack, that you can," he said; "and if you can only frighten him out of this place you will earn the thanks of the whole

household."

The man's tone was so self-evidently sincere that Jack, with a farewell warning, sprang to the ground, and hastened towards the window of the blue room.

To his surprise and momentary annoyance, he found that there was no vestige of a sill to the window.

The diamond-paned leaden casement was flush with the outer wall.

After a brief consideration, Jack made up his mind.

"I'll risk it," he said. "I have been successful so far, and surely I shall not fail now."

In another instant he had sprang harlequin-like clean through the window, carrying before him glass, frame, and all.

As he dashed like a stone from a catapult into the room his head struck against a human form, and when our hero had recovered his lost balance he discovered in the full light of the moon Morgan lying prone on the floor.

"Rise, and give me all the papers you have, or stay—you can lay where you are. I can see your valise there, and there, I know, you carry your private journal, and so on. I'll take it, and save you the trouble of rising. Lay where you are, and don't attempt to leave this house for three hours, or fear the hangman, for yours is a hanging offence."

Without another word Jack flung the valise out of the window, and speedily followed it himself.

As Jack left the room Morgan rose from the floor, and, trembling with fear, said—

"Fear the hangman! Fear the hangman, indeed! I fear nothing but this cursed Spring-Heeled Jack, who seems to haunt every moment of my life. I'll end it at once."

And end it he did, for half-an-hour later the dead body of Alfred Morgan was swinging from a hook in a rafter above his bed.

He had cheated the hangman, but he had hanged himself.

Jack did not reach the Bridge House until late the next night, when all was quiet in the hotel.

He had no difficulty in effecting an entrance into the bedroom, but he found he could not carry the valise up with him, so he secreted it in an outhouse.

He rapidly made Ned acquainted with the events which had occurred, and wound up by saying—

"And I really believe that the valise contains the proofs of my cousin's and his accomplice's villainy."

And so it proved in the morning, when Ned, who had risen very early, had contrived to smuggle the bag in unseen.

There lay every link in the chain of fraud, including a paper signed by the baronet and witnessed by two of the hall servants, stating that he was well aware that Jack was legitimate and the rightful heir to the Dacre baronetcy and estates.

"I must see Sir Charles Grahame about this," said Jack.

"He has enquired for you several times during your absence, Sir John," replied the faithful fellow.

A glow of pride passed over Jack's face as he stretched forth his hand to Ned.

"Thanks, old fellow; it is only fitting that you, who have stuck to me in adversity, should be the first to congratulate me in my prosperity. Go and ask the general if he can favour me with an interview."

Ned immediately obeyed, and a quarter of an hour later our hero was closeted with Sir Charles Grahame. Little more remains to be told.

The general was delighted when he found that the man who had twice saved his daughter's life, first in the guise of Jack Turnbull, and secondly in that of Spring-Heeled Jack, should turn out to be no less a personage than Sir John Dacre, of Dacre Hall, Surrey.

In answer to an inquiry made by Jack, Sir Charles informed our hero that Lady Graham had consented, to avoid scandal, to become the inmate of a private lunatic asylum for not less than two years; if she behaved herself during that time Sir Charles intended to take steps for her liberation, and to provide her with an income which would enable her to live in comparative obscurity abroad.

Jack and the general ordered a chaise, and started at once for Dacre Hall, armed with Mr. Morgan's documents.

The task before them was an easier one than they had anticipated.

Michael Dacre had been so shocked by the suicide of Morgan that he at once caved in, and agreed to quit the country, Jack, of course, having no wish to prosecute any one of his own kith and kin, no matter how treacherous his conduct might have been.

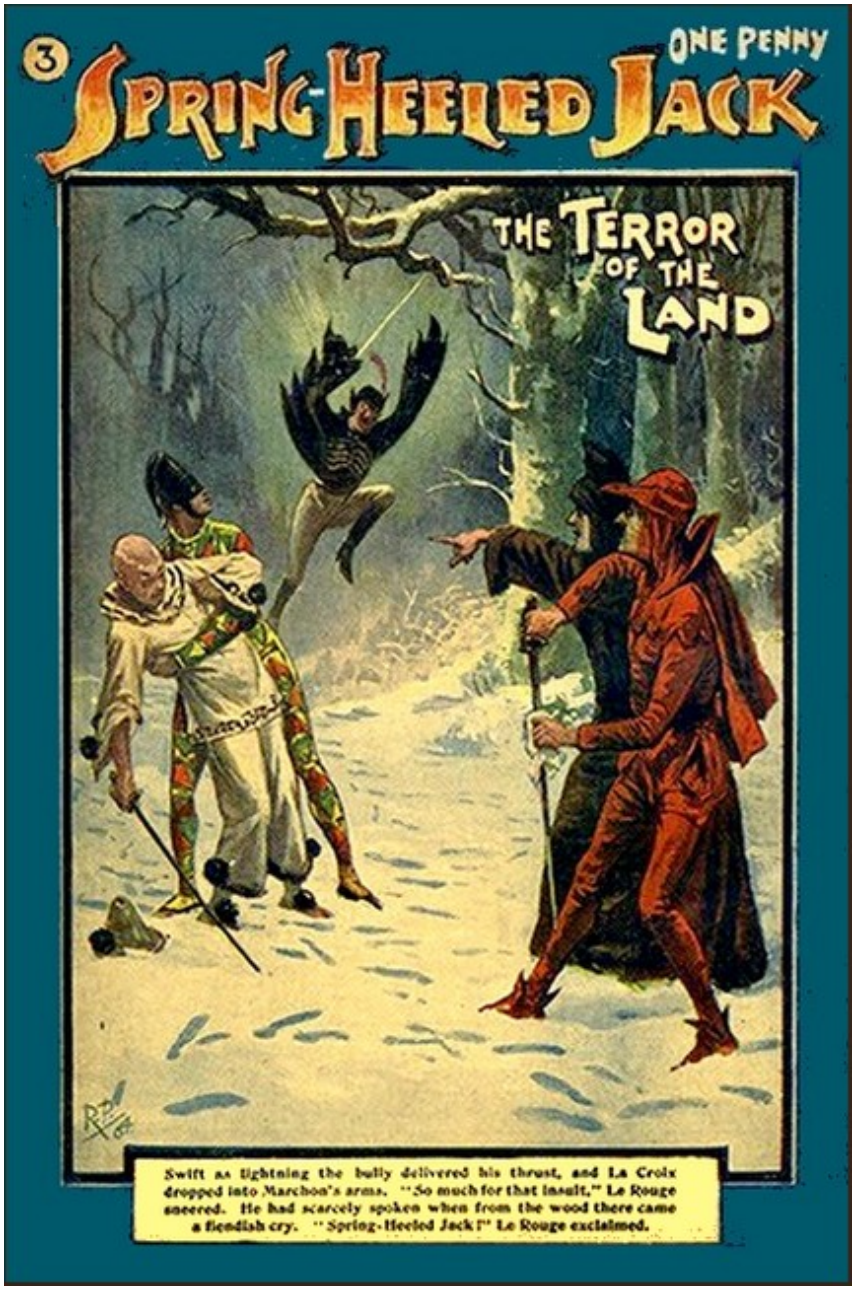
In due course, as our readers must have guessed, Jack and Lucy were married.

Ned was appointed to a post of trust at the hall, and as children grew up around them few mortals enjoyed so much earthly happiness as the family and household of Sir John Dacre.

Our story is ended.

After Jack's resumption of his title many scamps and ruffians played the part of Spring-Heeled Jack in various garbs in and around London, but the story which we have told of brave Jack Dacre is the only authentic history of SPRING-HEELED JACK.

GALLERY OF IMAGES

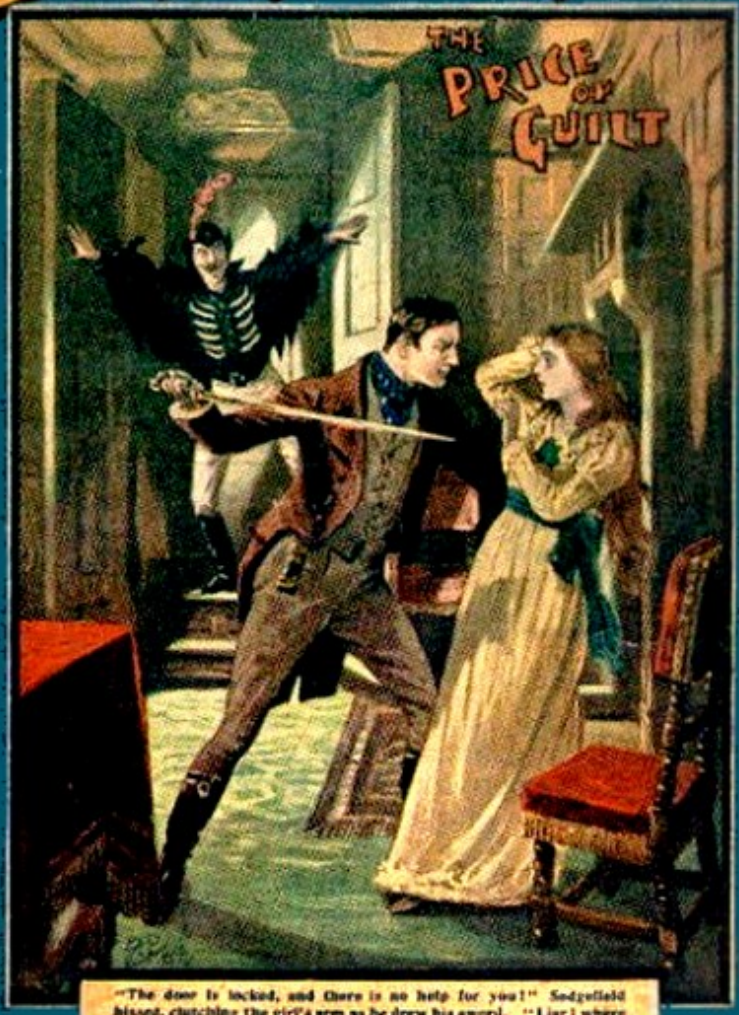


An Early Penny Dreadful with a Coloured Cover.

5

ONE PENNY

SPRING HEELED JACK



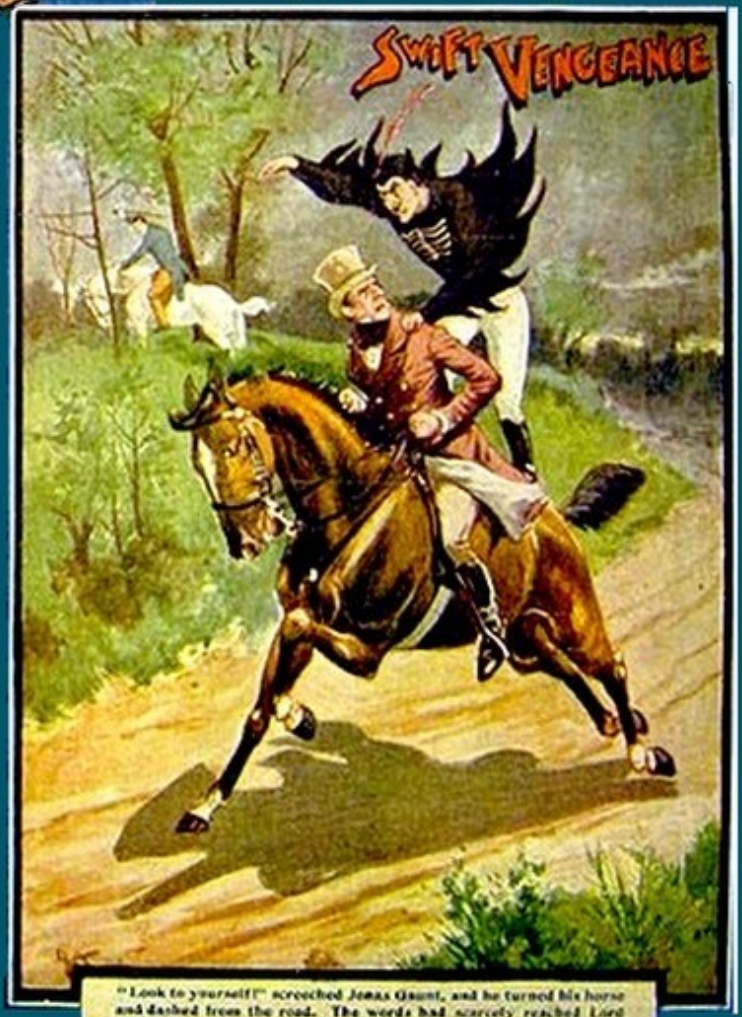
"The door is locked, and there is no help for you!" Sedgefield hissed, clutching the girl's arm as he drew his sword. "Liar! where I am there is help for the weak and oppressed!" The doors of a cabinet flew open, and Spring-heeled Jack appeared.

Early Penny Dreadfuls with Coloured Covers.

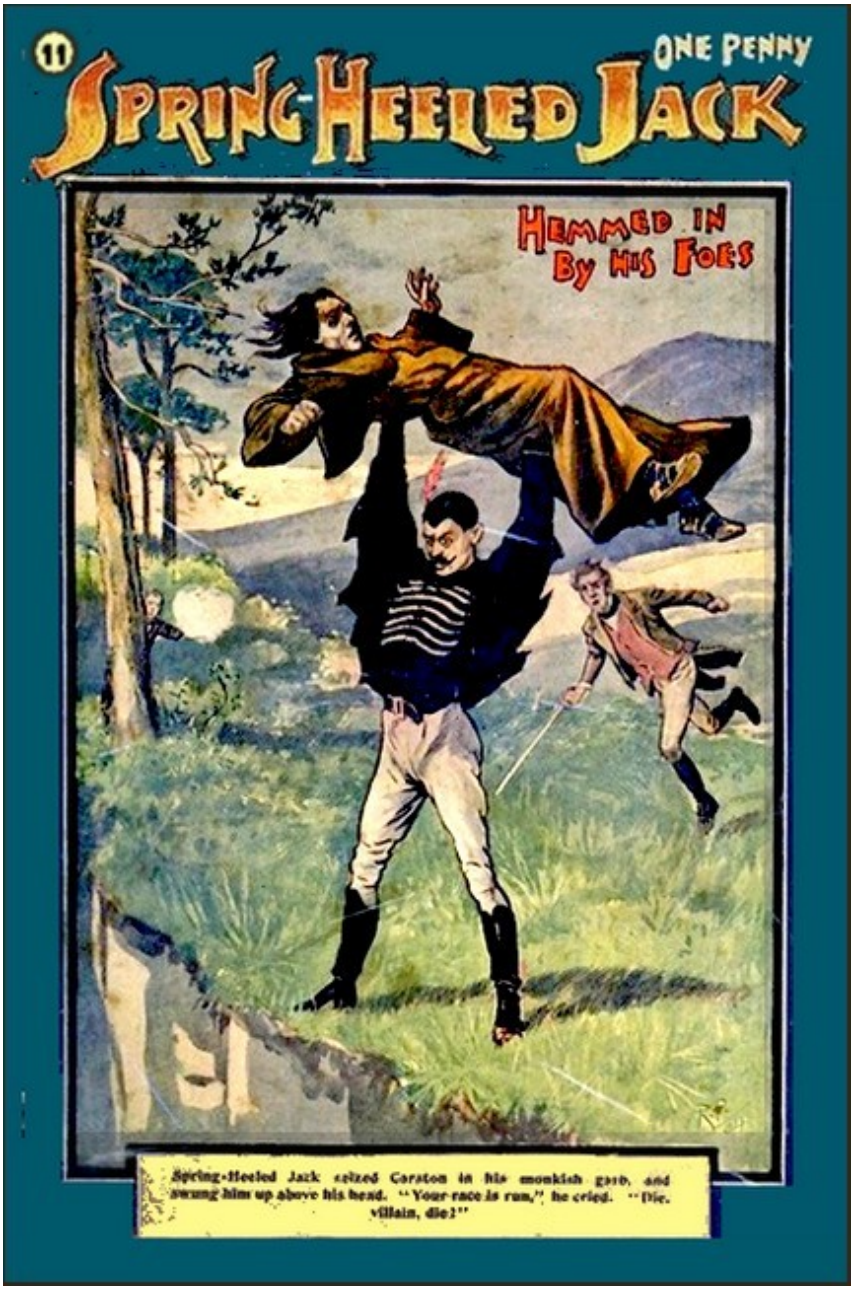
8

ONE PENNY

SPRING-HEELED JACK



"Look to yourself!" screeched Jonas Gaunt, and he turned his horse and dashed from the road. The words had scarcely reached Lord Quinton's ears when something alighted on his horse, and a hand of steel gripped him. He was in the clutches of Spring-heeled Jack.



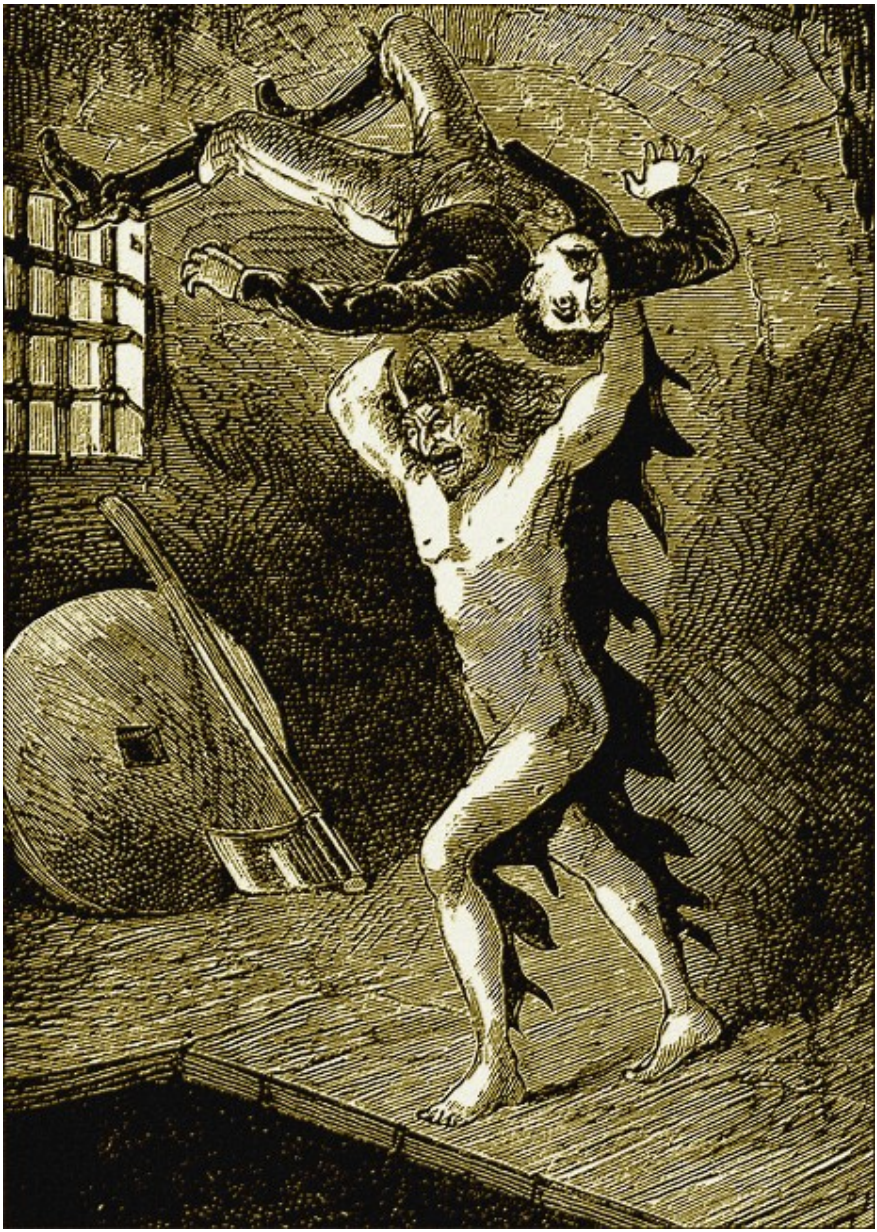
Early Penny Dreadfuls with Coloured Covers.

Booh!

A Kidnapping

Spring-Heeled Jack Leaps Over a Gate.

Spring-Heeled Jack Appears.



Spring-Heeled Jack Casts Victim Into a Pit.

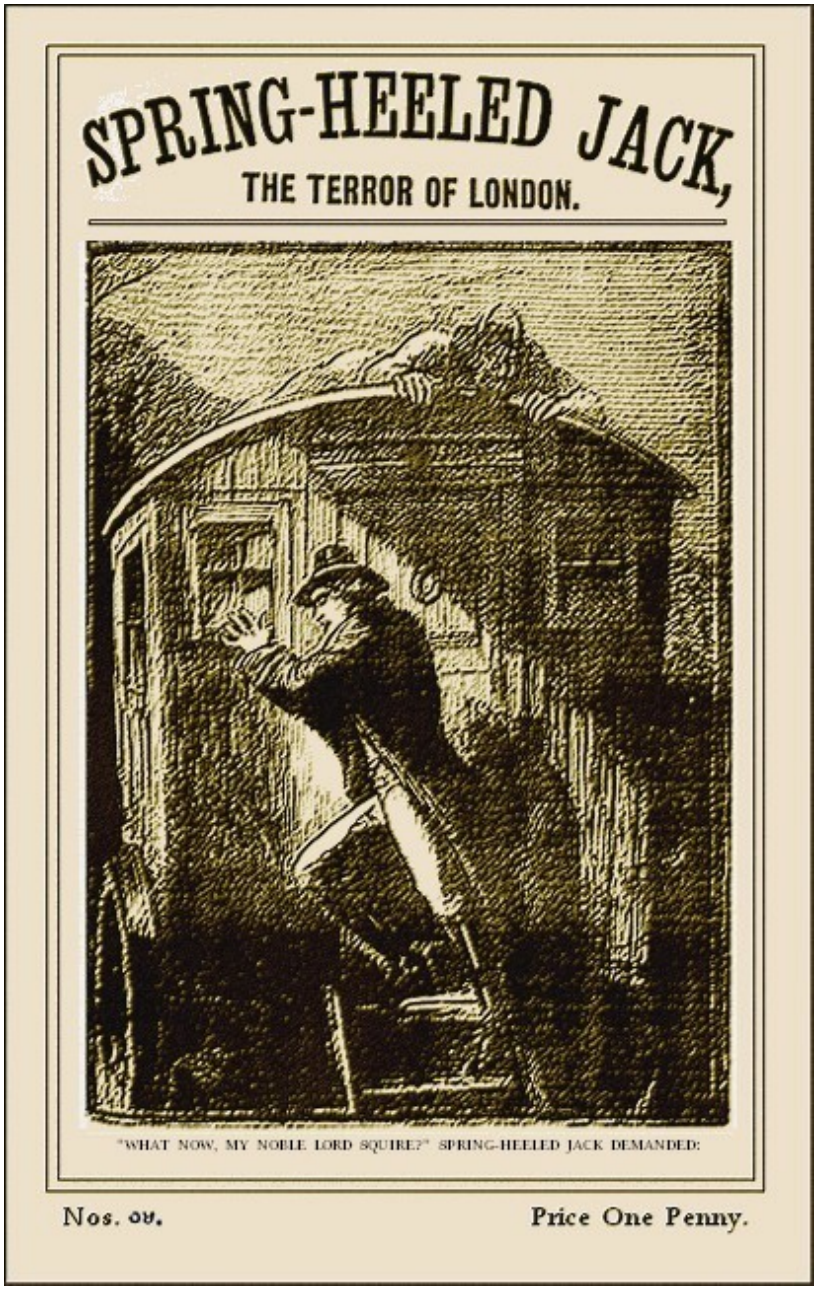
Spring-Heeled Jack Attacks a Rider.

SPRING-HEELED JACK,

THE TERROR OF LONDON.

THE WINDOW SHIVERED AS SPRING-HEELED JACK LEAPED BODILY THROUGH IT.

No. 32. Price One Penny.



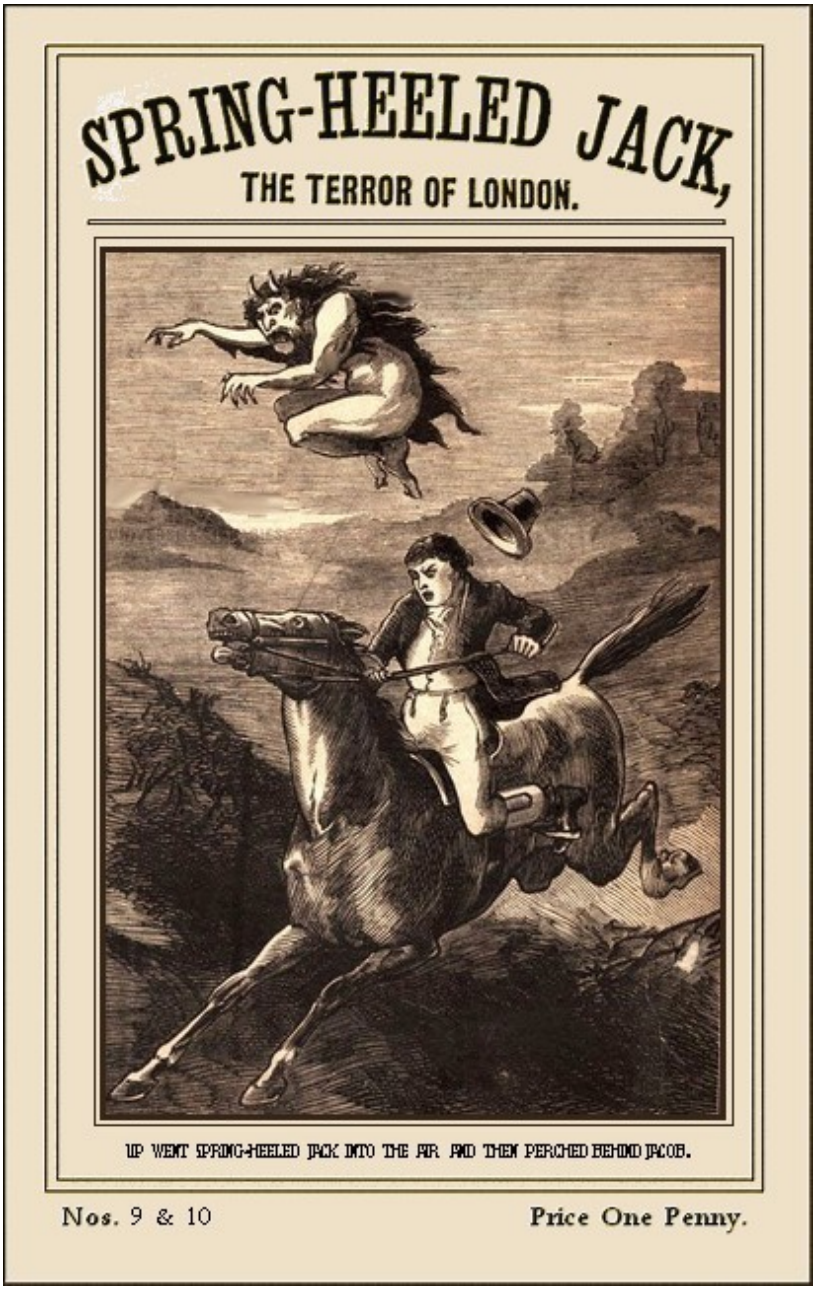
Early Penny Dreadfuls with Monochrome Covers.

SPRING-HEELED JACK,

THE TERROR OF LONDON.

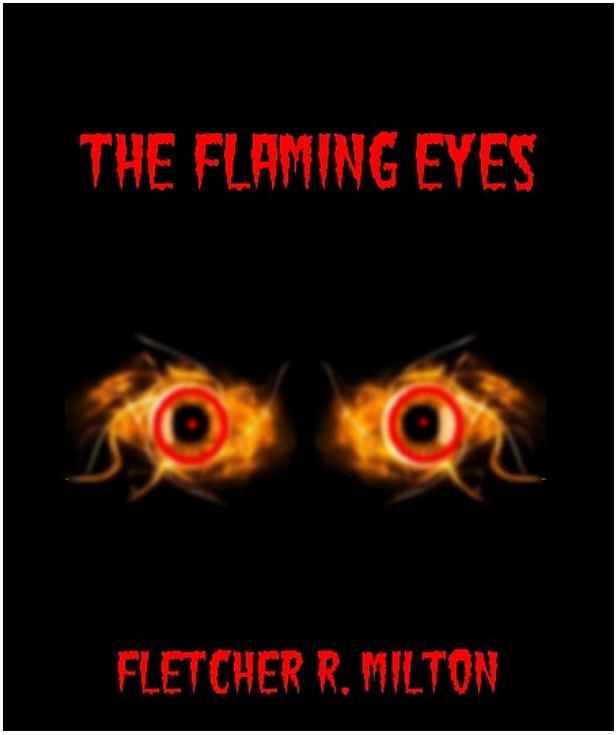
AS SPRING-HEELED JACK APPEARED A TERRIFIC EXPLOSION SHOOK THE BUILDING

Nos. 19 & 20. Price One Penny.

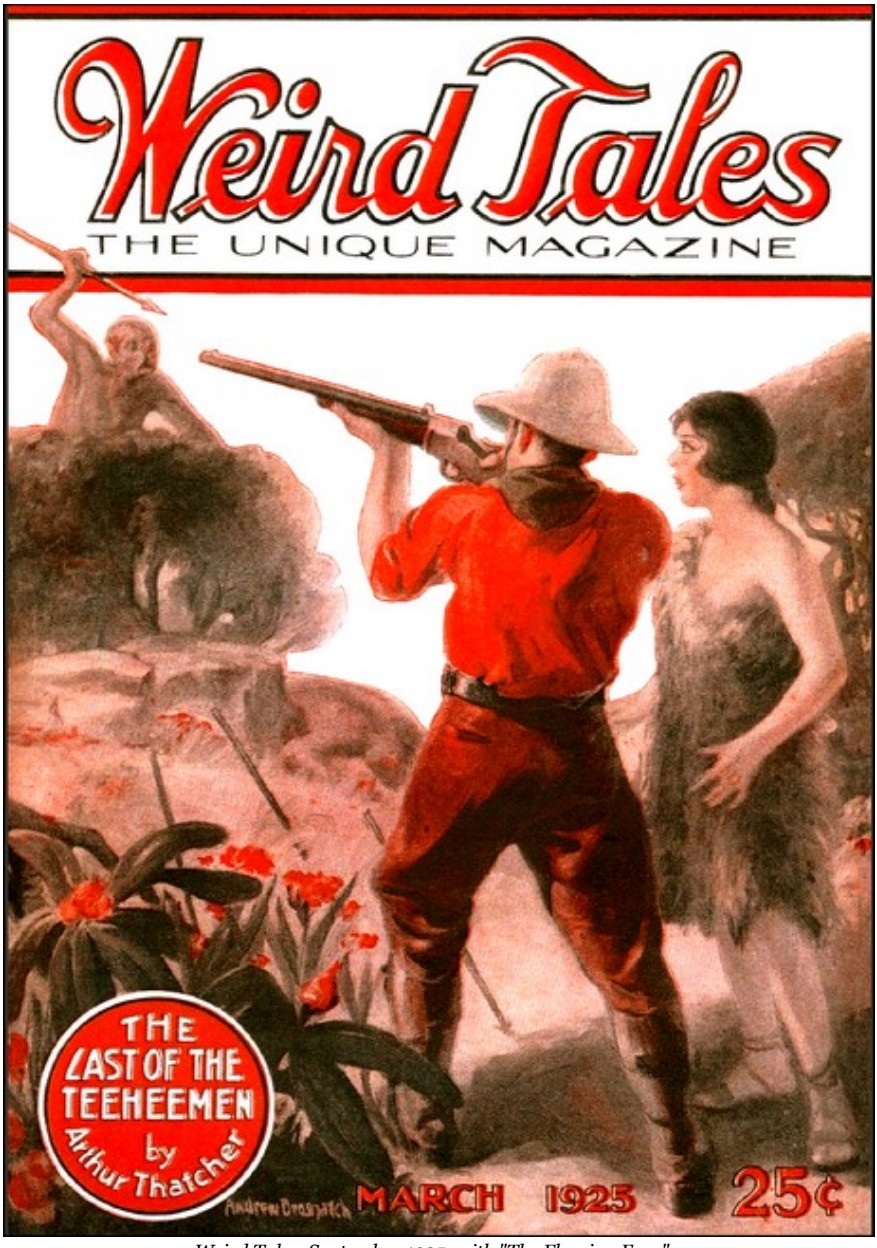


Early Penny Dreadfuls with Monochrome Covers.

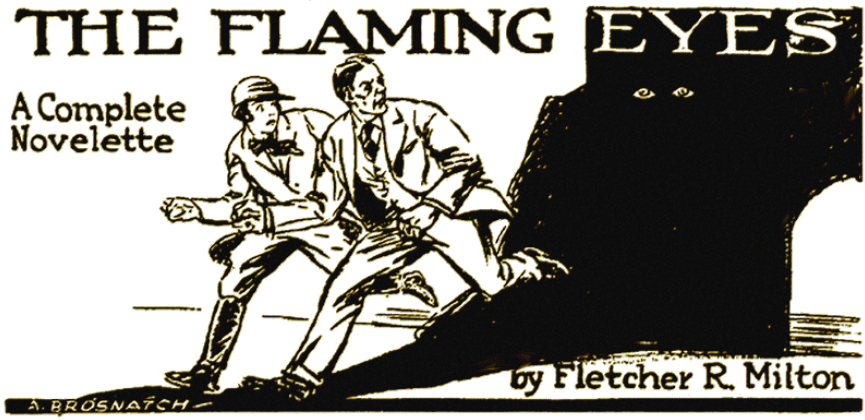
THE END



First published in *Weird Tales*, March 1925



Weird Tales, September 1925, with "The Flaming Eyes"



Headpiece from "Weird Tales"

1.

THE night was black and stormy. The sharp wind which had been blowing all day had freshened toward evening, so that now at about 8 o'clock, as I returned to town after a protracted day at the neighboring cliffs, it was a terrific gale.

An archeologist by profession, I had spent the past week searching the cliffs for hidden openings, crude steps, or ancient ladder-ways, which should support my documentary evidence of the existence of an ancient cliff city in great caverns in the solid rock. The chief result of my investigations in Arizona had been the discovery of a number of carvings on stone, which when deciphered made reference to a magnificent city once existing in the cliffs near the present city of X.

Accordingly I had come with the ardent hope of making discoveries which should compare with those recently made by myself and others in the valley of the Euphrates.

X is a small city of about five thousand souls situated in the central pan of New Mexico. On account of its hot and cold springs it has earned for itself a considerable reputation as a health resort. Though it is in nowise a beautiful town, the climate is dry, the air is pure and clean and the temperature is warm, often indeed very hot. Accordingly many people have flocked into it to receive the cure promised by the magical waters of its springs and its health-giving air.

The city itself spreads all the way across a sloping ridge, which gradually rises upward until it terminates in an abrupt precipice, along whose steep sides I had been making my search. Although there is only one main business street, there are shops scattered about in various parts of the town.

On this late evening I was passing a small curio shop, in the window of which were displayed curiously carven oriental images, incense burners and

so on, and as I looked into it I remembered a purchase I had so far neglected to make.

About a year before I had received by mail a fantastic oriental devil in bronze, along with a rather odd letter. The letter was from an older acquaintance of mine, then living in X, but of whom I had received no word since that time. It stated that this quite innocent-looking image was casting a curse over my friend's life, that it had a strange history which he would refrain from telling, and suggested that I use my own judgment about keeping the gift or giving it away. I did use my judgment and, as the cast figure was of hollow bronze, I conceived the idea of having it converted into an incense burner, which I did accordingly. But so far I had never thought of getting the incense, and the bronze devil stood unused on a shelf at home.

Now, quite willing to get out of the wind for a moment, I entered the shop.

As the door opened, the wind of itself almost blew me inside, and before I could close the door again behind me there had been havoc done in the shop. I saw packages, cards and papers flying from the counter, and just as I managed to get the door closed I heard a crash of a falling object.

I stepped forward with an apology on my lips.

As I did so I saw the proprietor, a tall, dark-skinned East Indian in flowing Hindoo garb, facing me with his teeth showing in an evil snarl. His teeth were yellow and long, and as he stood with his mouth half open I had a feeling that I was facing a wolf rather than a human being.

But it was his eyes which stilled my tongue and sent wild chills down my back. They were red, flaming red, and just now they were two seething pits of fire which seemed to sear my very soul. I had a moment of terrible fear. I felt the hair starting to stand straight up on my head.

Then the East Indian let his eyes fall from mine to the floor. He stooped, and as I stepped forward I saw him holding broken fragments of some object in his hand. I saw behind the counter other fragments, evidently the pieces of the article which had fallen as I entered.

While he stood contemplating a grotesquely-shaped arm and the squat body of some oriental figure, I put my hand into my pocket.

"I am sorry," I said, drawing out my purse. "I will pay for it."

"You pay?" Again his eyes blazed into my own. "You pay for this?"

"Yes," I said, taking a banknote from my purse. "The wind. My fault."

"No." His mouth closed into a grim line and the flame in his eyes seethed. "You cannot pay for this with gold! You pay for it only with—your soul!"

"My soul!" I repeated, feeling my senses numb as my eyes looked into his.

As his eyes flamed into mine I felt as if I were near an immense blazing furnace. I felt the heat on my face, felt it searing my body, felt my throat

parch.

Then he was speaking again and his eyes were turned to the floor.

"It is nothing. See? I will break it again."

He raised his arm and threw the pieces of the broken figure on the floor so that they were shattered again into dozens of smaller particles. I experienced a distinct shock as the fragments struck the floor and immediately I felt the sweat breaking out on my face.

Then he was speaking in a soft, friendly voice.

"You wished something, sahib?"

"Some incense—sandalwood," I muttered, taking my handkerchief from my pocket and wiping my forehead, which was beaded with sweat.

He turned away, and when he faced me again I surveyed the man and was surprised to think that I had imagined anything unusual or uncanny about him. His eyes were brown, though with a lurking reddish tinge in their depths. He was smiling pleasantly enough and I noted that his swarthy face was almost handsome. His age was hard to determine, anywhere from thirty-five to fifty years.

"Sorry, sahib," he apologized. "No sandalwood. But I have something better. Rare incense. Would you like it?"

"Yes. Anything will be all right," I replied, anxious to be gone.

He took a small oblong package from beneath the counter, wrapped it and handed it to me. I held the banknote out to him.

"Take out for the broken article," I said.

"No," he replied. "It was nothing, sahib. A trifle. Almost worthless. Forget it."

He handed me my change and I turned and started for the door.

"The incense!" he called after me. "It is rare. Wonderful. You must try it—soon!"

Something in his voice made me turn, and for an instant I felt his eyes blazing into my own. Then the flame died and he smiled at me a pleasant smile.

Without a word I stumbled from the shop, pulled the door shut after me and fought my way onward through the storm.

2.

UPON my arrival in the town I had rented a small house, vacant for some time previous to my occupancy and distant from the curio shop about three blocks. I had three rooms and a bath, one room as a living room, one as a bedroom, and one as a study. It was in this latter room that I kept my documents and studied over them, and in fact it was here that I spent the most of

my time when indoors. My meals I took out at a restaurant about a block distant. The house was equipped with an electric water-heater for my bath, and I had a woman come in and tidy up each day. All in all I was fixed very comfortably indeed.

After a late dinner at the restaurant I arrived at my house, and went immediately to my study. I drew books and papers before me and tried to interest myself in my work. But I was curiously disturbed. I was unable to shake off a feeling of restlessness. I could not fix my mind upon the matters in hand, and finally I pushed books and papers aside. For a while I sat nervously clasping and unclasping my hands, and finally I got to my feet and began to pace back and forth across the floor.

There was nothing that should have worried me. Naturally I was somewhat discouraged by my failure so far to find a hint of the cliff city, but that alone should not have depressed me, as I knew that I had not yet made more than a superficial examination of the region. Otherwise I had a good, comfortable private income and a host of friends scattered in all parts of the world. In addition I had won honors in archeology, of which I could be justly proud.

In my pacing between the study table and the door I chanced to raise my eyes and I saw the grotesque, grinning devil-incense burner on a shelf on the far wall, beyond the table and directly opposite the door leading into my living room. Immediately my heart gave a throb and I felt a thrill through my whole body.

Rare incense! The East Indian had urged me to try it soon! I would try it now!

I hurried across the room, took down the grinning devil and set it on the study table. Then I took the small oblong package from my overcoat pocket and opened it. I found it to contain six slim cigarette-like cubes of reddish-brown incense. The color was peculiar, and I felt myself wondering where I had seen it before. Then I remembered the Hindoo's eyes. The cubes of incense were exactly the color of the oriental's eyes after the flame had died in them.

I lifted the head off the devil-incense burner, thrust one of the cubes down into the hollow cavity of the bronze body and, procuring a match from a box on the table, lighted the upper end of the cube.

When the match died I found myself gazing at a red, flaming eye on the end of the cube of incense! One eye! The Hindoo had had two eyes that glowed just like that! I took another cube from the box, lighted it and thrust it into the cavity beside the other, where it glowed and seethed with a red flame.

Two eyes! Two flaming red eyes! If only there were the long yellow-teeth!

I became conscious of a pungent perfume. The odor was peculiar, intoxicating. I felt myself suddenly filled with a great elation, a sense of power.

The aromatic smoke floated upward to the ceiling. The two eyes glowed. I felt them searing deep into my own.

With an effort I lifted the grinning head and set it back on the slender shoulders. But I could still see the glow through the hollow devil-eyes, pin-points of flaming red.

The grayish-white smoke of the burning incense poured from the mouth of the devil and trailed upward to the ceiling. It filled the whole room. My sense of power increased. I was conscious of a feeling of lightness.

The smoke grew dense. The table gradually became obliterated before my eyes. Only the grinning devil with its two glowing eyes was visible. Finally even it was obliterated.

I was light, light like air. I was floating. I had a sense of motion as of running, or of flying.

Through an immense wind-swept region, past leering gods and grinning devils, past a great belching flame that seared my body and parched my throat. Then into an intensely cold place, damp, soggy, freezing cold, so that the perspiration froze on my body. Then into pleasant warmth where was a great quiet and peace.

3.

THE room was luxuriously furnished, thick carpets on the floor, two or three upholstered chairs near the door, and a small mahogany stand in the center. Glowing electric chandeliers filled the room with bright light.

The room was small, perhaps an anteroom. I stood in the middle of the room. Before me was a curtained doorway. I was fully self-possessed, sure.

I tiptoed to the doorway, peered through it. There was intense blackness in the room beyond. I felt a flashlight in my hand and snapped it on so that a fan-like arm of light swept across the dark room.

Then I started across it, past chairs and tables to a door at the far side.

I stopped by the door, which was partly ajar. A soft, mellow light shone through the opening into the room.

I became conscious of a faint hissing noise, which seemed to rise and fall as by regular rhythm. After a prolonged hiss there would be a choking cough, then another hiss, followed by silence broken almost instantly by a hiss, and so on.

Listening, I had a sudden feeling of fear, of panic. I snapped off my flashlight and stood quavering in the darkness.

The sound was in front of me, inside of the room from which the light streamed. Something impelled me forward. I felt myself moving toward the door.

Then I stopped, while my blood froze. There was someone behind me! I heard light footfalls on the carpet! I heard quick breathing! Someone was approaching!

I crept silently away from the doorway into the darkness. In my left hand was the flashlight, while in my right I gripped the handle of a short automatic.

The intruder approached the door. I saw the opening widening. Slowly, cautiously, the door swung wide. I crouched behind a table (a billiard table it seemed to be) to hide myself from the light that spread out toward me from the open door.

From my position I could see quite clearly into the room beyond. The room was lighted by four glaring eyes of light, which glowed brilliantly from the sockets of two great bronze images, which stood with outspread arms on a raised platform opposite the doorway. The figures were stolid, but the features were commanding and with the glaring eyes made a startling picture. In front of the platform was a low altar railing, and between this and the door I could see low benches, apparently of stone. The floor was uncarpeted and of stone or concrete.

The hissing seemed to come from behind the images, and I could detect a trace of white smoke or steam rising upward over the heads of the bronze figures.

An arm appeared across the lighted doorway, a shoulder. Then a slim figure framed itself there, a form straight, graceful. Slender legs cased in white riding breeches, slender arms in well-cut riding jacket. A gray cap was pulled low over the forehead.

Cautiously the slender figure crept through the doorway into the room, toward the raised platform. I caught the gleam of a knife in the right hand of the grim stalker, and I felt that certainly there must be something living in that room as an objective.

I found myself in the midst of a terrible mental struggle. I had an overpowering impulse to run forward, to interfere in what would evidently be cold-blooded murder enacted in that hissing room. Against this impulse I felt an impelling force holding me to silence, to inaction. It seemed as if a voice were speaking in command:

"Wait until the knife strikes, till death-screams rend the air, then take aim, shoot the murderer!"

At one time I felt my arm rising, my eyes taking bead on the slender moving figure, waiting for the arm with the gleaming knife to upraise, to strike once, perhaps twice, at some unseen animated form, then to shoot.

But my brain cleared. My impulse to interfere was mastered. I thrust my automatic into my belt, my flashlight into my pocket, and got to my feet. I ran forward, swiftly, silently, through the door and upon the death-stalker.

My adversary was taken by surprise: he had not heard my approach. But he was agile and quick to struggle, though I found him no match for me in strength.

For a moment we struggled silently, without sound. Then the struggle ended as abruptly as it had started. My adversary went limp in my arms, so that I had to hold him to keep him from falling.

The instinct to flee was strong upon me. I picked up my unconscious antagonist and ran with his body in my arms, out of the lighted room into the blackness of the room beyond. There I stopped and listened. Still the regular choked hissing, and no sight or other sound of anything living in the room.

Hesitating barely an instant, I ran out of the darkness into the lighted anteroom, which I had left just a few minutes before.

Reaching the lighted room, my captive began to struggle again in my arms and squirmed free, the cap falling from his head as he did so.

Then I was amazed to see that the would-be murderer was a woman, young, beautiful, in trim, dainty riding costume. Light golden hair crowned a clear white forehead. Her blue eyes were wide as she looked into mine, her red-lipped mouth was parted in surprise, in fright.

4.

"WHO—who are you?" she gasped, drawing away from me and preparing herself for flight.

I stepped close to her and suddenly clasped my arms on her shoulders, and held her so. She made a movement as if to raise the knife which she still hold in her hand, but I held her so tightly she could not. After a moment she ceased to struggle and stood before me listless.

"Who are you?" she repeated insistently.

"I might better ask that than you," I said, shaking her roughly. "How come I to find you with a knife in your hand, creeping into that room, intent evidently upon stabbing someone whom I could not see?"

"I—I do not know. I am—afraid."

She looked at me with a great fear in her eyes.

"Who is in that room? Whom were you going to kill?" I insisted.

"I do not know," she repeated. Then, as she saw the pistol in my belt, she asked, "Why are you here, with a pistol strapped to your belt?"

I suddenly felt at a loss. My mind groped for the answer to her question. There was, there must be a good logical reason why I should he there. I looked at the pistol, which I remembered thrusting into my belt as I ran forward upon the form with the upraised knife. It was my own. It was the automatic which I always carried with me into dangerous places. I had carried it

along with me today to the cliffs. And it had been gripped in my hands but a moment ago.

"Why?" she insisted, with a note of sharpness in her voice.

"Why—I—I don't know." I stammered uncertainly. "I seem to have forgotten something."

"You were going to shoot—me," she guessed.

I remembered my impulse when she was creeping into the lighted room and I knew that she was right, partly at least. And she...

"Were you not stalking me to stab me to death?" I asked, looking her squarely in the eyes. She had very beautiful eyes, deep, alluring, mysterious.

She made no reply for a moment, and I sensed that she was undergoing a mental struggle. In a moment she spoke in a voice low and musical.

"I must not, dare not tell you, anything. I am afraid to tell you. You might be... Tell me, who are you? Tell me!"

I felt an urge to hold my tongue, but I disregarded it.

"I am Andrew Bishop, archeologist, carrying on investigations which I hope will result in the discovery of an ancient cliff city. I am a man of reputation and honor, and worthy of your trust and confidence. Now, pray tell me who you are. What are you doing here? Why are you afraid?"

"I cannot tell you who I am or why I have the knife in my hand, though if I told you you would know that I have a better right to be here than you. I do not know what I am afraid of, exactly, something terrible, which is always present and hears everything, sees everything. Strange things have happened and I would not even dare to ask you for help. I have heard of you, but after all I do not know—I fear you may belong to it—the thing!"

"The thing!" I echoed.

"Yes," she whispered. "Don't you feel, almost see, near you, eyes watching, terrible eyes?"

I looked about me apprehensively. I could make out nothing tangible, but I could sense something. Certainly I was afraid.

"Yes," I whispered in reply. "I feel something. Please trust me. I will help you if I can. What can I do?"

"Nothing," she said despairingly. "I cannot escape."

"Escape?"

"No. It is impossible."

"But you can escape. I will help you."

I released her shoulders and took both of her hands in mine, feeling the knife gripped tightly in one of them. I looked into her eyes and I saw confidence and hope growing in them.

Then we heard a sound behind us, in the dark room we had just left. We stood a moment clasping each other's hands, looking at each other with a nameless fear in our eyes.

"Quick!" she whispered, breaking the spell that held us fast. "We must run quickly! Come!"

She grasped my arm and we ran through the door ahead of us, which she pulled open, and out into an intense blackness. We ran and ran, and we heard sounds of pursuit behind us. Once I looked back to see two red eyes flaming behind us out of the darkness. I felt my senses numb.

We stopped suddenly. I knew that she had stopped me.

"It is coming! It will catch us!" she whispered, clutching my arm with one band and pointing with the long-bladed knife in the other. "Run straight on, there. If we separate we may both escape."

"No!"

I felt my senses clearing a little. "I will stay and fight while you escape."

"No! You must not!" she insisted, her breath warm on my cheek. "It would kill you. Go now. Escape. I will be all right. But if you can, come tomorrow night. You have offered to help me and I must have help. I beg you to come!"

"Come? But where?" I asked breathlessly.

"Here. The way you came. Goodbye."

She pressed my hand, released it, and I heard her running.

A moment I stood while my heart pounded. Then I ran on as she had pointed, swiftly. I had a sensation of numbing senses, of bodily elation, of lightness. I was flying, floating.

A terrible cold chilled my limbs, made my lungs ache. Then I was suddenly in fire, in terrific heat which scorched me.

Still I ran, or flew, while angry, grotesque gods and devils struck at me and opened wolf-like jaws to sink yellow fangs into my flesh.

But I evaded all, felt myself being tossed, thrown, blown about like a feather. Then I felt quiet and rest.

5.

THE grotesque oriental devil stood before me on the table. No longer did smoke belch from the half-open, grinning mouth; no longer did two pinpoints of flame glow from the eyes. I lifted the head from the shoulders and saw that the incense had burned completely out. Only a faint trace of the peculiar perfume was noticeable in the room.

The lights blazed from the chandeliers. I looked about me. I stood up, tried my limbs.

I was here alive, and from the look of things I had never been out of this room!

But the vision of those other scenes was vivid in my mind. It was real. It must be real. The bright anteroom, the dark room adjoining, the choked hissing noise, the lighted room and its two images with the brilliantly glaring eyes, the silent form creeping through the lighted doorway, my own pistol upraised. Then my interference, the short struggle, my flight with a light form in my arms, the beautiful girl with her fear-stricken blue eyes, the interruption and our flight, those flaming red eyes pursuing... It was all real enough to make me catch my breath, look about me.

I thought of my pistol. I thrust my hand to my belt and found it there, but that proved nothing, as I had carried my automatic with me to the cliffs. My flashlight also was in my pocket, but I always carried that with me so that I might investigate any openings I should find. Neither pistol nor flashlight proved anything.

Could it have been a dreamt It must have been.

I thought of the girl. She had been so beautiful. She was just the type of girl that I could love. Her alluring blue eyes, her lovely red lips, her beautiful golden hair! I loved her now.

She had told me to come again, that she must have help. Must!

Oh, well. What of it? I should have to dismiss it all as a dream.

I tried to dismiss it and retired to bed. But I could not sleep well that night. I tumbled and tossed and felt myself tormented by a pair of flaming red eyes; haunted by a beautiful girl in white riding-breeches and jacket, whose eyes pleaded for help; startled by choked hissing noises coming to me in a vast endless darkness.

The morning dawned and I started about my usual schedule. After breakfasting at the restaurant I started off to the cliffs with a short pick over my shoulder for exploring into the crevices of the rocks. I spent the whole forenoon searching about and digging in the crannies of the cliff wall. I found nothing to encourage me.

I returned to town at noon and I decided not to go out that afternoon. I was restless, perturbed. I had a sense of impending danger which I tried vainly to shake off. I spent the rest of the day taking in the sights of the little city.

I had always been very much interested in the famous springs which were the chief attraction of the town. There were five springs altogether. Three of these were hot, all close together and enclosed by a high steel-wire fence to guard against small children falling into the scalding water which filled the concrete basin about them. The water did not come up as a geyser, but only bubbled a steady flow of steaming white water.

Watching the white liquid flowing out of the wide lime-encrusted mouths I reflected that somewhere beneath, and not so very far beneath, there must be hot volcanic rocks and molten beds of lava.

Though these hot springs were unusual in themselves, contrast with the other two springs made an unusual phenomenon. These two springs were distant about a block from the three first mentioned, and were also enclosed, with a separate pool of their own. But instead of being boiling hot they were as cold as if they flowed from a frozen glacier. The temperature of the water was only slightly above freezing. This phenomenon was the more unusual on account of the warm dry region. Undoubtedly the springs were fed from some reservoir deep in the earth, kept cold by geologic forces. Certainly no one would believe that there was a glacier underneath. However, there could be no doubt about there being a wide divergence in the sources of the hot and cold springs whose mouths were so close together.

IN the late afternoon I passed the curio shop. Something impelled me to step in, to see if my sensations of the previous evening would be repeated.

There was no wind this evening and I entered without mishap. There was no one visible behind the counter, or in sight anywhere. Nevertheless I was conscious of someone watching me closely. As I looked back toward the rear of the shop I saw facing me a large bronze figure, a huge idol with evil, malevolent grin. I could imagine its great eyes bent on me balefully.

The huge fists of the figure were clasped together and upraised as if to strike or to hurl anything which might be clasped between the great fingers. One leg was thrust forward, and I could imagine a gleam in the wicked black eyes—could imagine that the figure was preparing to run forward upon me.

A moment I stood facing the menacing figure, then, conquered by a nameless fear, I turned and hastily left the shop. Outside I reflected that I had been a fool to allow such uncanny thoughts to master even for a moment my usual courage. Nevertheless I was certain that the figure had not been standing in the rear of the shop on my first visit, at least not in its present striking attitude. I would certainly in that case have noticed it, as would anyone ordinarily observant.

I walked about, trying to shake off a feeling of uneasiness. I dined, and when darkness came on, which it did at that season about 7 o'clock, I returned to my house and went to my study.

The grinning bronze devil still sat on the table as I had left it the night before. My housekeeper had strict orders to disturb nothing in my study, and the orders were carefully observed. I sniffed the air for a trace of the peculiar perfume, but I could smell nothing out of the ordinary.

I sat down before the table and dropped my head in my hands. Against my will my thoughts turned to the strange phenomenon of last night, whether dream or reality I could not decide.

The girl had said she must see me "tomorrow night." That was tonight. But where should I see her? How?

She was in danger. She had asked me to help her. How?

Where was she?

I raised my head and considered the bronze devil. After a moment I lifted off the grinning head. I took out two cubes of incense from the oblong box at my right hand. I thrust them into the hollow bronze body, found a match and lighted them.

The two flaming eyes glowed and seethed. A peculiar aromatic perfume smote my nostrils.

I put the grinning head back on the shoulders. The eyes glowed with pinpoints of red. Grayish-white smoke belched from between the black evil teeth, trailed upward to the ceiling, and filled the whole room.

The smoke became dense, obscured all else. I felt myself flying through a great stillness, past jeering grotesque devils who laughed at me, into white-hot flame, through frozen space, then into comfortable warmth and quiet.

6.

I WAS in absolute darkness. I could see nothing. It was as if I were blind.

Intense stillness reigned. Only the faint heating of my own heart, the quick terrified gasping of my own breath, were audible.

I was on all fours, hands and knees resting on thick carpet. I was listening for something, some sound, some signal.

Finally I heard it: soft footfalls, a door opening behind me. I crouched in the darkness, poised to leap like a beast of prey. I waited until the footfalls sounded opposite, holding my breath, my breast pressed to the thick soft carpet to smother the beating of my own heart.

I allowed the footfall to pass by, to go on and on, away from me into the distance. After an interval I heard the opening of a door, and in a moment I heard it close again.

Then I got to my feet cautiously, silently. As if guided by a sixth sense I moved across the room to a door. I opened the door, stepped through it, and closed it behind me.

A pale subdued light filled the room I was now in, which was bare, unfurnished, uncarpeted. The same deathly silence prevailed. There was no sign of life, of motion.

Cautiously I walked across the room, exploring it. I looked upward. The light entered from overhead, through small round openings. It streamed in faintly as the light might shine into a deep well at night when there was no moon. I could make out nothing clearly, just the bare outlines of a room whose dimensions I was unable to determine.

I waited expectant.

Suddenly a door opened before me. I knew it was not the one through which I had entered. A pale white figure hesitated in the doorway. The door closed and the figure approached. It came near.

"You came!"

In the silence of the room the whisper was loud in my ears. I felt my blood stir.

"Yes," I answered, as I stepped across the room to meet the one who had just entered.

I came close. I saw it was the girl I had known it would be. She was very beautiful in the pale light. She was not now dressed in riding costume but in a long filmy white gown, which showed her arms bare and beautiful, her shoulders white and lovely. I was conscious of the deep blue of her eyes even in the subdued light, while her red-lipped mouth seemed like a pale delicate rosebud just opening to unfold its pinkish glow. She was small, slender, beautiful.

She came to me and gripped my arm; she pulled me away, led me to the door through which she had entered. We went through it together, into a room lighted by chandeliers.

This room was small but brightly furnished, gay pictures on the walls, velvet-covered chairs, a table with a few books neatly arranged upon it. One thing that I noted was the absence of windows, and as I thought of it I knew that this feature was in common with the other rooms I had seen.

Inside the room with the door closed the girl let go of my arm and stood away from me a little. She was breathing quickly as with excitement, her lips slightly parted. I found myself looking into her eyes, drinking in the blue of them, feeling refreshed, exhilarated.

7.

"I AM so glad you came," she whispered after a moment.

"I also am glad," I replied. "Now, please tell me who you are, what you fear, everything."

"I should not do that, but I must," she said. "Will you promise to do as I say after I tell you, to make no move without my permission?"

"I promise," I replied eagerly.

"Then listen carefully. My father in his youth was an explorer, traveler, adventurer. He wandered many times over the face of the globe, visited innumerable out-of-the-way places in many countries. He had many adventures, had many hair-breadth escapes. He was shot at by bandits in Spain, menaced by native spearmen in Africa, but he always escaped with his life, laughing, smiling, debonair.

"This was all before he met my mother. After he met her and married her he settled down and traveled no more, contenting himself with telling to those who would listen, the strange and thrilling adventures through which he had passed.

"But when my mother died a few years ago he became restless. There came on him a longing to have just one more round of adventures before he died. I loved him and did not like to see him go, but I could not ask him to stay and be unhappy.

"He was gone two years. When he came back he was different. He was strange. He seemed to dislike to have other people about. We left our friends and came here, a place much more barren then than it is now.

"I knew that something was preying on his mind. I begged him to tell me what was bothering him. Finally he told me a story.

"He was traveling through an unsettled region in upper India. He was alone, having left his party at a village six or seven miles back and ridden on ahead by himself. He came upon an old ruined temple.

"The temple was apparently deserted, and it awoke his curiosity. He dismounted, tied his horse, and entered. There were rough benches of stone, and at the far end a low platform and an altar-railing.

"He walked down the empty aisle, in his mind a picture of those benches once filled with worshiping natives with a native priest presiding.

"As he stood at the altar-railing looking upward he saw raised above the platform a huge, malevolently grinning god. One of its great legs was thrust forward, its arms were upraised and in the great fists was clasped a small grotesque devil, which he was in the act of dashing down to destruction.

"The whole thing was of bronze, and was symbolic probably of the destruction of forces of evil by a benevolent god. My father went up on the platform to examine the figures.

"He was particularly impressed with the grinning devil in the huge fists of the god. Upon touching this with his fingers he found that dampness and rain had loosened the cement which held it in place. Pulling a little he was able to free it entirely from the great fists.

"My father was daring and, without a thought of any possible consequences, he thrust the small image into his coat pocket. Looking about to see that he had not been observed, he hurried down from the platform and out of the temple. At the entrance he looked back, and he imagined that the face of the god had screwed itself into a look of anger, that the eyes gleamed.

"Shaken a little, and knowing how the superstitious people of the region might act toward a robber of their shrine, he lost no time in getting to his horse. Just as he was ready to mount he heard an angry shouting from the temple, and a large Hindoo in flowing priestly garb came running from the

ruined doorway toward him. He was gesticulating and uttering curses in his native tongue.

"My father sprang upon his horse, and as he did so a half dozen dark-skinned natives appeared along the path by which he had come and menaced him with long glittering knives in their hands. Someone cast a spear and it struck near his horse, frightening it. But he turned the horse as it reared, plunged through the underbrush, and escaped.

"When he came back to his party he made no note of the incident or of the image, as he had taken a fancy to the bronze devil for which he had risked his life and wished to take it home with him without possible interference from the authorities. When he left the country a short time later he smuggled the image out with him.

"AS he finished telling me this story my father brought the bronze devil from a box where he kept it and showed it to me. I have never seen another image quite so fantastic as this. Its evil leering grin was so malevolent as to make one remember the evil face for many days afterwards.

"My father stated plainly that the image seemed to be exerting some strange influence over his mind and actions. After he told me this I urged him to get rid of it, but he would not hear of that.

"Soon afterwards we built a house here. He gave particular attention to fitting up the basement in an unusual style. He fitted up rooms which you would expect to find only on the upper floors, a library, a billiard room, even a bedroom for himself, for, as I have intimated, he seemed to be in great fear of something. Apparently his idea in building these basement rooms was to hide and to have a refuge in case of a possible attack.

"There was one room he fitted up which he would never allow anyone to enter, not even myself. At first he liked to have me down in the basement rooms with him, playing billiards with him or reading to him in the library. But toward the last he took to spending most of his time in this mysterious room.

"One day I was on the first floor when I heard a scream from the basement. I ran down the stairs. I ran through the lower rooms and I saw nothing of my father. I came to the door of the room which I had never been permitted to enter. It was partly open, and without hesitating I ran into it. It opened into the fantastic shrine you saw last night, which you entered to grapple with me.

"Before the altar railing beneath the two great bronze gods with their four glaring eyes my father was kneeling, a look of mortal fright on his face. I ran to him and helped him to his feet. I asked him what was the matter.

"He said that just a moment before he had felt, rather than seen, behind him a tall priest-like Hindoo standing with arms folded, gazing at him with evil, vindictive eyes. The sight of the menacing figure had been such a shock

to his overwrought nerves that he had screamed, and with the scream the Hindoo form had vanished.

"I did not believe there was any foundation in fact for his story. From the evidence of the fantastic shrine my father had fitted up I felt sure that his mind was becoming unbalanced by preying over the stolen image. I think that my father suspected something of this sort himself, for when I now urged him to get rid of the bronze devil he promised at once to do so immediately. I cannot say for sure whether he did or not. for...."

The girl hesitated and stopped as if in distress.

"Yes? What was it?" I prompted gently.

"Two nights later my father was killed—stabbed in the heart in the library of those basement rooms. I found him lying on the floor in the morning with his hand clasped to the handle of a knife protruding from his breast."

There was a hint of tears in the girl's voice as she made this startling statement.

"I am sorry," I said sympathetically, involuntarily shuddering a little.

8.

After a moment the girl went on. "The police called it suicide, but I never believed so. I think that someone stabbed my father and left the dagger in his breast, and that as he died my father put his hand to the handle of the knife in an involuntary effort to withdraw it. I told the police what I thought. I also told them the story of the image and of the strange influence which it had seemed to exert, on him. I told them of the tall Hindoo form which had seemed to appear behind my father in that strange room. The room itself I did not show them, as I did not want them to think he was crazy. The bronze devil I would have showed them, but I could find it nowhere."

"Perhaps it was stolen," I suggested.

"It may have been, but I remember my father's promise. I think he either hid the image or gave it to someone to keep for him."

"That is more likely," I conceded. "But what has developed since?"

"Only this. I have been persistently haunted, hounded, by a nameless thing which has only eyes, terrible evil eyes. Two weeks after my father's death the phenomena started. I was in my room at night in bed. It was dark. The curtain was raised at my window, but there was no moon, and practically no light entered.

"I had been asleep, but I suddenly awoke as if startled. I looked toward the door and saw two eyes, glowing like red coals of fire! I was frightened.

"Then I thought of cats. I knew a cat's eyes would glow in the dark. Though I had no cat I felt sure after a startled moment that it was a cat sit-

ting in a chair looking at me.

"There was a stand near the head of my bed with a book on it, which I had been reading before I went to sleep. I suddenly reached out a hand, seized hold of the book, and cast it with all my strength at the two glowing eyes. I hate cats. I am afraid of them.

"My aim was true, apparently, for I heard the soft thud of the book striking some yielding body. Then I heard a low growl, angry, hair-raising. A growl, you hear. Do cats growl?"

"I have not heard so," I replied with sudden apprehension, looking about me.

"Then the eyes flamed once and disappeared. After a moment I got up, found the light switch at the head of my bed, and turned on the lights. There was nothing in the room. The door was closed. I crossed over and locked it. I did not go to sleep again that night.

"Since that time there has not passed a week but that I have seen the eyes, sometimes at my door, sometimes at the windows. Locks or shutters do no good.

"The influence those eyes have exerted upon me is terrible. I have been hypnotized. I have feared nameless fears during the day, and at night felt myself doing things terrible. Upon awaking in the morning I know I have done something while my consciousness slept, something frightful, maybe, possibly crime, murder. I have a memory of two eyes driving me, ordering me. But no consciousness of anything done remains in my mind.

"Until last night when you intervened I had no knowledge of what I was doing. Then it was as if I had just awaked and remembered a dream."

"You mean," I whispered, "you mean that you were—out of your senses when you were creeping into that room with the knife in your hand?"

"Yes," she breathed. "It was you that waked me, your will that seemed to free me from a dreadful spell. But who knows what terrible things I have done before this, how many times I have raised that knife when no one intervened! Oh, it is terrible! What is it?"

"Hypnotism," I said, taking her hands in mine and looking into her face searchingly.

"I do not know," she said hopelessly. "If that were so, what could I do?"

"Something must be done," I replied. "You must let me come, watch at your door. I have a pistol. I am a good shot. Or the police...."

"Oh, the police! Don't you see? They would just say that I am crazy, that my father was crazy. Am I crazy? Do you think so?"

"No," I asserted. "You are perfectly sane. I have seen crazy people and I can see from your eyes that you arc not crazy. You must let me protect you from this fiend."

"No. I am afraid. It—the thing would kill you."

"But this can't go on. It must stop."

"Yes, I know, but—look!"

The girl suddenly clung to me and pointed to the door through which we had just entered, with a shaking hand. I looked where she pointed. I saw nothing immediately.

THEN I saw it. Two eyes glowing out of the partly opened door, the door which the girl had closed securely behind us. Two flaming eyes, terrible, menacing!

The girl pulled away. She clutched my arm.

"Come!" she cried in a low voice. "Let us run! Run!"

I took her hand. We ran out through a door which the girl pulled open before us, pulling it shut after us. Then we ran on and on, into intense blackness. The girl led me. I did not know where we were going. After a while we stopped. She held my arm, listening.

"Tell me," I whispered, "please tell me where we are, where I can find you should we become separated. Who are you?"

"I am—oh!"

She ceased speaking and I felt her body trembling against me. Confronting us, not twenty feet away, were two eyes, flaming red, live like coals of fire.

The girl tugged at my arm, tried to drag me away. But I held back.

"Run! Escape!" I cried, pushing her from me. "I will fight, kill!"

She tried to cling to my arm.

"I am afraid it will kill you," she whispered.

But I put her from me and heard her footsteps retreating.

I confronted the gleaming eyes. I felt them boring deep into my own consciousness. I felt my knees shaking. I had a nameless terror. I felt my senses reeling.

Those eyes! I must destroy them! I must master them! Though they scorch me I must extinguish them! They made me mad, those eyes! I was crazy! I would kill!

I took a step forward, my fists clenched. I would grapple with the unknown!

Then I heard a missile flying from behind me, heard it whirl over my head. I heard it strike something soft, yielding, heard it bounce to the floor and roll away like a billiard ball. I heard a low growl as of anger, pain.

Then for an instant both eyes disappeared. After a moment there appeared one red flaming eye. One eye! Only one! But it was belching, seething with a scorching fire. Then it started toward me!

Conquered by a nameless terror I fled, with the one eye pursuing. As I ran I thought that in my flight I was at least allowing the girl to escape. So I ran on and on.

I became giddy. My senses reeled. I became a floating thing without will or volition, which went tearing through frozen spaces, seething through the flames of hell, flying out through a world of hideous dragon-gods and devils, into quiet stillness, and finally to rest and peace.

9.

I SAT before my study table, the bronze devil grinning at me in the light of the chandeliers. There was nothing unusual about the room.

I stood up, felt of my limbs. My muscles functioned as usual. I was perfectly normal, sane.

Yet that other scene was vivid, real. The pursuing eyes! The girl! It was she who had thrown the missile that had struck the thing, extinguished one of the eyes.

Where was she? Had she escaped? I must return and protect her from this terrible thing! Return? Where?

I laughed. It was silly. It was idle. I was going insane, crazy. I must get my mind off this sort of thing or I would be in the asylum. I must go to bed, forget.

But I could not forget, and tossed restlessly, sleeplessly through the night, my mind a jumble of half-formed, fearful dreams.

The next day I went about my usual routine. I carried my lunch with me, as I had made up my mind to spend all the time until dark in my search of the cliffs. All morning and until late afternoon I scrambled about among the rocks, striking here and there with my pick, climbing on precarious footing along the cliff-wall.

Along toward dark, cutting away some scraggly brush from the side of the precipice, I found a small opening in the face of the rock. Digging excitedly about with my pick I widened this opening until it was large enough to permit entrance of a man crawling on hands and knees. When I had made the opening as wide as possible with the tools at hand I threw aside my pick and, getting to my knees, thrust head and shoulders into the hole. I took my flashlight from my pocket and sent a glow of light ahead of me into the intense darkness. For a short distance I could make out the walls of a passage on either side, but ahead of me the revealing light faded away into blackness without a sign of an end to the cavern. The floor seemed to be about ten feet down from the entrance, making the height of the chamber about twenty feet.

I had a great desire to explore my discovery immediately, but it was fast growing dark and I had quite a distance to make over precarious footing until I reached safe ground at the top of the cliffs. Accordingly I left further explorations to another day and started out on my return journey while I yet had sufficient light to make it in safety.

The sky had been cloudy all afternoon, and before I reached town there had come on a spattering rain. It was dark before I reached town. As I passed the lighted doorway of the Hindoo shop the thought suddenly occurred to me that I had only two cubes of incense remaining. I should have some more. Whatever the strangeness and terror of my nightly dream, I wished it to be repeated until I should either bring this beautiful dream-girl into reality or at least satisfy myself that there could be no basis in fact for her existence. However much I might laugh at myself for it, I knew that I had fallen in love—how hopelessly I was only too well aware. If she were a dream, it was only in dreaming that I could be happy, and there was no doubt in my mind that the dream was in some way the product of the burning incense.

I entered the shop rather fearfully. The proprietor was in. He faced me across the counter.

"Something, sahib?" he asked, his reddish-brown eyes pleasant enough.

"Some incense," I said. "Some of the rare kind you gave me before. You remember?"

"Yes, sahib."

He turned away and searched behind him on a shelf. While he was doing so I looked toward the rear of the shop. There was no sign of the huge idol that had confronted me the day before. There was nothing at the rear of the shop but a number of tall, innocent-looking packing-cases, but I felt the Hindoo's eyes upon me again, and I turned to face him.

"I have no more," he said; "only sandalwood."

"But I don't want sandalwood. Where can I get the other?"

"You cannot get it," he replied, his eyes stirring into a dull, smoldering flame. "Do you wish the sandalwood?"

"No," I answered shortly, and turned on my heel.

"Your soul!"

The words from behind me were low, passionate, menacing.

I whirled as if I had been struck.

"My soul!" I cried, glaring at the East Indian, who stood facing me with arms folded across his breast.

"Your soul shall pay!" he snarled.

His eyes flamed an instant into mine, then the fire in them went out.

"It is just a saying in India. It means nothing. I only said my secret thoughts aloud. Pardon, sahib."

"Oh," I said; then I whirled and left the shop hastily.

I HURRIED through the dripping rain to the restaurant, where I dined, my mind trying to analyze the peculiar effect which the oriental had upon me. It did not take much thinking to convince me that the Hindoo was a thorough rascal. I am familiar with hypnotism and I have more than once had different persons try to exercise this power over me. I have experienced the numbing clash of a powerful will with my own, have felt my own mind struggle for mastery, never once to come out other than victor. So I knew that the East Indian had tried to hypnotize me, not only on this evening, but also on the first occasion.

"Your soul shall pay!" That trinket that I had broken! Was all that had happened, the dream and all, part of his revenge? Had he created the beautiful girl in my mind just to torture me with her memory for the rest of my days? What a diabolical vengeance!

I returned to my house. I went immediately to my study. I sat down before the table and picked up the little oblong box. Tomorrow the box would be empty and then I would have it out with that evil red-eyed fellow.

I lifted the head from the bronze devil, and thrust the last two reddish-brown cubes of incense into the hollow body. I was feverish with impatience. I felt as the opium fiend must feel while he prepares his drug.

I lighted the two cubes, and for a moment two eyes gleamed. Then one cube went out and I had to light it again. It did not burn well, but I got it to going fairly.

I put the head back into position. I watched smoke belch forth from the grinning mouth. I watched the two pinpoints of red, one intensely bright, the other smoldering, dying.

As I stared at the grinning face of the bronze devil a thought occurred to me. The face, the whole figure was familiar as if I had seen it somewhere. No, I had only heard of it! If I could just think a moment I could remember all. Why must my mind wander? Oh, yes. My soul! The Hindoo would have my soul! No, he would not! My soul should run from him so fast he would not be able to catch it!

The world became full of aromatic smoke. My senses dulled. My soul ran flying out into a pelting noisy space, through the gates of hell, where long-tailed devils struck at me, into the white heat of torment, through the icy cold of despair, and then into a haven of rest and comfort.

10.

I SQUATTED before a door in the darkness. I had an automatic in my right hand. I was also conscious of something clasped in my left hand. I was wait-

ing, watching, every sense alert.

There was someone in the room before which I waited. This I knew. I was not afraid. My arm was steady. My aim would be sure.

A half hour passed, perhaps more.

Then a scream from beyond the door. A sudden scream of fright, of mortal terror.

I was on my feet, shaking the door, which was locked. I heard the scream rise again.

I laid the object clasped in my left hand carefully down near the door. I thrust my pistol into my belt. Then I ran back a few feet, turned, and lunged forward with all my weight upon the door. Once, twice, three times. At the fourth lunge the lock broke and I went hurtling into the room.

Lights flamed from chandeliers overhead.

Facing me stood the girl in shimmering white night-clothes. Behind her was a bed just vacated, while to the right were chairs, a dressing table, articles of ladies' wearing apparel.

Her hair was disheveled, her eyes were large with fright.

"You screamed," I said, looking at her, thinking more of her great beauty than of the dangers which her cry of terror might signify.

"You!" she cried.

She came to me, clasped her arms about me, clung to me like a little child.

"Tell me! What was it?" I insisted, putting an arm about her and patting her shoulder reassuringly.

"The—the thing!" she whispered. "The eyes! I saw them at the window. I heard the window opening, saw the eyes looking in. I screamed, sprang from bed and turned on the lights. Then you came crashing at the door, came plunging in. How came you here?"

"I said I would come, would defend you," I asserted, looking into her blue eyes and searching them for a sign of an answering love in their depths.

My gaze was so ardent that the girl's eyes fell before my own. Suddenly conscious of her dress she pulled away from me, picked up a silk robe from a chair, and gathered it about her hastily.

"Where was it?" I asked, as she looked up at me again.

"There."

She pointed at the window at the foot of her bed. I started toward the window, and as I did so she put a hand on my arm and clung to me. We took half a dozen steps across the room.

Then there was sudden darkness. Intense, terrible, menacing!

"The lights!" cried the girl in my ear. "It has put out the lights! The thing! See? At the window!"

I put my arm about the girl and held to her convulsively. One flaming red eye, hot and intense as a living fire! And beside it the wavering glow of another eye, less intense, but deadly!

The eyes were moving, coming nearer!

The girl pulled out of my grasp, put both hands on my shoulders and shook me.

"Let us run! Flee!" she cried.

"I will stay! Fight!" I muttered, trying to shake her off.

But she put both hands upon my arm and forced me to run with her out of the room. Outside the door I stopped, groped in the darkness, and picked up the object I had laid down a few moments ago. Then the girl pulled me on. Swiftly along a carpeted hallway, down a broad staircase, across a wide room, stumbling past chairs and tables, through a second room whose door was wide, all in the pale light cast through windows from a cloudy sky outside.

We came to a flight of steps leading down into blackness. Down it we plunged together. I missed a step and went tumbling, rolling down the remainder of the flight. The girl came running after. She helped me to my feet, and we ran on again.

After a while we stopped. The girl was exhausted. I heard her panting. I put ray arms about her and held her. She clung to my shoulders with both hands.

"Where are we?" I asked after a moment.

"In my father's basement rooms. We are in the billiard room, I think. Ahead of us is the shrine. There is something strange in there, back of the images. Last night when you fled with the thing after you I followed a little way. I saw you run through the shrine-room, around the platform to the rear. I waited a moment but I saw nothing else enter. Then I ran after you. I came to the rear of the platform, where was a hissing, bubbling spring of hot water. Back of the spring, I saw a dark, square opening cut through the solid concrete. I looked through it. I could hear your footsteps retreating in the blackness beyond, and in my flight I was tempted to follow you. But I feared that the thing was still behind me, that it might overtake me in the darkness of that subterranean passage. What is back of that opening?"

"I do not know," I said, and told her all I knew, of the Hindoo shop, of the incense, and of my strange sensations.

"Is this a dream?" I asked. "Are you real or only fancy?"

"I am perfectly real," she replied. "But it is all so strange. Can there be some connection between the Hindoo you mention and the vindictive, priest-like form that threatened my father? May not the two be the same?

That black hole behind the shrine platform may open into a passageway leading to the shop you mention. He may have entered through this passage, come upon my father and stabbed him for the image. But the eyes! What other eyes are there which glow in the dark, besides a cat's?"

"A wolf's eyes would glow in the dark," I replied, looking about me into the darkness apprehensively.

There was no sight nor sound of anything else living in the room other than ourselves.

"Come. When we get where there is light I have something to show you."

Groping about for the light switch, we came to a door, mid we passed through it. My fingers touched the knob of a switch and I turned it.

Lights flamed out at us from four eyes above our heads. We were in the shrine-room. After a moment of accustoming ourselves to the glare we smiled at each other for encouragement. To our ears came a faint hissing from the springs behind the images, but knowing what made the sound we were not afraid.

Then I held up the object I had boon carrying in my hand. It was the devil-incense burner.

"The image!" gasped the girl. "Where did you get it?"

"I received it as a gift about a year ago." I replied. "I converted it into an intense burner."

"Who gave it to you?" asked the girl breathlessly.

"Mr. James Brandt," I replied. "He was an old friend of mine."'

"It was you," she whispered. "He gave it to you! My father!"

"You are—Miss Brandt?"

"Lenore Brandt," she replied, smiling. "But we are not safe here. I do not know why I came here, except that you escaped this way before."

"Now that we are here we will investigate that passage. I am not going to let this night go by without coming to the solution of this mystery. But first I want to talk to you."

I took both of the girl's hands in my own, and then continued.

"We may become separated. I may never see you again. This is all so strange that no one can just tell what might happen. If we never should meet again, after tonight, I want you to know that I love you. It may seem strange to you that after seeing you only three times I should love you, but that can be no stranger than that I should be here with you now. I do not expect you to love me yet, but may I hope that should we meet again under more favorable circumstances you might learn to care?"

She looked up at me and I saw tenderness in her eyes. She stepped close and put her two hands on my shoulders.

"I—I do not know," she said with a little catch in her voice. "It seems as if we two might be on the brink of eternity. It does not seem strange that you should love me. Nor would it be strange if I should love you. It seems that we may have but a moment to love. I would not ask that we waste it. Put your arms about me now and hold me tightly. I wish to love and to be loved for just one moment before some terrible force destroys us, or drives us apart. One kiss for eternity."

I had her in my arms, touched her soft lips to mine. I felt her cheeks, wet with tears. She was crying quietly. A moment I held her and we clung together, then interruption.

WE heard a low click behind us and the room was plunged in darkness. Looking over the girl's shoulder I saw two eyes glowing from the darkness near the door. The girl looked almost at the same time.

We turned almost as one and ran into the darkness where we believed the raised platform to be. It was the girl's arm which guided me around the altar railing, back of the platform; it was she who stopped me.

"Here! The passage!" she whispered, drawing me down to my knees.

She crawled quickly through a narrow hole, and I after her. As I came through upon uneven stone she took my hand and helped me to my feet. Then we ran quickly out into the darkness, feeling our way as we went. Stopping occasionally, we could hear a sound as of someone, or something, running after us.

After a time we came to a point where we could hear a faint trickle of water, which grew louder as we went on. As we approached the sound, the temperature became colder, until when the trickling waters sounded beside us the coldness was so intense as to chill us to the bone. We started to run, and soon it began to grow warmer. Warmer and warmer it became, and then hot. We now heard a sound as of escaping steam. We felt the stones beneath our feet hot as if in a furnace. A sudden thought came to me.

"The springs!" I cried. "We are beneath the hot springs. We are near the lava bed at the source of them. We are so near to the channel that the hot water and steam escape into the passage. And back there, where it was so cold, were the cold springs."

As we ran on, the heat became less, and soon we came to what appeared to be the end of the passage. Feeling about, I found that there was a door and, opening it, we came out into a small basement room.

The light entered from a square opening overhead, to which I could see a ladder leading upward. About the room were a number of images of all shapes and sizes, grotesque gods, evil, grinning devils, fantastic lion-men.

We stopped but a moment, then started for the ladder together. But I heard a sound behind me, and turned to confront two red eyes peering at us from the darkness of the passage. One eye was flaming brightly, the other

smoldering dully. There was not time to escape up the ladder. I must fight the thing!

I felt for my pistol and saw that I had lost it when I fell down the stairway. I doubled my fists.

The eyes came nearer. I called to the girl.

"Run up the ladder! Quick! I am going to kill it, or die!"

Then I faced the thing. It came almost to the door of the small basement room. But I was impatient. I could not wait. I leapt forward and struck with all my might at a point just between the two naming eyes.

I felt my hand strike flesh, which recoiled. It was real, then, not a ghost. So much the better. I knew how to fight real things, things which recoiled from a blow.

I still clutched the bronze devil in my left hand. I laid it aside on the floor.

The eyes still wavered before me, and about them I could make out the dim outline of a face, with the mouth open in an evil, yellow-toothed snarl.

I struck at that face again and again, and I felt myself being beaten severely. I saw the eyes flaming red, menacing, and gradually I saw their flame diminishing, the fire dying out of them. The blows struck out at me became weaker. They finally ceased, the eyes smoldered, and went out. I heard a heavy body fall. I had conquered it—the thing!

The girl! Where was she? I turned and saw her standing behind me. I ran to her, lifted her in my arms and carried her up the ladder, into the rear of a small shop.

The Hindoo curio shop! I knew it. And the proprietor? I did not fear him. I felt, I knew, that he was down below, unconscious as I had knocked him.

I set the girl on her feet and took her hand, and we fled out of the shop into a dripping rain. Her home was only a few blocks away, and she led me in that direction. We hurried to it, meeting no one, arriving there without mishap. Securing my automatic from the foot of the basement steps, I kept guard the remainder of the night while Lenore slept, or tried to do so. In my mind there was no fear, but in my heart was a great happiness.

11.

THE rest is soon told. In the morning we explored the passage, Lenore and I together. We found that a wide passage, evidently of ancient construction, led between the basement rooms of the girl's home to the small room beneath the curio shop. We found that this passage passed directly beneath the famous hot and cold springs. We also found other passages diverging from this one, leading into numerous great caverns. We followed one passage in particular for a great distance until it ended at a small opening on the face of the cliff-wall. This was the very opening I had discovered the day before.

But why go into the particulars of this wonderful subterranean city? You will find a full discussion of the cliff-dwellers of central New Mexico and their marvelous cliff-city in a recent scientific periodical, so that you may satisfy yourself with a full description at any time.

Orientals are not quick to forget or to forgive. When Lenore's father stole the bronze devil from the temple in India he became at once a marked man. Pursuit was immediate and unrelenting. Though the trail was long, it did not end for him until a dagger point had been thrust into his heart. It was probably by accident that the Hindoo stumbled upon the underground passage, and it is doubtful if Brandt ever knew of its existence.

Had I not entered the oriental's shop and broken an image, thereby earning for myself a curse, I should probably never have become implicated in the chain of vengeance. Unable to hypnotize me in the shop on my first visit, the Hindoo sold me a drug which numbed my will, making me respond to his call, obey his will while the effects of the drug lasted. What he intended to have me do, what fate he thought to mete out to me, will never be fully known. He possibly thought to have me slain by the girl, or to have her slain by me. But my mind always struggled, gave defiance to his will.

Had not Brandt sent the bronze image to me, had he left it where the Hindoo could find it, no doubt Lenore would not have been disturbed. But when the image was not to be found, the East Indian first thought the girl had hidden it, and so hypnotized her and tried to force her to lead him to it. But she did not know where it was, and so was unable to lead him. But he persisted long, and in the end was successful.

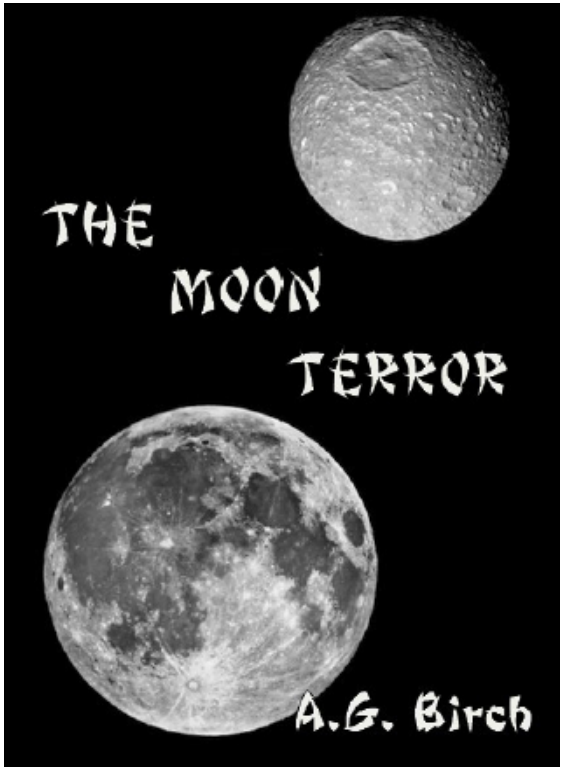
The eyes? I know that it is unusual for human eyes to glow in the dark, but I have always believed that the Hindoo was more of a wolf than a man anyway. I am sure they were his eyes. Anyway they never bother us now, and it is very seldom that we think of them, Lenore and I. We are too happy in the present to think of the past.

THE grinning bronze devil was never found. When I came to search for it in the basement of the curio shop the next day I could not find it. It was gone, and with it the curious images and the packing-cases, and with them the proprietor. I often think and wonder.

But even as I wonder I know that far away in a small temple in India a grinning bronze devil is clasped in the immense fists of a great savage god. I can imagine the god squeezing the small figure tightly, triumphantly, his eyes gleaming with the triumph of a chase well ended.

And on the platform before the great god, confronting a motley group of worshipers, I seem to see a tall Hindoo in flowing priestly garb, who looks out at his people with reddish-brown eyes, eyes which have a smolder in their depths, which often gleam as with triumph, and which can upon occasion belch forth two seething red tongues of flame.

THE END



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CHAPTER I. — THE DRUMS OF DOOM

THE first warning of the stupendous cataclysm that befell the earth in the third decade of the Twentieth Century was recorded simultaneously in several parts of America during a night in early June. But, so little was its awful significance suspected at the time, it passed almost without comment.

I am certain that I entertained no forebodings; neither did the man who was destined to play the leading role in the mighty drama that followed—Dr. Ferdinand Gresham, the eminent American astronomer. For we were on a hunting and fishing trip in Labrador at the time, and were not even aware of the strange occurrence.

Anyway, the nature of this first herald of disaster was not such as to cause alarm.

At twelve minutes past 3 o'clock a.m. during a lull in the night's aerial telegraph business, several of the larger wireless stations of the Western hemisphere simultaneously began picking up strange signals out of the ether. They were faint and ghostly, as if coming from a vast distance—equally far removed from New York and San Francisco, Juneau and Panama.

Exactly two minutes apart the calls were repeated, with clocklike regularity. But the code used—if it *were* a code—was undecipherable.

Until near dawn the signals continued—indistinct, unintelligible, insistent.

Every station capable of transmitting messages over such great distances emphatically denied sending them. And no amateur apparatus was powerful enough to be the cause. As far as any one could learn, the signals originated nowhere upon the earth. It was as if some phantom were whispering through the ether in the language of another planet.

Two nights later the calls were heard again, starting at almost the same instant when they had been distinguished on the first occasion. But this time they were precisely three minutes apart. And without the variation of a second they continued for more than an hour.

The next night they reappeared. And the next and the next. Now they began earlier than before—in fact, no one knew when they had started, for they were sounding when the night's business died down sufficiently for them to be heard. But each night, it was noticed, the interval between the signals was exactly one minute longer than the night before.

Occasionally the weird whispers ceased for a night or two, but always they resumed with the same insistence, although with a newly-timed interval.

This continued until early in July, when the pause between the calls had attained more than thirty minutes' duration.

Then the length of the lulls began to decrease erratically. One night the mysterious summons would be heard every nineteen and a quarter minutes; the next night, every ten and a half minutes; at other times, twelve and three-quarters minutes, or fourteen and a fifth, or fifteen and a third.

Still the signals could not be deciphered, and their message— if they contained one—remained a mystery.

Newspapers and scientific journals at last began to speculate upon the matter, advancing all manner of theories to account for the disturbances.

The only one of these conjectures attracting widespread attention, however, was that presented by Professor Howard Whiteman, the famous director of the United States Naval Observatory at Washington, D.C.

Professor Whiteman voiced the opinion that the planet Mars was trying to establish communication with the earth—the mysterious calls being wireless signals sent across space by the inhabitants of our neighboring world.

Our globe, moving through space much faster than Mars, and in a smaller orbit, overtakes its neighboring planet once in a little over two years. For some months Mars had been approaching the earth. At the beginning of June it had been approximately 40,000,000 miles away, and at that time, Professor Whiteman pointed out, the strange wireless calls had commenced. As the two worlds drew closer together the signals increased slightly in power.

The scientist urged that while Mars remained close to us the government should appropriate funds to enlarge one of the principal wireless stations in an effort to answer the overtures of our neighbors in space.

But when, after two more days, the ethereal signals ceased abruptly and a week passed without their recurrence, Professor Whiteman's theory began to be derided, and the whole thing was dismissed as some temporary phenomenon of the atmosphere.

It was something of a shock, therefore, when, on the eighth night after the cessation of the disturbances, the calls were suddenly resumed—much louder than before, as if the power creating their electrical impulses had been increased. Now wireless stations all over the world plainly heard the staccato, mystifying challenge coming out of the ether.

This time, too, the interval between the signals was of a new length—eleven minutes and six seconds.

The next day the matter took on still further importance.

Scientists all along the Pacific Coast of the United States reported that in the night their seismographs had recorded a series of light earthquakes;

and it was noted that these tremors had occurred precisely eleven minutes and six seconds apart— simultaneously with the sounding of the mysterious wireless calls!

After that the aerial signals did not stop during any part of the twenty-four hours. And the earth shocks continued, gradually increasing in severity. They kept perfect time with the signals through the ether—a shock for every whisper, a rest for every pause. In the course of a couple of weeks the quakes attained such force that in many places they could be distinctly felt by anyone standing still upon solid ground.

Science now became fully aware of the existence of some new and sinister—or at least unfathomed—force in the world, and began to give the matter profound study.

However, both Dr. Ferdinand Gresham and I remained in complete ignorance of these events; for, as I have said, we were in the interior of Labrador. We both possessed a keen love of the wilderness, where, in vigorous sports, we renewed our energy for the work to be done in the cities—the doctor's as director of the great astronomical observatory at the National University; mine in the prosaic channels of business.

To the public, which knew him only through his books and lectures, Dr. Gresham perhaps appeared the last person in the world anyone would seek for a companion: a man silent, preoccupied, austere, unsociable. But underneath this aloofness and taciturnity was a character of rare strength, good nature and lovableness. And, once beyond the barriers of civilization, his austerity vanished, and he became a prince of good fellows, actually reveling in hardships and danger.

The complete change in him on such occasions brought to mind a strange phase of his life about which not even I, his most intimate associate, knew anything—a period in which he had undertaken a mysterious pilgrimage alone into the dark interior of China.

I only knew that fifteen years before he had gone in quest of certain amazing astronomical discoveries rumored to have been made by Buddhist savants dwelling in monasteries far back in the Himalayas or the Tian-Shan, or some of those inaccessible mountain fastnesses of Central Asia. After more than four years he had dragged back, ill and suffering, bearing hideous disfigurations upon his body, the look in his eyes of a man who had seen hell, and maintaining inviolate silence regarding his experiences.

On regaining his health after the Chinese adventure, he had immersed himself in silence and work, and year by year since then I had seen him steadily rise in prominence in his profession. Indeed, his name had come to stand for vastly more in the scientific world than merely the advancement of astronomical knowledge. He was a deep student along many lines of scientific endeavor—electricity, chemistry, mathematics, physics, geol-

ogy, even biology. To the development of wireless telegraphy and the wireless transmission of electrical energy he had devoted particular effort.

The doctor and I had left New York a few days before the wireless disturbances began. Returning by a small private vessel, which was not equipped with wireless, we continued in ignorance of the world's danger.

It was during our homeward sea voyage that the earthquakes began to grow serious. Many buildings were damaged. In the western portions of the United States and Canada a number of persons were killed by the collapse of houses.

Gradually the affected area expanded. New York and Nagasaki, Buenos Aires and Berlin, Vienna and Valparaiso began to take their places on the casualty list. Even modern skyscrapers suffered broken windows and falling plaster; sometimes they shook so violently that their occupants fled to the streets in a panic. Water and gas mains began to break.

Before long, in New York, one of the railroad tunnels under the Hudson River cracked and flooded, causing no loss of life, but spreading such alarm that all the tubes under and out of Manhattan were abandoned. This brought about a fearful congestion of traffic in the metropolis.

Finally, toward the beginning of August, the earthquakes became so serious that the newspapers were filled every day with accounts of the loss of scores—sometimes hundreds—of lives all over the world.

Then came a happening fraught with a monstrous new terror, which was revealed to the public one morning just as day dawned in New York.

During the preceding night, a great Atlantic liner, steaming westward approximately along the fiftieth parallel of latitude, had *run aground* about 700 miles east of Cape Race, Newfoundland—at a point where nautical charts showed the ocean to be *nearly two miles deep*!

Within an hour there had come reports of a similar nature from other ships two or three hundred miles distant from the first one. There was no telling how vast in extent might be the upheaved portion of the sea bottom.

Hardly had the wireless stations finished taking these startling stories from mid-ocean before there began to arrive equally strange reports from other quarters of the globe.

Someone discovered that the sea level had risen almost six feet at New York. The Sahara Desert had sunk to an unknown depth, and the sea was rushing in, ripping vast channels through the heart of Morocco, Tripoli and Egypt, obliterating cities and completely changing the face of the earth.

Within a few hours the high waters in New York harbor receded about a foot. Mount Chimborazo, the majestic peak of more than 20,000 feet altitude in the Ecuadorean Andes, began to fall down and spread out over the surrounding country. Then the mountains bordering the Panama Canal

started to collapse for many miles, completely blocking that famous waterway.

In Europe the Danube River ceased to flow in its accustomed direction and began, near its junction with the Save, to pour its waters back past Budapest and Vienna, turning the plains of western Austria into a series of spreading lakes.

The world awoke that summer morning to face a more desperate situation than ever had confronted mankind during all the centuries of recorded history.

And still no plausible explanation of the trouble—except the Martian theory of Professor Howard Whiteman—was forthcoming.

Men were dazed, astounded. A feeling of dread and terror began to settle upon the public.

At this juncture, realizing the need of some sort of action, the President of the United States urged all the other civilized nations to send representatives to an international scientific congress in Washington, which should endeavor to determine the origin of the terrestrial disturbances and, if possible, suggest relief.

As speedily as airplanes could bring them, an imposing assemblage of the world's leading scientists gathered in Washington.

Because of his international reputation and the fact that the congress held its sessions at the United States Naval Observatory, of which he was chief, Professor Whiteman was chosen president of the body.

For a week the scientists debated—while the world waited in intense and growing anxiety. But the learned men accomplished nothing. They could not even agree. The battle seemed one of man against nature, and man was helpless.

In a gloomy state of mind they began to consider adjournment. At 10 o'clock on the nineteenth of August the question of terminating the sessions was scheduled for a final vote.

That night, as the hands of the clock on the wall above the presiding officer's head drew near the fateful hour, the tension throughout the assemblage became intensely dramatic.

Even after the sound of the clock's striking had died out upon the stillness of the room, Professor Whiteman remained seated; he seemed haggard and downcast. At last, however, he drew himself up and opened his lips to speak.

At that moment a secretary tiptoed swiftly in and whispered briefly to the presiding officer. Professor Whiteman gave a start and answered something that sent the secretary hurrying out.

Betraying strange emotion, the scientist now addressed the assemblage. His words came haltingly, as if he feared they would be greeted with ridicule.

"Gentlemen," he said, "a strange thing has happened. A few minutes ago the wireless signals that have always accompanied the earthquakes ceased abruptly. In their place came a mysterious summons out of the ether—whence no one knows—demanding a conversation with the presiding officer of this body. The sender of the message declares his communication has to do with the problem we have been trying to solve. Of course, this is probably some hoax—but our operator is greatly excited over the circumstances surrounding the call, and urges that we come to the wireless room at once!"

Leading the way to another part of the observatory grounds, Professor Whiteman ushered the company into the operating room of the wireless plant—one of the most powerful in the world.

A little knot of observatory officials already was clustered about the operator, their manner denoting that something unusual had been going on.

At a word from Professor Whiteman, the operator threw over his rheostat and the hum of the rotary spark filled the room. Then his fingers played on the key while he sent out a few signals.

"I'm letting them—*him*—know you're ready, sir," the operator explained to the astronomer, in a tone filled with awe.

A few moments slipped by. Everyone waited breathlessly, all eyes glued upon the apparatus, as if to read the momentous message that was expected to come from—no one knew where.

Suddenly there was an involuntary movement of the muscles of the operator's face, as if he were straining to hear something very faint and far away; then he began writing slowly upon a pad that lay on his desk. At his elbow the scientists unceremoniously crowded each other in their eagerness to read:

"To the Presiding Officer of the International Scientific Congress, Washington," he wrote. *"I am the dictator of human destiny. Through control of the earth's internal forces I am master of every existing thing. I can blot out all life—destroy the globe itself. It is my intention to abolish all present governments and make myself emperor of the earth. As proof of my power to do this, I"*—there was a pause of several seconds, which seemed like hours in the awful stillness—*"I shall, at midnight tomorrow, Thursday (Washington time), cause the earthquakes to cease until further notice. —KWO."*

CHAPTER II. — THE DICTATOR OF DESTINY

BY the next morning the entire civilized world knew of the strange and threatening communication from the self- styled "dictator of human destiny."

The members of the scientific congress had sought to keep the matter secret, but all the larger wireless stations of North America had picked up the message, and thence it found its way into the newspapers.

Ordinarily, such a communication would have attracted nothing more than laughter, as a harmless prank; but the increasing menace of the earthquakes had wrought a state of nervous tension that was ready to clothe the whole affair with sinister significance.

It was an alarmed and hysterical public that gathered in the streets of all the great cities soon after daylight. One question was on every tongue:

Who was this mysterious "KWO," and was his message actually a momentous declaration to the human race, or merely a hoax perpetrated by some person with an over-vivid imagination?

Even the signature to the communication was such as to arouse curiosity. Was it a name? Or a combination of initials? Or a title, like "Rex" signifying king? Or a *nom de plume*? Or the name of a place? No one could say.

Any one capable of discovering the secrets of the earth's internal forces, and harnessing those forces for his own ends, unquestionably was the most wonderful scientist the world had ever seen; but, though every important nation of the globe was represented at the scientific congress in Washington, not one of those representatives had ever heard of successful experiments along this line, or knew any prominent scientist named KWO, or one possessing initials that would make up that word. The name sounded Oriental, but certainly no country of the Orient had produced a scientist of sufficient genius to accomplish this miracle.

It was a problem concerning which the best-informed persons knew no more than the most untutored child, but one which was of paramount importance to the group of savants assembled in Washington. Until more light could be shed on this subject they were powerless to form any conclusions. Accordingly, their first effort was to get into further communication with their unknown correspondent.

All through the night the operator at the naval observatory's wireless plant in Washington sat at his key, calling over and over again the three letters that constituted mankind's only knowledge of its adversary:

"KWO—KWO—KWO!"

But there was no answer. Absolute silence enveloped the menacing power.

"KWO" had spoken. He would not speak again. And after twelve hours even the most persistent members of the scientific body—who had remained constantly in the wireless room throughout the night—reluctantly desisted from further attempts at communication.

Even this failure found its way into the newspapers and helped to divide public opinion. Many persons and influential papers insisted that "KWO's" threat was nothing more than a hoax. Others, however, were inclined to accept the message as the serious declaration of a human being with practically supernatural powers. In advancing this opinion they were supported by the undeniable fact that from the time the mysterious "KWO" began his efforts to communicate with the head of the scientific congress, until his message had been completed, the strange wireless signals accompanying the earth tremors had ceased entirely—a thing that had not happened before. When he was through speaking, the signals had resumed their clocklike recurrence. It was as if some power had deliberately cleared the ether for the transmission of this proclamation of mankind.

A feeling of dread—of monstrous uncertainty—hung over everyone and increased as the day wore on. Ordinary affairs were neglected, while the crowds in public places steadily increased.

By nightfall of Thursday even the loudest scoffers at the genuineness of the "dictator's" threat began to display symptoms of the general uneasiness.

Would the earthquakes begin to subside at midnight?

Upon the answer to this question hung the fate of the world.

It was an exceedingly hot night in most parts of the United States. Scarcely anywhere was a breath of air stirring; the whole country was blanketed by a suffocating wave of humidity. Low clouds that presaged rain—but never brought it—added to the general feeling of apprehension. It was as if all nature had conspired to furnish a dramatic setting for the events about to be enacted.

As midnight drew near the excitement became intense. In Europe, as well as in America, vast throngs filled the streets in front of the newspaper offices, watching the bulletin boards. The Consolidated News Syndicate had arranged special radio service from various scientific institutions—notably the Washington Naval Observatory, where savants were watching the delicate instruments for recording earth shocks—and any variation or subsidence in the tremors would be flashed to newspapers everywhere.

When the hands of the clocks reached a point equivalent to two minutes of midnight, Washington time, a vast hush fell upon the assembled thousands. The very atmosphere became aquiver with suspense.

But if the scene in the streets was exciting, that within the instrument room of the United States naval observatory, where the members of the international scientific congress waited, was dramatic beyond description.

About the room sat the scientists and a couple of representatives from the Consolidated News. Professor Whiteman himself was stationed at the seismographs, while at his elbow sat Professor James Frisby, in direct telephone communication with the wireless operator in another part of the grounds.

The light was shaded and dim. The heat was stifling. Not a word was spoken. Scarcely a muscle moved. All were painfully alert.

Every eleven minutes and six seconds the building was shaken by a subterranean shock. The windows rattled. The floor creaked. Even the chairs seemed to lift and heave. It had been that way for weeks. But would this night see the end?

With maddening slowness, the hands of the clock on the wall— its face illuminated by a tiny electric lamp—drew toward 12 o'clock.

Suddenly there came one of the earthquakes, that, while no different from its predecessors, heightened the tension like the crack of a whip.

All eyes flew to the timepiece. It registered thirty-four seconds past 11:49 o'clock.

Therefore, the next tremor would occur at precisely forty seconds after midnight.

If the unknown "KWO" were an actual being, and kept his word, at that time the shocks would begin to subside!

The suspense became terrible. The faces of the scientists were drawn and pale. Beads of perspiration stood out on every brow. The minutes passed.

The electric correcting-device on the clock gave a sharp *click*, denoting midnight. Forty seconds more! The suffocating atmosphere seemed almost to turn cold under the pressure of anxiety.

Then, almost before any one could realize it, the earthquake had come and gone! And not one particle of diminution in its violence had been felt!

A sigh of relief involuntarily passed around the room. Few moved or spoke, but there was a lessening of the strain on many faces. It was too soon yet, of course, to be sure, but—in most hearts there began to dawn a faint ray of hope that, after all, this "dictator of human destiny" might be a myth.

But suddenly Professor Frisby raised his hand to command quiet, and bent more intently over his telephone.

A short silence followed. Then he turned to the gentlemen and announced in a voice that seemed curiously dry:

"The operator reports that no wireless signal accompanied this last earthquake."

Again the nerve tension in the assembly leaped like an electric spark. Several more minutes passed; then came another quake.

All eyes sped to Professor Whiteman but he remained absorbed at his seismographs.

In this silence and keen suspense eleven minutes and six seconds again dragged by. Another earthquake came and went. Once more Professor Frisby announced that there had been no wireless signal attending the tremor. The savants began to settle themselves for a further wait, when Professor Whiteman left his instrument and came slowly forward. In the dim light his face looked lined and gray.

"Gentlemen," he said, *"the earthquakes are beginning to subside!"*

For a moment the scientists sat as if stunned. Everyone was too appalled to speak or move. Then the tension was broken by the rush of the Consolidated News men from the room to get their momentous tidings out to the world.

After that the ground shocks died out with increasing rapidity. In an hour they had ceased entirely, and the tortured planet once more was still.

But the tumult among the people had only started!

With a sudden shock the globe's inhabitants realized, that they were in the grip of an unknown being endowed with supernatural power. Whether he were man or demigod, sane or mad, well-disposed or malignant no one could guess. Where was his dwelling-place, whence the source of his power, what would be the first manifestation of his authority, or how far would he seek to enforce his control? Only time could answer.

As this situation dawned upon men, their fears burst all bounds. Frantic excitement took possession of the throngs.

Only at the Naval Observatory in Washington was there calmness and restraint. The gathering of scientists spent the night in earnest deliberation of the course to be followed.

Finally it was decided that nothing should be done for the present; they would merely await events. When it had suited the mysterious "KWO" to announce himself to the world he had done so. Thereafter, communication with him had been impossible. Doubtless when he was ready to speak again he would break his silence—not before. It was reasonable to suppose that, now be had proved his power, he would not be long in stating his wishes or commands.

Events soon showed this surmise was correct.

Promptly at noon the next day—there having in the meantime been no recurrence of the earthquakes or electrical disturbances of the ether—the wireless at the Naval Observatory again received the mysterious call for the presiding officer of the scientific congress.

Professor Whiteman had remained at the observatory, in anticipation of such a summons, and soon he, with other leading members of the scientific assembly, was at the side of the operator in the wireless room.

Almost immediately after the call: "KWO— KWO—KWO" went forth into the ether, there came a response and the operator started writing:

"To the Presiding Officer of the International Scientific Congress:

"Communicate this to the various governments of the earth:

"As a preliminary to the establishment of my sole rule throughout the world, the following demands must be complied with:

"First: All standing armies shall be disbanded, and every implement of warfare, of whatsoever nature, destroyed.

"Second: All war vessels shall be assembled— those of the Atlantic fleets midway between New York and Gibraltar, those of the Pacific fleets midway between San Francisco and Honolulu—and sunk.

"Third: One-half of all the monetary gold supply of the world shall be collected and turned over to my agents at places to be announced later.

"Fourth: At noon on the third day after the foregoing demands have been complied with, all the existing governments shall resign and surrender their powers to my agents, who will be on hand to receive them.

"In my next communication I will fix the date for the fulfillment of these demands.

"The alternative is the destruction of the globe. KWO."

IT was on the evening of this eventful day that Dr. Gresham and I returned from Labrador. A little after 10 o'clock we landed in New York and, taking a taxicab at the pier, started for our bachelor quarters in apartments near each other west of Central Park.

As we reached the center of town we were amazed at the excited crowds that filled the streets and at the prodigious din raised by newsboys selling extras.

We stopped the car and bought papers. Huge black headings told the story at a glance. Also, at the bottom of the first page, we found a brief chronological summary of all that had happened, from the very beginning of the mysterious wireless signals three months before. We scanned it eagerly.

When I finished the newspaper article I turned to my companion—and was struck with horror at the change in his appearance!

He was crumpled down upon the seat of the taxi, and his face had taken on a ghastly hue. Only his eyes held a sign of life, and they seemed fixed on

something far away—something too terrifying to be a part of the world around us.

His lips moved, and presently he murmured, as if talking in his sleep:

"It has come! The Seuen-H'sin—*the terrible Seuen- H'sin!*"

An instant later, with a great effort, he drew himself together and spoke sharply to the chauffeur:

"Quick! Never mind those addresses we gave you! Rush us to the Grand Central Station! *Hurry!*"

As the car suddenly swerved into a side street, I turned to the doctor.

"What's the matter? Where are you going?" I asked.

"To Washington!" he snapped in reply. "As fast as we can get there!"

"In connection with this earthquake terror?"

"Yes!" he told me; "for—"

There was a pause, and then he finished in a strange, awed voice:

"What the world has seen of this devil 'KWO' is only the faintest prelude to what may come—events so terrible, so utterly opposed to all human experience, that they would stagger the imagination! *This is the beginning of the dissolution of our planet!*"

CHAPTER III. — THE SORCERERS OF CHINA

"DOUBTLESS you never heard of the Seuen- H'sin."

The speaker was Dr. Ferdinand Gresham, and these were the first words he had uttered since we had entered our private compartment on the midnight express for Washington, an hour before.

I lowered my cigar expectantly.

"No," I said; "never until you spoke the name in a momentary fit of illness this evening."

The doctor gave me a swift, searching glance, as if questioning what I might have learned. Presently he went to the door and looked out into the passage, apparently assuring himself no one was within hearing; then, locking the portal, he returned to his seat and said:

"So you never heard of the Seuen-H'sin—'The Sect of the Two Moons'? Then I will tell you: the Seuen-H'sin are the sorcerers of China, and the most murderously diabolical breed of human beings on this earth! They are the makers of these earthquakes that are aimed to wreck our world!"

The astronomer's declaration so dumbfounded me that I could only stare at him, wondering if he were serious.

"The Seuen-H'sin are sorcerers," he repeated presently, "whose devilish power is shaking our planet to the core. And I say to you solemnly that this 'KWO'—who is Kwo-Sung-tao, high priest of the Seuen-H'sin—is a thousand times more dangerous than all the conquerors in history! Already he has absolute control of a hundred millions of people—mind and body, body and soul!— holding them enthralled by black arts so terrible that the civilized mind cannot conceive of them!"

Dr. Gresham leaned forward, his eyes shining brightly, his voice betraying deep emotion.

"Have you any idea," he demanded "what goes on in the farthermost interior of China? Has *any* American or European?

"We read of a republic superseding her ancient monarchy, and we meet her students who are sent here to our schools. We hear of the expansion of our commerce along the jagged edges of that great Unknown, and we learn of Chinese railroad projects fostered by our financiers. But no human being in the outside world could possibly conceive what takes place in that gigantic shadowland— vague and vast as the midnight heavens—a continent unknown, impenetrable!

"Shut away in that remote interior—in a valley so little heard of that it is almost mythical—beyond trackless deserts and the loftiest mountains on the globe—this terrible sect of sorcerers has been growing in power for

thousands of years, storing up secret energy that some day should inundate the world with horrors such as never have been known!

"And yet you never heard of the Seuen-H'sin! No; nor has any other Caucasian, except, perhaps, a chance missionary or two.

"But, I tell you, *I have seen them*!"

Dr. Gresham was becoming strangely excited, and his voice rose almost shrilly above the roar of the train.

"I have seen them," he went on. "I have crossed the Mountains of Fear, whose summits tower as high as from the earth to the moon, and I have watched the stars dance at night upon their glaciers. I have starved upon the dead plains of Dzun-Sz'chuen, and I have swum the River of Death. I have slept in the Caves of Nganhwiu, where the hot winds never cease and the dead light their campfires on their journey to Nirvana. And I have seen, too—" there was a strange, entranced look on his face as he spoke "I have seen the Shadow of God on Tseih Mwan and K'eech- ch'a-gan! But in the end I have dwelt in Wu-yang!"

"Wu-yang," he continued, after a brief pause, "is the center of the Seuen-H'sin—a wondrous dream city beside a lake whose waters are as opalescent as the sky at dawn; where the gardens are sweet-scented with a million blooms, and the air is filled with bird songs and the music of golden bells.

"But forgive me," sighed the doctor, rousing himself from his ecstatic train of thought; "I speak in the allegories of another land!"

We were silent for a time, until finally I suggested:

"And the Seuen-H'sin—The Sect of the Two Moons?"

"Ah, yes," responded Dr. Gresham. "In Wu-yang the Beautiful I dwelt among them. For three years that city was my home. I labored in its workshops, studied in its schools, and—yes; I will admit it—I took part in those hellish ceremonies in the Temple of the Moon God—to save myself from death by fiendish torture. And, as my reward, I watched those devils at their miraculous business—*the making of another moon!*"

We smoked a moment in silence. Then: "Surely," I objected, "you do not believe in miracles!"

"Miracles? Yes," he affirmed seriously—"miracles of science. For the sorcerers of China are scientists—the greatest that this world has yet produced. Talk to me of modern progress—our arts and sciences, our discoveries and inventions! Bah! They are child's play—clap- trap!—beside the accomplishments of this race of Chinese devils! We Americans boast of our Thomas Edison. Why, the Seuen- H'sin have a thousand Edisons!

"Think of it—thousands of years before Copernicus discovered that the earth revolves around the sun, Chinese astronomers understood the na-

ture of our solar system and accurately computed the movements of the stars. The use of the magnetic compass was ancient even in those days. A thousand years before Columbus was born their navigators visited the western coast of North America and maintained colonies for a time. In the year 2657 B.C. savants of the Seuen-H'sin completed engineering projects on the Yellow River that never have been surpassed. And forty centuries before Christ the physicians of China practised inoculation against smallpox, and wrote erudite books on human anatomy.

"Scientists? Why, man alive, the Seuen-H'sin are the greatest scientists that ever lived! But they haven't the machinery or the materials or the factories that have made the Western nations great. There they are shut up in their hidden valley, with no commercial incentives, no contact with the world, no desire but to study and experiment.

"Their scientific development through centuries beyond number has had only one object, which was the basis of their fanatical religion—the discovery of a means to split this earth and project an offshoot into space to form a second moon. And if our train stopped this minute you probably could feel them somewhere beneath you hammering, hammering, hammering away at the world with their terrible and mysterious power, which even now it may be too late to stop!"

The astronomer rose and paced the length of the compartment, apparently so deep in thought that I was loth to disturb him. But finally I asked:

"Why do these sorcerers desire a second moon?"

Dr. Gresham resumed his seat and, lighting a fresh cigar, began:

"Numerous legends that are almost as old as the human race represent that the earth once had two moons. And not a few modern astronomers have held the same theory. Mars has two satellites, Uranus four, Jupiter five and Saturn ten. The supposition of these scientists is that the second satellite of the earth was shattered, and that its fragments are the meteors which occasionally encounter our world in their flight.

"Now, in the far, far distant past, before the days of Huang- ti and Yu—even before the time of the great semi-mythical kings, Yao and Shun—there ruled in China an emperor of peculiar fame— Ssu-chuan, the Universal.

"Ssu-chuan was a man of weak character and mediocre talents, but his reign was the greatest in all Chinese history, because of the intelligence and energy of his empress, Chwang-Keang.

"In those days, the legends tell us, the world possessed two moons.

"At the height of his prosperity Ssu-chuan fell in love with a very beautiful girl, called Mei-hsi, who became his mistress.

"The Empress Chwang-Keang was as plain as Mei-hsi was beautiful, and in time the mistress prevailed upon her lord to plot his wife's murder, so

that Mei-hsi might be queen. Chwang- Keang was stabbed to death one evening in her garden.

"With her death begins the history of Seuen-H'sin.

"Simultaneous with the murder of the empress, one of the moons vanished from the sky. The Chinese legends say the spirit of the great ruler took refuge upon the satellite, which fled with her from sight of the earth. Modern astronomers say the satellite probably was shattered by an internal explosion.

"Now that the firm hand of Chwang-Keang was lifted from affairs of state, everything went wrong in China—until the country reverted virtually to savagery.

"At last Ssu-chuan aroused himself from his pleasures sufficiently to take alarm. He consulted his priests and seers, who assured him that heaven was angry because of the murder of Chwang-Keang. Never again, they said, would China know happiness or prosperity until the vanished moon returned, bringing the spirit of the dead empress to watch over the affairs of her beloved land. Upon her return, however, the glory of China would rise again, and the Son of Heaven would rule the world.

"Upon receiving these tidings, the legends relate, Ssu-chuan was consumed with pious zeal.

"Upon a lofty mountain behind the city he built the most magnificent temple in the world, and installed there a special priesthood to beseech heaven to restore the second moon. This priesthood was named the Seuen-H'sin, or Sect of the Two Moons. The worship of the Moon God was declared the state religion.

"Gradually the belief that the Seuen-H'sin was to restore the second moon—and that, when this happened, the Celestial Kingdom again would enjoy universal rule—became the fanatical faith of a fourth of China.

"But finally, in a fit of remorse, Ssu-chuan burnt himself alive in his palace.

"The empire of Ssu-chuan dissolved, but the Seuen-H'sin grew greater. Its high priest attained the most terrible and far- reaching power in China. But in the second century B.C., Shi- Hwang-ti the great military emperor made war upon the sorcerers and drove them across the Kuen-lum mountains. Still they retained great wealth and power; and in Wu-yang they made a city that is the dream spot of the world, equipped with splendid colleges for the study of astronomy and the sciences and magic.

"As astronomical knowledge increased among the Seuen-H'sin, they came to believe that the moon once was a part of the earth, having been blown out of the hollow now filled by the Pacific Ocean. In this theory certain eminent American and French astronomers lately have concurred.

"The Chinese sorcerers conceived the idea that by scientific means the earth again could be rent asunder, and its offshoot projected into space to form a second moon. Henceforth, all their labors were directed toward finding that means. And the lust for world domination became the religion of their race.

"When I dwelt among them they seemed to be drawing near their goal—and now they probably have reached it!

"But if we may judge from these demands of Kwo-Sung-tao, their plans for world conquest have taken a new and simpler turn: by threatening to use their mysterious force to dismember the globe they hope to subjugate mankind just as effectively as they expected to do by creating a second moon and fulfilling their prophecy. Why wreck the earth, if they can conquer it by threats?

"If they are able to enforce their demands it will not be long before civilization is face to face with those powers of evil that grind a quarter of China's millions beneath their ghastly rule a rule of fanaticism and terror that would stun the world!"

Dr. Gresham paused and peered out the window. There was an unearthly look on his face when he again turned toward me.

"I have seen," he said, "those hideous powers of the Seuen- H'sin—things of horror such as the Western mind cannot conceive! When the beating of my heart shall cease forever, when my body has been buried in the grave, and when the Seuen-H'sin torture scars—" he tore open his shirt and revealed frightful cicatrices upon his chest "—have vanished in the final dissolution, then, even then, I shall not forget those devils out of hell in Wu-yang, and I shall feel their power clutching at my soul!"

CHAPTER IV — DR. GRESHAM TAKES COMMAND

IT was shortly before dawn when we alighted from the train in Washington. Newsboys were calling extras:

"Terrible disaster! Nine thousand lives lost in Mississippi River!"

Purchasing copies of the papers, Dr. Gresham called a taxicab and directed the chauffeur to take us as rapidly as possible to the United States Naval Observatory in Georgetown. We read the news as we rode along.

The great railroad bridge across the Mississippi River at St. Louis had collapsed, plunging three trains into the stream and drowning virtually all the passengers; and a few minutes later the Mississippi had ceased to flow past the city, pouring into a huge gap that suddenly had opened in the earth at a point about twenty-five miles northwest of the town.

Nearly everyone in St. Louis who could get an automobile had started for the point where the Mississippi was tumbling into the earth, and before long a vast crowd had assembled along the edges of the steaming chasm, watching the phenomenon.

Suddenly there had come a heavy shock underground and the crack had heaved nearly shut, sending a vast geyser, the full width of the stream, spouting a couple of thousand feet aloft. A few moments later this huge column of water had thundered back upon the river banks where the spectators were gathered, stunning and engulfing thousands. At the same time the gash had opened again and into it the torrent had swept the helpless multitude. Then it had closed once more and remained so, and the river had resumed its flow.

It was estimated that more than 9,000 persons had perished.

"Kwo-Sung-tao has stopped his earthquakes," remarked Dr. Gresham, when he had finished scanning the newspaper reports, "but irreparable damage has been done. Enough water doubtless has found its way into the heated interior of the globe to form a steam pressure that will play havoc."

Soon we drew up at the white-domed observatory crowning the wooded hill beyond Wisconsin Avenue. It was our good fortune to find Professor Howard Whiteman and several prominent members of the international scientific congress still there.

After a brief conversation with these gentlemen—to whom he was well known by reputation—Dr. Gresham drew Professor Whiteman and two of his chief assistants aside and began questioning them about the disturbances. He gave not the slightest hint of his knowledge of the Seuen-H'sin.

The doctor was particularly interested in every detail regarding the course taken by the quakes—whether or not all of them had come from the

same direction, what that direction was, and how far away the point of origin seemed to be.

Professor Whiteman said the seismographs indicated the tremors all had come from one direction—a point somewhere to the northwest and had traveled in a general southeasterly course. It was his opinion that the seat of the disturbances was about 3,000 miles distant—certainly not more than 4,000 miles.

This appeared greatly to surprise my companion and to upset whatever theories he might have in mind. Finally he asked to see all the data on the tremors, especially the actual seismograph records. At once we were taken to the building where these records were kept.

For more than an hour Dr. Gresham intently studied the charts and calculations, making new computations of his own and referring to numerous maps. But the longer he worked, the more puzzled he became.

Suddenly he looked up with an exclamation, and after seemingly weighing some new idea, he turned to me and said:

"Arthur, I need your help. Go to one of the newspaper offices and look through the files of old copies for an account of the capture of the Pacific steamship *Nippon* by Chinese pirates. Try to find out what cargo the vessel carried. If the newspaper accounts do not give this, then try at the State Department. But hurry!"

We had kept our taxicab waiting, so I was soon speeding toward one of the newspaper offices on Pennsylvania Avenue. As I rode along, I brought to mind the strange and terrible story of the great Pacific liner.

The *Nippon* was the newest and largest of the fleet of huge ships in service between San Francisco and the Orient. Fifteen months previous, while running from Nagasaki to Shanghai, across the entrance to the Yellow Sea, she had encountered a typhoon of such violence that one of her propeller shafts was damaged, and after the storm abated she was obliged to stop at sea for repairs.

It was an intensely dark, quiet night. About midnight the officer of the watch suddenly heard from the deck amidship a wild, long-drawn yell. Then all became quiet again. As he started to descend from the bridge he heard bare feet pattering along the deck below. And then more cries arose forward—the most awful sounds. Rushing to his cabin, he seized a revolver and returned to the deck.

Surging over the rail at a dozen points were savage, half- naked yellow forms, gripping long, curved knives—the dreaded but almost-extinct Chinese pirates of the Yellow Sea. The fiends swiftly attacked a number of passengers who had been promenading about, murdering them in cold blood.

Meanwhile, other pirates were rushing to all parts of the ship.

As soon as he recovered from his first horrified shock, the officer leaped toward a group of the Chinamen and emptied his revolver into them. But the pirates far outnumbered the cartridges in his weapon, and when his last bullet had been fired several of the yellow devils darted at him with gleaming knives. Whereupon the officer turned and fled to the wireless operator's room near by.

He got inside and fastened the heavy door just a second ahead of his pursuers. While the Chinamen were battering at the portal, he had the operator send out wireless calls for help, telling what was occurring on board.

Several ships and land stations picked up the strange story as far as I have related it, at which point the message ceased abruptly.

From that instant the *Nippon* vanished as completely as if she never had existed. Not one word ever again was heard of the vessel or of a single soul on board.

It required only a few minutes' search through the newspaper files to find the information I sought, and soon I was back at the observatory.

Dr. Gresham greeted me eagerly. "The steamship *Nippon* " I reported, "carried a cargo of American shoes, plows and lumber."

My friend's face fell with keen disappointment.

"What else?" he inquired. "Weren't there other things?"

"Lots of odds and ends," I replied—"pianos, automobiles, sewing machines, machinery—"

"Machinery?" the doctor shot out quickly. "What kind of machinery?"

I drew from my pocket the penciled notes I had made at the newspaper office and glanced over the items.

"Some electrical equipment," I answered. "Dynamos, turbines, switchboards, copper cable—all such things—for a hydro-electric plant near Hongkong."

"Ah!" exclaimed the doctor in elation, "I was sure of it! We may be getting at the mystery at last!"

Seizing the memoranda, he ran his eyes hurriedly down the list of items. Profound confidence marked his bearing when he turned to Professor Whiteman a moment later and said:

"I must obtain an immediate audience with the President of the United States. You know him personally. Can you arrange it?"

Professor Whiteman could not conceal his surprise.

"Concerning these earthquakes?" he inquired. "Yes!" my friend assured him. The astronomer looked at his colleague keenly.

"I will see what I can do," he said. And he went off to a telephone.

In five minutes he was back.

"The President and his cabinet meet at 9 o'clock," announced the director. "You will be received at that hour."

Dr. Gresham looked at his watch. It was 8:30.

"If you will be so kind," said Dr. Gresham, "I would like to have you go with us to the President—and Sir William Belford, Monsieur Linné and the Duke de Rizzio as well, if they are still here. What we have to discuss is of the utmost importance to their governments, as well as to ours."

Professor Whiteman signified his own willingness to go, and went to hunt the other gentlemen.

This trio my friend had named comprised undoubtedly the leading minds of the international scientific congress. Sir William Belford was the great English physicist, head of the British delegation to the congress. Monsieur Camille Linné was the leader of the French group of scientists, a distinguished electrical expert. And the Duke de Rizzio was the famous Italian inventor and wireless telegraph authority, who headed the representatives from Rome.

The director soon returned with the three visitors, and we all hastened to the White House. Promptly at 9 o'clock we were ushered into the room where the nation's chief executive and his cabinet—all grim and careworn from a night of sleepless anxiety—were in session.

As briefly as possible, Dr. Gresham told the story of the Seuen-H'sin.

"It is their purpose," he concluded, "to crack open the earth's crust by these repeated shocks, so that the water from the oceans will pour into the globe's interior. There, coming into contact with incandescent matter, steam will be generated until there is an explosion that will split the planet in two."

It is hardly to the discredit of the President and his advisers that they could not at once accept so fantastic a tale.

"How can these Chinamen produce an artificial quaking of the earth?" asked the President.

"That," replied the astronomer frankly, "I am not prepared to answer yet—although I have a strong suspicion of the method employed."

For the greater part of an hour the gentlemen questioned the astronomer. They did not express doubt of his veracity in his account of the Seuen-H'sin, but merely questioned his judgment in attributing to that sect the terrible power to control the internal forces of the earth.

"You are asking us," objected the Secretary of State, "virtually to return to the Dark Ages and believe in magicians and sorcerers and supernatural events!"

"Not at all!" returned the astronomer. "I am asking you to deal with modern facts—to grapple with scientific ideas that are so far ahead of our times the world is not prepared to accept them!"

"Then you believe that an unheard-of group of Chinamen, hiding in some remote corner of the globe, has developed a higher form of science than the brightest minds of all the civilized nations?" remarked the Attorney General.

"Events of the last few weeks seem to have demonstrated that," replied Dr. Gresham.

"But," protested the President, "if these Mongolians aim at splitting the globe to project a new moon into the sky, why should they be satisfied with an entirely different object the acquisition of temporal power?"

"Because," the? scientist informed him, "the acquisition of temporal power is their ultimate goal. Their only object in creating a second moon is to fulfill the prophecy that they should rule the earth again when two moons hung in the sky. If they can grasp universal rule *without* splitting the globe—merely by *threatening* to do so—they are very much the gainers."

The Secretary of the Navy next voiced a doubt.

"But it is evident," be remarked, "that if Kwo-Sung-tao makes the heavens fall, they will fall on his own head also!"

"Quite true," admitted the astronomer.

"Then," persisted the Secretary, "is it likely that human beings would plot the destruction of the earth when they know it would involve them, too, in the ruin?"

"You forget," returned the doctor, "that we are dealing with a band of religious fanatics—undoubtedly the most irrational zealots that ever lived!

"Besides," he added, "the Seuen-H'sin, in spite of its threats, does not expect to destroy the world completely. It contemplates no more than the blowing of a fragment off into space."

"What, then, shall be done?" inquired the President.

"Place at my disposal one of the fastest destroyers of the Pacific fleet—equipped with certain scientific apparatus I shall devise—and let me deal with the Seuen-H'sin in my own way," announced the astronomer.

The gathering at once voiced vigorous objection.

"What you propose might mean war with China!" exclaimed the President.

"Not at all," was the answer. "It is possible not a single shot will be fired. And, in any event, we will not go anywhere near China,"

The consternation of the officials increased.

"We shall not go near China," Dr. Gresham explained, "because I am certain the leaders of the Seuen-H'sin are no longer there. At this very hour, I am convinced, Kwo-Sung-tao and his devilish band are very much nearer to us than you dream!"

The gathering broke into excited discussion.

"After all," remarked Sir William Belford, "suppose this expedition *should* plunge us into hostilities. Unless something is done quickly, we are likely to meet a fate far worse than war!"

"I am willing to do anything necessary to remove this menace from the world—if the menace actually exists," the President stated. "But I am unable to convince myself that these wireless messages threatening mankind are not merely the emanations of a crank, who is taking advantage of conditions over which he has no control."

"But I maintain," argued Sir William, "that the sender of these messages *has* fully demonstrated his control over our planet. He prophesied a definite performance, and that prophecy was fulfilled to the letter. We cannot attribute its fulfillment to natural causes, nor to any human agency other than his. I say it is time we recognized his power, and dealt with him as best we may."

Several others now began to incline to this view.

Whereupon the Attorney General joined in the discussion with considerable warmth.

"I must protest," he interposed, "against what seems to me an extraordinary credulity upon the part of many of you gentlemen. I view this affair as a rational human being. Some natural phenomenon occurred to disturb the solidity of the earth's crust. That disturbance has ceased. Some joker or lunatic was lucky enough to strike it right with his prediction of this cessation—nothing more. The disturbance may never reappear. Or it may resume at any moment and end in a calamity, no one can foretell. But when you ask me to believe that these earthquakes were due to some human agency—that a mysterious bugaboo was responsible for them—I tell you *no!*"

Monsieur Linée had risen and was walking nervously up and down the room. Presently he turned to the Attorney General and remarked:

"That is merely your opinion, sir. It is not proof. Why may these earthquakes not be due to some human agency? Have we not begun to solve all the mysteries of nature? A few years ago it was inconceivable that electricity could ever be used for power, heat and light. May not many of the inconceivable things of today be the commonplace realities of tomorrow? We have earthquakes. Is it beyond imagination that the forces which produce them can be controlled?"

"Still," returned the Attorney General vigorously, "my answer is that we have no adequate reason for attributing either the appearance or the cessation of these earthquakes to any human power! And I am unalterably opposed to making the government of the United States ridiculous by fitting out a naval expedition to combat a phantom adversary."

Dr. Gresham now had risen and was standing behind his chair, his face flushed and his eyes shining. At this point he broke sharply into the discussion, the cold, cutting force of his words leaving no doubt of his decision.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I did not come here to *argue*; I came to *help!* As surely as I am standing here, our world is upon the brink of dissolution! And I alone may be able to save it! But, if I am to do so, you must agree absolutely to the course of action I propose!"

He glanced at his watch. It was 10 o'clock.

"At noon," he announced, in tones of finality, "I shall return for my answer!"

And he turned and started for the door.

In the tenseness of those last few moments, almost no one had been conscious of the soft buzzing of the President's telephone signal, or of the fact that the executive had removed the receiver and was listening into the instrument.

Now, as Dr. Gresham reached the door, the President lifted a hand in a commanding gesture and cried: "Wait!"

The astronomer turned back into the room.

For a minute, perhaps, the President listened at the telephone; and as he did so the expression of his face underwent a grave change. Then, telling the person at the other end of the wire to wait, he addressed the gathering:

"The Naval Observatory at Georgetown is on the 'phone. There has just been another communication from 'KWO.' It says—"

The executive again spoke into the telephone: "Read the message once more, please!"

After a few seconds, speaking slowly, he repeated:

"'To the Presiding Officer of the International Scientific Congress:

"'I hereby set the hour of noon, on the twenty-fifth day of the next month, September, as the time when I shall require compliance with the first three demands of my last communication. The fulfillment of the fourth demand—the resignation of all the existing governments—therefore, will take place on the twenty-eighth day of September.

"'In order to facilitate the execution of my plans, I shall require an answer by midnight next Saturday, one week from today, from the govern-

ments of the world as to whether they will comply with my terms of surrender. In the absence of a favorable reply by that time, I shall terminate, absolutely and forever, all negotiations with the human race, and shall cause the earthquakes to resume and continue with increasing violence until the earth is shattered.

"'KWO.'"

When the President finished reading and hung up the telephone, a deathlike silence fell upon the gathering. Dr. Gresham, standing by the door, made no further movement to depart.

The President glanced at the faces about him, as if seeking some solution of the problem. But no aid was forthcoming from that source.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a chair being pushed back from the table, and Sir William Belford rose to speak.

"Gentlemen," he said, "this is no time for hesitation. If the United States does not immediately grant Dr. Gresham's request for a naval expedition against the Seuen-H'sin, Great Britain *will* do so!"

At once Monsieur Linné spoke up: "And that is the attitude of France!"

The Duke de Rizzio nodded, as if in acquiescence.

Without further hesitation, the President announced his decision.

"I will take the responsibility for acting first and explaining to Congress afterward," he said. And, turning to the Secretary of the Navy, he added:

"Please see that Dr. Gresham gets whatever ships, men, money and supplies he needs—without delay!"

CHAPTER V. — BEGINNING A STRANGE VOYAGE

TELEGRAPHIC orders flew thick and fast from Washington, and before nightfall two high naval officers left the capital for San Francisco to expedite arrangements for the expedition.

Meanwhile, the doctor hurried me back to New York with instructions to visit the electrical concern that had manufactured the dynamos and other equipment that had been aboard the steamship *Nippon*, and obtain all the information possible about this machinery. This I did without difficulty.

The government arranged with a big electrical machinery firm to place a section of its plant at Dr. Gresham's disposal, and as soon as the astronomer returned to New York he plunged into feverish activity at this shop, personally superintending the construction of his paraphernalia.

As fast as this apparatus was completed it was rushed off by airplane to the Mare Island navy yard near San Francisco.

It had already been settled that I was to accompany the doctor on his expedition, so my friend availed himself of my services for many tasks. Some of these struck me as most odd.

I had to purchase a large quantity of fine silks of brilliant hues, mostly orange, blue and violet; also a supply of grease-paints and other materials for theatrical make-up. These articles were sent to Mare Island with the scientific equipment.

Day by day, the week which "KWO" had granted the world to announce its surrender slipped by. During this period the utmost secrecy was maintained regarding the projected naval expedition. The public knew nothing of the strange story of the sorcerers of China. Anxiety was universal and acute.

Many persons favored surrender to the would-be "emperor of the earth," arguing that any person who proposed to abolish war possessed a greatness of spirit far beyond any known statesman; they were willing to entrust the future of the world to such a dictator. Others contended that the demand for destruction of all implements of war was merely a precautionary measure against resistance to tyranny.

Dr. Gresham urged to the authorities at Washington that in dealing with so unscrupulous and inhuman a foe as the sorcerers, equally unscrupulous methods were justified. He proposed that the nations inform "KWO" they would surrender, to ward off the immediate resumption of the earthquakes and give the naval expedition time to accomplish its work.

But the governments could not agree upon any course of action; and in this indecision the last day of grace drew toward its close.

As midnight approached, vast crowds assembled about the newspaper offices, eager to learn what was going to happen.

At last the fateful hour came—and passed in silence. The world had failed to concede its surrender.

Five minutes more slipped into eternity.

Then there was a sudden stir as bulletins appeared. Their message was brief. At three minutes past 12 o'clock the wireless at the United States Naval Observatory had received this communication:

To All Mankind:

I have given the world an opportunity to continue in peace and prosperity. My offer has been rejected. The responsibility is upon your own heads. This is my final message to the human race.

KWO.

Within an hour the earthquakes resumed. And they were repeated, as before, exactly eleven minutes and six seconds apart.

With their reappearance vanished the last vestige of doubt that the terrestrial disturbances were due to human agency—to a being powerful enough to do what he chose with the planet.

By the end of three days it was noticed that the shocks were increasing in violence much more swiftly than previously, as if the earth's crust had been so weakened that it could no longer resist the hammering.

At this juncture Dr. Gresham announced that he was ready to leave for the Pacific Coast.

The government had one of its giant mail planes waiting at an aviation field on Long Island, and in its comfortable enclosed interior we were whisked across the continent.

In less than two days we alighted at the Mare Island Navy Yard, where the *Albatros*, the destroyer that was to serve for our expedition, lay at our disposal.

The *Albatros* was the newest, largest and fastest destroyer of the Pacific fleet—an oil-burning craft carrying a crew of 117 men.

Most of the boxes and crates of material that we had sent from New York being already on deck, the astronomer immediately went to work with a corps of the navy's electricians to assemble his apparatus.

I was sent off to find six men tailors all familiar with the making of theatrical costumes, who were willing to undertake a mysterious and danger-

ous sea voyage; also two actors skilled in make-up.

All during this time the earthquakes never varied from their intervals of eleven minutes and six seconds, and the seriousness of affairs throughout the world continued to grow. In Europe and America deep fissures, sometimes hundreds of miles long, now appeared in the ground. Gradually it became apparent that these cracks in the earth's crust were confined within a definite area, which roughly formed a circle touching the Mississippi River on the west and Serbia on the east.

Then, on the morning after our arrival in San Francisco, half a dozen noted scientists—none of whom, however, belonged to the little group that had been taken into Dr. Gresham's confidence regarding the Seuen-H'sin issued a warning to the public.

They prophesied that the world soon would be rent by an explosion, and that the portion within the circular area already outlined would be blown away into space or would be pulverized.

Nearly one-fifth of the entire surface of the earth was included in this doomed circle, embracing the most civilized countries of the globe the eastern half of the United States and Canada; all of the British Isles, France, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Switzerland, Belgium, Holland and Denmark; and most of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Brazil. Here, too, were located the world's greatest cities—New York, London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Rome, Chicago, Boston, Washington and Philadelphia.

The scientists urged the people of the eastern United States and Canada to flee immediately beyond the Rocky Mountains, while the inhabitants of western Europe were advised to take refuge east of the Carpathians.

The first result of this warning was simply to daze the public. But in a few hours the true character of the predicted happenings dawned upon people in full force. Then terror—blind, sickening, unreasoning terror seized the masses, and there began the most gigantic and terrible exodus in the history of the earth—a migration that in a few hours developed into a mad race of half the planet's inhabitants across thousands of miles.

Transportation systems were seized by the frenzied throngs and rendered useless in the jam. People started frantically in airplanes, automobiles, horsedrawn vehicles—even on foot. All restraints of law and order vanished in the hideous struggle of "every man for himself."

At last, toward midnight of this day, Dr. Gresham finished his work. Together we made a final tour of inspection through the ship.

Electrical equipment was scattered everywhere—several big generators, a whole battery of huge induction coils, submarine telephones, switchboards with strange clocklike devices mounted upon them, and reels of heavy copper wire.

One thing that particularly attracted my attention was an instrument at the very bottom of the ship's hold. It looked like the seismographs used on land for recording earthquakes. I observed, too, that the wireless telegraph equipment of the destroyer had been much enlarged, giving it a wide radius.

At the finish of our inspection, the doctor sought Commander Mitchell, the vessel's chief officer, and announced:

"You may start at once—on the course I have outlined."

A few minutes later we were silently speeding toward the Golden Gate.

Dr. Gresham and I then went to bed.

When we awoke the next morning we were out of sight of land and were steaming at full speed north in the Pacific Ocean.

CHAPTER VI. — THE COASTS OF MYSTERY

HOUR after hour the destroyer kept up her furious pace almost due north in the Pacific. We never came in sight of land, and it was impossible for me to guess whither we were bound.

Throughout the first day Dr. Gresham remained in his stateroom—silent, troubled, buried in a mass of arithmetical calculations.

In another part of the ship the six tailors I had brought on board labored diligently upon a number of Chinese costumes, the designs for which the doctor had sketched for them.

And on deck a detail of men was busy unpacking and assembling one of the two hydroplanes that had been taken on hoard.

By the middle of the second day Dr. Gresham laid aside his calculations and began to display the keenest interest in the details of the voyage. About midnight he had the ship stopped, although neither land nor any other craft was in sight; whereupon he went to the hold and studied the hydro-seismographs. To my surprise I saw that, although we were adrift upon the restless ocean, the instrument was recording tremors similar to earthquakes on land. These occurred precisely eleven minutes and six seconds apart.

Seeing my astonishment, the doctor explained:

"It is possible to record earth shocks even at sea. The ocean bed imparts the jar to the water, through which the tremor continues like the wave caused by throwing a stone into a pond."

But the thing which seemed to interest my friend most was that these shocks now appeared to be originating at some point to the northeast of us, instead of to the northwest, as we had noted them in Washington.

Soon he ordered the vessel started again, this time on a northeasterly course, and the next morning we were close to land.

Dr. Gresham, who at last had begun to throw off his taciturn mood, told me this was the coast of the almost unsettled province of Cassiar, in British Columbia. Later, as we began to pass behind some rugged islands, he said we were entering Fitzhugh Sound, a part of the inland passage to Alaska. We were now approximately 300 miles northwest of the city of Vancouver.

"Somewhere, not far to the north of here," added the doctor, "is 'The Country of the Great Han,' where Chinese navigators, directed by Huei-Sen, a Buddhist priest, landed and founded colonies in the year 499 A.D. You will find it all recorded in 'The Book of Changes,' which was written in the reign of Tai- ming, in the dynasty of Yung: how, between the years 499 and 556, Chinese adventurers made many trips across the Pacific to these colonies, bringing to the wild inhabitants the laws of Buddha, his sacred

books and images; building stone temples; and causing at last the rudeness of the natives' customs to disappear."

With this my friend left me, upon some summons from the ship's commander, and I could learn no more. The region into which we were now penetrating was one of the wildest and loneliest on the North American continent. The whole coastline was fringed by a chain of islands the tops of a submerged mountain range. Between these islands and the continent extended a maze of deep, narrow channels, some of which connected in a continuous inland waterway. The mainland was a wilderness of lofty peaks, penetrated at intervals by tortuous fiords, which, according to the charts, sometimes extended erratically inland for a hundred miles or more. Back from the coast a few miles, we could see the elevated gorges of the main range filled with glaciers, and occasionally one of these gigantic rivers of ice pushed out to the Sound, where its face broke away in an endless flotilla of icebergs.

The only dwellers in this region were the few inhabitants of the tiny Indian fishing villages, scattered many miles apart; and even of these we saw not a sign throughout the day.

Toward nightfall the doctor had the *Albatros* drop anchor in a quiet lagoon, and the hydroplane that had been assembled on deck was lowered to the water.

It now lacked two nights of the period of full moon, and the nearly round satellite hung well overhead as darkness fell, furnishing, in that clear atmosphere, a beautiful illumination in which every detail of the surrounding mountains stood forth.

As soon as the last trace of daylight had vanished, Dr. Gresham, equipped with a pair of powerful binoculars, appeared on deck, accompanied by an aviator. He said nothing about where he was going; and, knowing his moods so intimately, I realized it was useless to seek information until he volunteered it. But he handed me a large sealed envelope, remarking:

"I am going for a trip that may take all night. In case I should not return by sun-up you will know something has happened to me, and you are to open this envelope and have Commander Mitchell act upon the instructions it contains."

With this, he gave me a firm handclasp that plainly was meant for a possible farewell, and followed the aviator into the plane. In a few moments they were off, their new type of noiseless motor making scarcely a sound, and soon were climbing toward the summits of the snow-covered peaks to the eastward. Almost before we realized it they were lost from sight.

It was my intention to keep watch through the night for the return of my friend; but after several hours I fell asleep and knew no more until dawn was reddening the mountain-tops. Then the throbbing of the destroyer's

engines awakened me, and I hurried on deck to find Dr. Gresham himself giving orders for the vessel's movements.

The scientist never once referred to the events of the night as he partook of a light breakfast and went to bed. However, I could tell by his manner that he had not met with success.

Slowly the ship continued northward most of that day, through the awesome fastnesses of Fitzhugh Sound, until we reached the mouth of a grim fiord set down on the charts as Dean Channel. Here we cast anchor.

Late in the afternoon Dr. Gresham put in his appearance, viewed the mainland through his glasses, and then went into the ship's hold to study his earthquake recorder. What he observed apparently pleased him.

This night also was moonlit and crystal-clear; and, as before, when daylight had departed, the doctor reminded me of the sealed orders I held against his failure to return at sunrise, bade me farewell, and started off in the airship, flying straight toward the range of peaks that walled the eastern world.

On this occasion a series of remarkable happenings removed all difficulty of my keeping awake.

About 10 o'clock, when I chanced to be visiting in the commander's cabin, an officer came and informed us of some strange lights that had been observed above the mountains at a distance inland. We went on deck and beheld a peculiar and inexplicable phenomenon.

To the northeast the heavens were illuminated at intervals by flashes of white light, extending, fan-shaped, far overhead. The display was as brilliant and beautiful as it was mysterious. For a good while we watched it—until I was suddenly struck with the regularity of the intervals between the flashes. Timing the lights with my watch, I found they occurred *precisely eleven minutes and six seconds apart!*

With a new idea in mind, I made a note of the exact instant when each flash appeared; then I went down into the hold of the ship and looked at Dr. Gresham's hydro-seismograph. As I suspected, the aerial flashes had occurred simultaneously with the earthquakes.

When I returned to the deck the phenomenon in the sky had ceased.

But shortly after midnight another portentous event occurred to claim undivided attention.

The powerful wireless of the *Albatros*, which could hear messages coming and going throughout the United States and Canada, as well as over a great part of the Pacific Ocean, began to pick up accounts of terrible happenings all over the world. The fissures in the ground, which had appeared shortly before we left San Francisco, had suddenly widened and lengthened into a nearly unbroken ring about the portion of the globe from which the inhabitants had been warned to flee. Within this danger- circle

the ground had begun to vibrate heavily and continuously— as the lid to a teakettle dances when the pressure of steam beneath it is seeking a vent.

The flight of the public from the doomed area had grown into an appalling *hegira*—until a fresh disaster, a few hours ago, had suddenly cut it short: the Rocky Mountains had begun to fall down throughout most of their extent, obliterating all the railroads and other highways that penetrated their chain. Now the way to safety beyond the mountain was hopelessly blocked.

And with this catastrophe hell had broken loose among the people of America!

It was near dawn before these stories ceased. The officers and I were still discussing them when day broke and we beheld Dr. Gresham's hydroplane circling high overhead, seeking a landing. In a few minutes the doctor was with us.

The instant I set eyes on him I knew he had met with some degree of success. But he said nothing until we were alone and I had poured out the tale of the night's happenings.

"So you saw the flashes?" he remarked.

"We were greatly puzzled by them," I admitted. "And you?"

"I was directly above them and saw them made," he announced.

"Saw them *made*?"I repeated.

"Yes," he assured me; "indeed, I have had a most interesting trip. I would have taken you with me, only it would have increased the danger, without serving any purpose. However, I am going on another jaunt tonight, in which you might care to join me."

I told him I was most eager to do so.

"Very well," he approved; "then you had better go to bed and get all the rest you can, for our adventure will not be child's play."

The doctor then sought the ship's commander and asked him to proceed very slowly up the deep and winding Dean Channel, keeping a sharp lookout ahead. As soon as the vessel started we went to bed.

IT was mid-afternoon when we awakened. Looking out our cabin portholes, we saw we were moving slowly past lofty granite precipices that were so close it seemed we might almost reach out and touch them. Quickly we got on deck.

Upon being informed that we had gone about seventy-five miles up Dean Channel, Dr. Gresham stationed himself on the bridge with a pair of powerful glasses, and for several hours gave the closest scrutiny ahead, as new vistas of the tortuous waterway unfolded.

We now seemed to be passing directly into the heart of the lofty Cascade Mountain range that runs the length of Cassiar Province in British Columbia. At times the cliffs bordering the fiord drew in so close that it seemed we had reached the end of the channel, and again they rounded out into graceful slopes thickly carpeted with pines. Still there was no sign that the foot of man ever had trod this wilderness.

Late in the afternoon Dr. Gresham became very nervous, and toward twilight he had the ship stopped and a launch lowered.

"We will start at once," he told me, "and Commander Mitchell will go with us."

Taking from me the sealed letter of instructions he had left in my care before starting on his airplane trips the previous nights, he handed it to the commander, saying: "Give this to the officer you leave in charge of the ship. It is his orders in case anything should happen to us and we do not return by morning. Also, please triple the strength of the night watch. Run your vessel close under the shadows of the bank, and keep her pitch- dark. We are now in the heart of the enemy's country, and we can't tell what sort of a lookout he may be keeping."

While Commander Mitchell was attending to these orders, the doctor sent me below to get a pair of revolvers for each of us. When I returned, the three of us entered the launch and put off up the channel.

Slowly and noiselessly we moved ahead in the gathering shadows near shore. The astronomer sat in the bow, silent and alert, gazing constantly ahead through his glasses.

We had proceeded scarcely fifteen minutes when the doctor suddenly ordered the launch stopped. Handing his binoculars to me and pointing ahead beyond a sharp bend we were just rounding, he exclaimed excitedly; *"Look!"*

I did so, and to my astonishment saw a great steamship lying at a wharf!

Commander Mitchell now had brought his glasses into use, and a moment later he leaped to his feet, exclaiming:

"My God, men! *That's the vanished Pacific liner Nippon!"*

An instant more and I also had discerned the name, standing out in white letters against the black stern. Soon I made a second discovery that thrilled me with amazement: faint columns of smoke were rising from the vessel's funnels, as if she were manned by a crew and ready to sail!

"Let us get back to the *Albatros*," said Dr. Gresham, "as quickly as we can!"

On board the destroyer, we hastened to our cabin, where Chinese suits of gorgeous silk had been laid out for us; they were part of the quantity of such garments my six tailors had been making. There were two outfits for

each—one of flaming orange, which we put on first, and one of dark blue, which we slipped on over the other. Then one of the actors was summoned, and he made up our faces so skillfully that it would have been difficult to distinguish us from Chinamen.

When the actor had left the room, the doctor handed me the revolvers I had carried before, and also a long, villainous- looking knife. To these he added a pair of field glasses. After similarly arming himself, he announced:

"I feel I must warn you, Arthur, that this trip may be the most perilous of your whole life. All the chances are against our living to see tomorrow's sun, and if we die it is likely to be by the most fiendish torture ever devised by human beings! Think well before you start!"

I promptly assured him I was willing to go wherever he might lead.

"But where," I asked, "is that to be?"

"We are going," he answered, "into the hell-pits of the Seuen- H'sin!"

And with that we entered the launch and put off into the coming darkness.

CHAPTER VII. — THE MOON GOD'S TEMPLE

IT was not long before the launch again brought us within sight of the mystery ship, the *Nippon*.

Near it we landed and had the seaman take the launch back to the destroyer. With a final inspection of our revolvers and knives, we started forward through the rocks and timber toward the vessel.

It was the night of the full moon, but the satellite had not yet risen above the mountains to the east, so we had only the soft gleam of the stars to light us on our way. In spite of the northern latitude, it was not uncomfortably cold, and soon we were spellbound by the gorgeous panorama of the night. Above us, through the lattice-work of boughs, the calm, cold stars moved majestically across the black immensity of space. The dark was fragrant with the scent of pines. Strangely hushed and still the universe appeared, as if in the silence world were whispering to world.

We could now feel the periodic earthquakes very plainly—as if we were directly over the seat of the disturbances.

In a few minutes we reached the edge of the clearing about the *Nippon's* wharf. There were no buildings, so we had an unobstructed view of the vessel, lying tied to the dock. Two or three lights shone faintly from her portholes, but no one was visible about her.

The wharf was at the entrance to a little side valley that ran off to the southwest through a break in the precipitous wall of the fiord. From this ravine poured a turbulent mountain stream which, I recalled from the ship's charts, was named Dean River.

After a brief look around we discovered a wide, smooth roadway leading from the wharf into the valley, paralleling the stream. Keeping a cautious lookout, we began to follow this road, slipping along through the timber at its side.

In about five minutes we came to a coal mine on the slope beside the highway. From the looks of its dump, it was being worked constantly—probably furnishing the fuel to keep fire under the *Nippon's* boilers.

Fifteen more minutes passed in laborious climbing over rocks and fallen timber, when all at once, after ascending a slight rise to another level of the valley's floor, we beheld the lights of a village a short distance beyond! At once Dr. Gresham changed our course to take us up the mountainside, whence we could look down upon the settlement.

To my amazement, we saw a neatly laid out town of more than a hundred houses, with electric-lighted streets. Although the houses seemed to be built entirely of corrugated sheet iron— probably because a more sub-

stantial type of construction would not have withstood the earthquakes—there was about the place an indefinable Chinese atmosphere.

My first shock of surprise at coming across this hidden city soon gave way to wonder that the outside world knew nothing of such a place—that it was not even indicated on the maps. But I recalled that on the land side it was unapproachable because of lofty mountains, beyond which lay an immense trackless wilderness; and on the water side it was a hundred miles off even the navigation lanes to Alaska.

Suddenly, as we stood there in the timber, a deep-toned bell began to toll on the summit of the low mountain above us.

"The Temple of the Moon God!" exclaimed Dr. Gresham.

With the sounding of the bell, the village awakened into life. From nearly every house came figures clad in flaming orange costumes, exactly like the ones Dr. Gresham and I wore beneath our outer suits. At the end of the town these figures mingled and turned into a roadway, and a few moments later we saw they were coming up the hill directly toward us!

Not knowing which way they would pass, we crouched in the dark and waited.

Still the weird, mellow tocsin sounded above us—slowly, mystically, flooding the valley with somber, thrilling sound.

All at once we heard the tramping of many feet, and then perceived with alarm that the roadway up the mountainside passed not more than twenty feet from where we lay! Along it the silent, strange procession was mounting the slope!

"The Seuen-H'sin," whispered my companion, "on their way to the hellish temple rites!"

Scarcely breathing, we pressed flat upon the ground, fearful each instant we might be discovered. For a period that seemed interminable the brilliantly clad figures continued to shuffle by—hundreds of them. But at last there was an end of the marchers.

Immediately Dr. Gresham rose and, motioning me to follow his example, quickly slipped off his blue outer costume and rolled it into a small bundle, which he tucked under his arm. I was ready an instant later.

Creeping out to the road, we peered about to make certain no stragglers were approaching; then we hurried after the ascending throng. It was only a few moments until we overtook the rear ranks, whereupon we adopted their gait and followed silently, apparently attracting no attention.

The mountain was not very high, and at last we came out upon a spacious level area at the top. It was moderately well illuminated by electric lamps, and at the eastern end, near the edge of the eminence, we beheld a stone temple into which the multitude was passing. Depositing our rolls of

outer clothing in a spot where we could easily find them again, we moved forward.

As we crossed the walled mountaintop, or temple courtyard it might be called, I swiftly took in the strange surroundings. The temple was a thing to marvel at. It was all of stone, with high, fantastically carved walls and an imposing facade of rounded columns. On each side of the central structure were wings, or side halls, that ran off into the darkness; and in front of these were walled courtyards with arched gateways, roofed with golden-yellow tiles. The structure must have required engineering skill of the highest order for its building, yet it appeared old, incredibly old, as if the storms of centuries had beaten upon it.

Everywhere about the walls were cracks—doubtless the result of the earthquakes—so numerous and pronounced that one wondered how the building held together.

Presently, as we advanced, I noticed an overturned and broken statue of Buddha, the stone figure partly overgrown with moss and lichens. As I studied this I recalled the bit of history Dr. Gresham had related to me a couple of days before as we journeyed northward on the Albatross—of the Chinese navigators, directed by Huei-Sen, a Buddhist monk, who had come "somewhere to the north" in the year 499 A.D. And I wondered if this was, indeed, the "Country of the Great Han" that was discovered by these Orientals in the long ago—if this might be one of the temples which Huei-Sen and his followers had built in the days a thousand years before Columbus.

I whispered these questions to the doctor.

With an alarmed glance about us to make sure I had not been overheard, he answered very low:

"You have guessed it! But keep silent, as you value your life! Stay close to me and do whatever the others do!"

We were now at the entrance to the temple. Heavy yellow curtains covered the portal, and within a gong droned slowly.

Summoning courage, we pushed aside the draperies and entered.

The place was large and dimly lighted. Low red seats ran crosswise in long rows. At the far end, against the east wall, was the altar, before which were drawn deep yellow hangings. In front of these, under a hood of golden gauze, burned a solitary light. There was a terror in this mysterious dusk that gave me a strange thrill.

The audience was standing, silent, with bowed heads, by the rows of seats. Quaking inwardly, we took places in the last row, where the light was dimmest. So perfectly were our costumes and make-up a match for those around us that we attracted no attention.

All at once the tempo of the gong's droning changed, becoming slower and weirder, and other gongs joined in at intervals. The illumination, which appeared to come solely from the ceiling, brightened somewhat.

Then a door opened on the right, about midway of the building, and there appeared a being such as I had never beheld before. He was tall and lean and wore a robe of golden silk. Behind him came another—a priest in superb violet; and behind him a third in flaming orange. They wore high helmets with feathery plumes.

In the hands of each priest were peculiar instruments—or images, if so they might be called. Above a handle about two feet long, held vertically, was a thin rod curved upward in a semi- circle, at each end of which was a flat disk about a foot in diameter—one disk of silver, the other of gold. As I scrutinized these emblems I wondered if they were meant to symbolize the Seuen-H'sin's belief in two moons.

Slowly the priests advanced to a central aisle, then forward to an open space, or hall of prayer, before the altar.

Then a door opened on the left, opposite the first portal, and from it issued a fourth priest in robes of richest purple, followed by another in crimson, and still another in wondrous green. They, also, wore the high, feathery helmets and carried the instruments with gold and silver disks.

When the last three had joined the first trio, other portals opened along the sides of the temple, and half a dozen more priests entered and strode forward. The brilliant colors of their frocks seemed a part of the devilish gong-droning. In the dim vastness of the temple they moved on, silent as ghosts. There was something singularly depressing in the slow, noiseless steps. It was as if they were walking to their death.

Still the procession grew in numbers. Hitherto unnoticed portals gave entrance to more yellow, orange and violet-clad priests—demoniacal-looking beings, with lean, cruel, thoughtful faces and somber, dreaming eyes.

At last the procession ended. There was a pause, after which the audience standing among the rows of red seats burst into low murmurs of supplication. Sometimes the voices rose into a considerable humming sound; again they sank into a whisper. Suddenly the murmur of voices ceased and there was a blare of unseen trumpets—a crashing vastness of sound; harsh, unearthly, infernal, so that I shivered in horror. Nothing could be seen of the terrible orchestra; its notes seemed to come from a dark adjoining hall.

Again there was a pause a thrilling period in which even the droning gongs were hushed; and then from an unseen portal came, slowly and alone, a figure that all the rest seemed to have been waiting for.

Leaning close to my ear, Dr. Gresham whispered:

"The high priest, Kwo-Sung-tao!"

With leaping interest, I turned to view the personage—and was held spellbound by the amazing personality of this man who proposed to make himself emperor of all the world.

He was old, *old*; small, shrunken; a very mummy of a man; bald, and with a long white mustache; enveloped in a shroud of cloth of gold, embroidered with crimson dragons and dual gold and silver moons. But never to my dying day can I forget that face, with its fearful eyes! All the wisdom and power and wickedness of the world were blended there.

Straight toward the altar the old man walked, looking neither to the right nor the left; and when he had mounted the steps he paused before the curtains and turned. As his blazing eyes swept the hall the entire multitude seemed to shrink and shrivel. An awful, sepulchral silence fell upon the crowd. The stillness hovered like a living thing. A thrill more intense than I had ever felt came over me; it swept me on cold waves into an ocean of strange, pulsing emotion.

Then, abruptly, a hundred cymbals clashed, subdued drums rolled forth, and the infernal trumpets that had heralded the entrance of the high priest crashed out a demoniacal peal—a veritable anthem of damnation that pierced me to the marrow.

The sound died out. The lights, too, began to sink. For a few moments not a word was spoken; there was the stillness of death, of the end of things. Presently all the illumination was gone save the solitary hooded light in front of the altar.

From his place at the head of the steps the high priest, Kwo- Sung-tao, made a gesture. Silently, and by unseen means, the deep yellow hangings rolled away.

There, to my amazement, the whole end of the temple was open, and we could look off from the mountaintop across innumerable valleys to the great range of peaks that walled the east. Out there the stars were shining, and near the horizon the blue-green heavens were tinged with a swimming silver mist.

The altar itself, if such it might be called, was a single block of undraped stone, about three feet high and four feet long, rising in the center of the platform.

Hardly had I taken in the scene, before two of the priests hurried forward, dragging between them a nearly-naked and half- swooning Chinese girl. Carrying her up the steps, they flung her on her hack upon the altar block and swiftly fastened her hands and feet to manacles on the sides of the stone, so that her naked breast was centered upon the pedestal. The priests then descended from the altar, leaving Kwo-Sung-tao alone beside the prisoner.

Still within the temple the profound silence reigned. There was not a whisper, not a rustle of the silken vestments.

But all at once we noticed that the eastern sky was growing brighter.

Then from before the altar a single somber bass rolled forth in a wailing prayer—a mystical, unearthly sound, coming in shattered sobs:

"Na-mo O'-mi-t'o-fo! Na-mo O'-mi-t'o-fo!"

Suddenly, from over the edge of the world, the moon began to rise!

This was the signal for another hellish blast from the trumpets, followed by the beginning of a steady humming of countless gongs. Other voices joined the quivering bass, together growing louder seeming to complain and sob and wail like the voices of tortured demons in the abyss.

The rhythmic sounds swelled louder and louder, higher and higher, until the orb of night had climbed clear of the wall of mountains.

Directly against the silver disk I now saw silhouetted the stone altar holding its shrinking prisoner, with the high priest standing close beside her. The priest's right arm was upraised, and in his hand there gleamed a knife.

Still the music grew in volume—tremendous, stunning, a terrific battle of sound.

All at once the high priest's knife flashed downward—straight and deep into the breast of the quivering wretch upon the stone— and in a moment his other hand was raised in salutation to the moon, and in it was clutched the dripping heart of the human sacrifice!

At the sight my limbs grew shaky and my senses swam.

But at this instant, like a blow upon the head, came a lightning-crash of cymbals, a smiting of great gongs, and a climacteric roar from those agonizing trumpets of hell. Then even the single altar light went out, plunging the great hall into darkness.

Instantly I felt Dr. Gresham's hand upon my arm, and, dazed and helpless, I was dragged out of the temple.

Outside the air released me from my stupor, and I raced beside the scientist to the spot where we had left our outer garments. In the shadow of the wall we slipped these on, and then fled panic-stricken down the mountainside.

CHAPTER VIII. — THE JAWS OF DEATH

WE did not pause in our flight from the temple until we reached the foot of the mountain; then, still shaken by the horror of the scene we had witnessed, we sat down to rest until the climbing moon should send its light into the depths of the gorge.

We could discern little of our surroundings, but close at hand we could hear the river rushing between its rocky walls.

Not a word was spoken until finally I inquired: "What next?"

In a low voice that indicated the need of caution even here, Dr. Gresham announced:

"The real work of the night still is before us. I would not have taken the risk of visiting the temple but for the hope that we would learn more of the Seuen-H'sin's layout than we did. Since nothing was gained there, we must reconnoiter the country."

"That sacrifice of human life," I asked—"what was its purpose?"

"To propitiate their god," the astronomer told me. "Every month, on the night of the full moon—in every Seuen-H'sin temple in the world—that hideous slaughter takes place. At certain times the ceremony is elaborated into a thing infinitely more horrible."

At this juncture the moon lifted itself clear of the valley's eastern rim, and the depression was bathed in silvery radiance. This was the signal for our start.

Heading toward the sound of the river, we soon came to the road that led to the *Nippon's* wharf. Beside this highway was an electric transmission line, running on up into the canyon. Turning away from the wharf and the village, we proceeded to follow this line toward its source.

Instead of traversing the road, however, we kept in the shadows of the timber at its side; and it was well that we did so, for we had not gone far before a group of Chinamen appeared around a bend in the highway, walking rapidly toward the town. They wore dark clothes of the same pattern as our own outer garments; and they passed without seeing us.

For fully two miles we followed the power line, until we began to pass numerous groups of Chinamen in close succession—like crowds of men getting off work.

To diminish the chance of our being discovered, Dr. Gresham and I turned up the mountainside. We climbed until we had reached a considerable height above the floor of the gorge, and then, keeping at this elevation, we again pursued the course of the electric line.

Another half-hour passed in this scramble along the steep slope, and my companion began to betray uneasiness lest the road and its paralleling copper wires, which we could not see from here, had ended or had turned off up some tributary ravine—when suddenly there came to our ears a faint roaring, as of a distant waterfall. At once Dr. Gresham was all alertness, and with quickened steps we pressed forward in the direction of the sound.

Five minutes later, as we rounded a shoulder of the mountain, we were stricken suddenly speechless by the sight, far below us, of a great, brilliantly lighted building.

For a few moments we could only stand and gaze at the thing; but presently, as the timber about us partly obstructed our view, we moved forward to a barren rocky promontory jutting out from the mountainside.

The moon now was well up in the heavens, and from the brow of this headland a vast expanse of country was visible, its every feature standing out almost as clearly as in the daylight. But, to take advantage of this view, we were obliged to expose ourselves to discovery by any spies the Seuen-H'sin might have posted in the region. The danger was considerable, but our curiosity regarding the lighted building was sufficient to outweigh our caution.

The structure was too far distant to reveal much to the naked eye, so we quickly brought our field glasses into use; then we saw that the building was directly upon the bank of the river, and that from its lower wall spouted a number of large, foaming streams of water, as if discharged under terrific pressure. From these torrents, presumably, came the sound of the waterfall. The angle at which we were looking down upon the place prevented our seeing inside the building except at one corner, where, through a window, we could catch a glimpse of machinery running.

But, little as we could see, it was enough to convince me that the place was a hydroelectric plant of enormous proportions, producing energy to the extent of probably hundreds of thousands of horsepower.

Even as I was reaching this conclusion, Dr. Gresham spoke:

"There," he said, "is the source of the Seuen-H'sin's power, which is causing all these upheavals throughout the world! That is where the yellow devils are at work upon their second moon!"

Just as he spoke another of the great ground-shocks rocked the earth. Too much amazed for comment, I stood staring at the plant until my companion added:

"There is where those brilliant flashes in the heavens came from last night. They were due to some accident in the machinery, causing a short circuit. For two nights I had been circling over this entire range of mountains in the hydroplane, in search of the sorcerers' workshop. The flashes were a fortunate circumstance that led me to the place."

"At last I understand," I remarked presently, "why you were so deeply interested, back there in Washington, in the steamship *Nippon* and the electric plant she was transporting to Hongkong. I suppose that is where the sorcerers obtained all this machinery!"

"Precisely!" agreed the astronomer. "That morning in Washington, when I got you to look up the inventory of the *Nippon's*, cargo, I had this solution of the mystery in mind. I knew from my years in Wu-yang that electricity was the force the sorcerers would employ, and I was certain I had seen mention in the newspapers of some exceptionally large electrical equipment aboard the *Nippon*. Those supposed pirates of the Yellow Sea were in reality the murderous hordes of the Seuen- H'sin, who had come out to the coast after this outfit."

"But why," I asked, "should these Chinamen, whose development of science is so far in advance of our own, have to get machinery from an inferior people? I should think their own appliances would have made anything from the rest of the world seem antiquated."

"You forget what I told you that first night we spoke of the Seuen-H'sin. Their discoveries never were backed up by manufacturing; they possessed no raw materials or factories or industrial instincts. They did not need to make machinery themselves. In spite of their tremendous isolation, they were watching everything in the outside world. They knew they could get plenty of machinery ready-made, once they had perfected their method of operations."

I was still staring at the monster power plant below us when Dr. Gresham announced:

"I know now that my theory of the earthquakes' origin was correct, and if we get back to the *Albatros* the defeat of the sorcerers' plans is assured."

"Tell me'one thing more," I put in. "Why did the Chinamen come so far from their own country to establish their plant?"

"Because," the doctor replied, "this place was so well hidden—yet so easy to reach. And the farther they came from their own country to apply their electric impulses to the earth, the less danger their native land would run."

"Still, for my part, the main point of the whole problem remains unsolved," I asserted. "How do the sorcerers use this electricity to shake the world?"

"That," replied the scientist, "requires too long an explanation for the present moment. On the way back to the ship I will tell you the whole thing. But now I must get a closer view of Kwo-Sung-tao's strange workshop."

As Dr. Gresham was speaking, some unexplained feeling of uneasiness—perhaps some faint sound that had registered itself upon my subconscious thoughts without my ears being aware of it—led my gaze to wander over

the mountainside in our vicinity. As my eyes rested for a moment upon some rocks about a hundred yards away, I fancied I saw something stir at the side of them.

At this moment Dr Gresham made a move to leave the promontory. Laying a detaining hand swiftly upon his arm, I whispered:

"Wait! Stand still!"

Unquestioningly the astronomer obeyed; and for a couple of minutes I watched the neighboring clump of rocks out of the corner of my eye. Presently I saw a darkly-clad figure crawl out of the shadow of the pile, cross a patch of moonlight, and join two other figures at the edge of the timber. The trio stood looking in our direction a moment, while apparently holding a whispered conference. Then all three disappeared into the shadow of the woods.

Immediately I announced to my companion: "We have been discovered! There are three Chinamen watching us from the timber, not a hundred yards away!"

The scientist was silent a moment. Then: "Do they know you saw them?" he asked.

"I think not," I replied.

Still without looking around, he asked:

"Where are they—directly behind us?"

"No; well to the side—the side nearest the power plant."

"Good! Then we'll move back toward the timber at once—go leisurely, as if we suspected nothing. If we reach the cover of the woods all right, we'll make a dash for it. Head straight up for the top of the ridge—cross over and descend into the gulch on the other side—then detour back toward the *Albatross*. Stick to the shadows—travel as fast as we can—and try to throw off pursuit!"

Moving off as unconsciously as if we were totally unaware that we had been observed, we struck out for the timber—all the time keeping a sharp lookout, for we half expected the spies to head us off and attempt a surprise attack. But we reached the darkness of the woods without even a glimpse of the Celestials; and instantly we broke into a run.

The ascent was too steep to permit much speed; moreover, the roughness of the ground and the fallen timber hampered us greatly—yet we had the consolation of knowing that it equally hampered our pursuers.

For nearly an hour we pressed on. The mountaintop was crossed, and we descended into a canyon on the other side. No sight or sound of the Chinamen had greeted us. Could they have surmised the course we would take, and calmly let us proceed, while they returned for reinforcements to head us off? Or were they silently stalking us to find out who we were and

whence we came? We could not tell. And there was the other chance, too, that we had shaken off pursuit.

Gradually this latter possibility became a definite hope, which grew as our overtaxed strength began to fail. Nevertheless, we pushed on until we were so spent and winded that we could scarcely drag one foot after the other.

We had now reached a spot where the floor of the canyon widened out into a tiny level park. Here the timber was so dense that we were swallowed up in almost complete darkness; and in this protecting mantle of shadow we decided to stop for a brief rest. Stretching out upon the ground, with our arms extended at our sides, we lay silent, inhaling deep breaths of the cool, refreshing mountain air.

We were now on the opposite side of a long and high mountain ridge from the Chinese village, and, as nearly as we could estimate, not more than a mile or two from the *Albatross*.

Lying there on the ground, we could feel the earthquakes with startling violence. We noticed that they no longer occurred only at intervals of eleven minutes and a fraction—although they were particularly severe at those periods—but that they kept up an almost continuous quivering, as if the globe's internal forces were bubbling restlessly.

Suddenly, in the wake of one of the heavier shocks of the eleven-minute period, the intense stillness was broken by a sharp report, followed by a ripping sound from the bowels of the earth, that seemed to start close at hand and rush off into the distance, quickly dying out. From the mountainside above us came the crash of a falling tree and the clatter of a few dislodged rocks bounding down the slope. The earth swayed as if a giant gash had opened and closed within a few rods of us.

The occurrence made Dr. Gresham and me sit up instantly. Nothing, however, was visible through the forest gloom of any changes in the landscape. Again silence settled about us.

Several minutes passed.

Then abruptly, from a short distance away, came the sound of something stirring. Sitting motionless, alert, we listened. Almost immediately we heard it again, and this time the sound did not die out. Something off there in the timber was moving stealthily toward us!

Dropping back at full length upon the ground, with only our heads raised, we kept a sharp watch.

Only a few more moments were we kept in suspense; then, across a slit of moonlight, we saw five Chinamen swiftly moving. They were slinking along almost noiselessly, as if following a scent—and, with a shock, we realized that it was ourselves they were tracking! We had not shaken off our pursuers, after all!

Even before we could decide, in a whispered debate, what our next move should be, our nerves again were whipped taut by other sounds close at hand—but now on the opposite side of the little valley from the first ones. This time the sounds grew fainter—only to become louder again almost immediately, as if the intruders were searching back and forth across the flat. In a short while it became plain that they were drawing closer to us.

"What fools we were to stop to rest!" the astronomer complained.

"I have a hunch we would have run into some of those spies if we had kept on," I rejoined. "They must have headed us off and found that we didn't pass on down this canyon, else they wouldn't be searching here so thoroughly.

"Right!" my friend agreed. "And now they've got us in a tight place!"

"Suppose," I suggested, "we slip across the valley and climb part-way up that other mountainside—then try to work along through the timber up there until we're near the ship."

"Good!" he assented. "Come on!"

Lying at full length upon the ground and wriggling along like snakes, we headed between two groups of the searchers. It was slow work, but we did not dare even to rise to our knees to crawl. Twice we dimly made out, not fifty feet away, some of the Chinamen slinking along, apparently hunting over every foot of the region. We could not tell how many of them there were now.

After a time that seemed nearly endless we reached the edge of the flat. Here we rose to our feet to tackle the slope in front of us.

As we did so, two figures leaped out of the gloom close at hand and split the night with cries of *"Fan kuei! Fan kuei!"**

[* "Foreign devils!"]

Then they sprang to seize us.

Further concealment being impossible, we darted back into the valley, no longer avoiding the patches of moonlight, but rather seeking them, so that we could see where we were going. We were heading for the fiord.

In a few seconds other cries arose on all sides of us. It seemed that we were surrounded and that the whole region swarmed with Chinamen. Dark forms began to plunge out of the woods ahead to intercept us; the leading ones were not sixty feet away.

"We'll have to fight for it!" called Dr. Gresham. And our hands flew to our revolvers.

But before we could draw the weapons a great ripping and crashing sound burst forth upon the mountainside above us the terrifying noise of rocks splitting and grinding—an appalling turmoil! Terrified, pursued and pursuers alike paused to glance upward.

There, in the brilliant moonlight, we saw a monster avalanche sweeping downward, engulfing everything in its way!

Abandoning the astronomer and me, the Chinamen turned to flee farther from the path of the landslide, and we all began running together down the valley.

Only a few steps had we gone, however, when above the roaring of the avalanche a new sound rang out—short, sharp, booming, like the report of a giant gun.

As I glanced about through the blotches of moonlight and shadow, I saw several of the sorcerers just ahead suddenly halt, stagger and then drop from sight.

Dr. Gresham and I stopped instantly, but not before we beheld other Chinamen disappearing from view.

The earth had opened and they were falling in!

Even as we stood there, hesitating, the black maw yawned wider—to our very feet—and with cries of horror we tried to stagger back. But we were too late. The sides of the crack were crumbling in, and in another instant the widening gash overtook us.

As his eyes met mine, I saw the astronomer topple backward and disappear.

A second later the ground gave way beneath my own feet and I was plunged into the blackness of the pit.

CHAPTER IX. — IN THE SORCERER'S POWER

WHAT happened immediately after that first drop into the abyss I do not know. My only recollection is of hurtling down a steep incline amid a smothering avalanche of dirt, of striking heavily upon a rocky ledge, and of bounding off again into the inky void as my senses left me.

The next thing I knew was the slow dawn of a sensation of cold; and then my eyes fluttered open and I beheld the moon shining upon me through a rent in the surrounding blackness. At first I was too much dazed to comprehend anything that had occurred, but soon, with considerable pain, I raised myself upon one elbow and looked about, whereupon understanding gradually returned.

The place where I lay was a mud-covered ledge upon one of the steep, sloping walls of a huge chasm that had opened in the earth. The gash was probably seventy-five feet across at this point, and above me the walls soared perhaps a hundred feet. Within arm's reach the shelf that supported me broke off in a precipice. I was half imbedded in soft mud, and was soaked to the skin and nearly frozen.

How long I had lain there I could not tell, but I judged it had not been more than two or three hours, for the moon still was high in the heavens.

All at once, as I gazed upon the weird scene, my heart leaped with anguish at remembrance of my vanished comrade, Dr. Ferdinand Gresham. He had dropped before me into the chasm, and therefore must have fallen clear of the ledge and plunged into the depths!

Thrusting myself to the edge of the precipice, I peered below. Nothing rewarded my gaze except horrifying silence and vapory gloom. The pain of the movement was so intense that I fell back almost in a swoon.

Before long, however, I saw that the moon was drawing near the rim of the gorge and that I should soon be engulfed in utter darkness, so I turned my eyes up the jagged wall in search of some means of escape. After considerable study, I thought I could discern a way to the summit.

But just then another surprise caught my gaze: the strip of sky above the chasm appeared narrower than when I had first turned my eyes upward. For a few moments I attributed this fact to an optical illusion produced by swiftly moving clouds overhead; but all at once the hideous truth burst upon me—*the crack in the earth was drawing shut!*

Heedless of the pain, I flung myself against the cliff— climbing in utter panic, for fear the chasm would close completely before I could get out.

The ascent was difficult and perilous in the extreme. Often rocks loosened beneath my fingers, starting miniature avalanches, and I flattened

myself against the wall in a paroxysm of terror and clung there until the danger passed.

For a space that seemed hours long I continued to claw my way upward—with the prodigious trap closing steadily upon me. At times I found myself below unscalable surfaces, and was obliged to descend a bit and start over again in a new direction; and often it seemed as if the pain of my injuries would cause me to faint.

When I had come within thirty feet of the top, the climb developed into a veritable race with death, for the opposite wall was now almost upon me.

And then, suddenly, I found the way blocked by a sheer, unscalable wall, upon which only a fly could have found a foothold! Simultaneously I saw that the moon was right at the rim of the chasm, and that in a minute the light would vanish.

With the realization of my plight, panic seized me, and I beat my head against the wall and shrieked aloud.

And, though I could not guess it then, that very outcry of despair was to save my life.

Hardly bad my first shriek gone forth before a head appeared directly above me, and a voice rang out:

"Here he is, fellows! Quick with that rope!"

With leaping heart, I recognized the voice as Dr. Gresham's!

An instant later a rope with a loop in the end of it dangled beside me, and a number of bands reached out to pull me to safety. Another moment, and I was drawn over the brink—not one second too soon, for as I made the last dozen feet the closing walls of the pit brushed my body.

Exhausted and trembling, I sank upon the ground, while a number of figures crowded about me. These proved to be twenty- five men from the *Albatros*, under command of Ensign Wiles Hallock. They were all dressed in the dark blue garments of the sorcerers.

How they came to be there was briefly related by Dr. Gresham.

When the ground had opened beneath us earlier in the evening, the astronomer had clutched the roots of a tree, and within a few seconds after I had dropped from sight he was back on firm ground. The Chinamen who had been pursuing us had either fallen into the gash or had fled in terror.

Considerable vapor was rising from the pit, but the scientist noticed that this was clearing rapidly, so he decided to linger at the spot awhile, with the forlorn hope that I might be found. Soon the vapor vanished and, as the moonlight was shining directly into the crack, the doctor began a search.

After a time he discerned a figure lying upon a ledge below. Close scrutiny revealed that the dark costume characteristic of the Seuen-H'sin was torn, displaying an orange garment beneath.

Confident that none of the sorcerers would be wearing two suits at once In this fashion, the scientist concluded the figure was mine. For a time he doubted whether I lived, but eventually he thought he saw me stir feebly, whereupon he began frantic efforts to reach me.

Repeated attempts to descend the precipice failed. Then he tried dropping pebbles to arouse me. Again unsuccessful, he risked attracting the sorcerers back to the spot by shouting into the chasm.

All his efforts proved futile, so he finally returned to the destroyer and obtained this rescue party.

In grateful silence I gripped his hand.

"Now," the astronomer concluded, "if you are able to walk, we will get back to the ship. It is only 1 o'clock, and if we hurry there still is time to attack the Seuen-H'sin before daylight. Conditions throughout the world are so alarming that we must put this power plant out of business without delay!"

"Go ahead!" I assented. "I'm able to hobble along!"

It was less than two miles to the destroyer's anchorage, they said. During the march none of the sorcerers was sighted, with which we began to conclude that the cracking of the earth had affected the village on the other side of the mountain so that all their lookouts had been called in.

But suddenly, when we were less than half a mile from the vessel, the stillness of the night was shattered by the shrill blast of a whistle. A series of other wild shrieks from the steam chant came in quick succession.

"The *Albatross*!" exclaimed Ensign Hal lock. "Something's happening!"

We burst into a run—the whistle still screaming through the night.

All at once the sound ceased, and as the echoes died out among the hills we heard the rattle of firearms.

"An attack!" cried Hallock. "The sorcerers have attacked the ship!"

Then, abruptly, the firing, too, died out.

A few moments later we emerged from the ravine onto the bank of the fiord and into full view of the destroyer. The passing of the moon into the west had brought the vessel within its rays—and the sight that greeted us almost froze our blood!

Swarming about the deck were dozens of Chinamen—some with rifles, some with knives. They appeared to be completely in control of the ship. Numerous pairs of them were coming up from below decks, carrying the

bodies of the vessel's crew, which they carelessly tossed overboard. Evidently they had taken our companions by surprise and wiped them out!

At this sight Ensign Hallock and his men became frenzied with rage.

"Ready, men!" the officer announced to his followers. "We're going down there and give those murderers something to remember!"

Eagerly the seamen prepared to charge the ship. But Dr. Gresham stopped them.

"It's no use," he said. "There are hundreds of the sorcerers down there—and only a handful of us. You would only be throwing away your lives and defeating the whole purpose of this expedition. We must find a better way."

The astronomer's counsel prevailed, whereupon we debated what should be done. The situation was desperate. Here we were, completely isolated in a grim wilderness, hundreds of miles from help, and surrounded by hordes of savage fanatics. Soon, no doubt, the sorcerers' spies would find us. And meanwhile we were helpless to put an end to the terrors that were engulfing the planet and its inhabitants.

So despair gradually took possession of us. Not even the customary resourcefulness of Dr. Gresham rose to the emergency.

Suddenly Ensign Hallock gave an exclamation of excitement.

"The *Nippon*!" he burst out. "Let's turn the tables on the Chinese, and seize the *Nippon*! She probably has a guard on board, but maybe we can take it by surprise!"

"What could we do with her?" I objected. "She needs a large crew—and there are only twenty-seven of us!"

"We'll sail her away, of course!" replied the young naval officer with enthusiasm. "There must be fuel on board, for her fires are going. Three of the boys here are apprentice engineers. I can do the navigating. And the rest of you can take turns stoking the boilers!"

"But how could we slip past the *Albatross*?" asked Dr. Gresham.

Ensign Hallock seemed to have thought of that, too, for he promptly answered:

"The *Albatros* is an oil-burning craft, with the new type of burners that came into use since these Chinks have been stowed away here in the wilderness. The mechanism for using the oil is quite complicated, and the sorcerers are likely to have trouble operating her until they figure out the system. If we reach them before they have time to master the thing, they will be helpless to stop us!"

The young man's enthusiasm was contagious. Dr. Gresham began to give heed.

"Even if we fail to get away in the *Nippon*," the scientist admitted, "she has a powerful wireless outfit: Kwo- Sung-tao has been using it to communicate with Washington. With that radio in our hands for ten minutes, we can summon help sufficient to annihilate these yellow devils!"

The plan was adopted without further question. And, believing that the sorcerer's easy victory over the *Albatros* had made them careless, perhaps, we struck out in as direct a course as possible for the spot at which the *Nippon* was docked.

In twenty minutes, without sighting any of the enemy, we arrived at the edge of the timber behind the wharf.

CHAPTER X. — WE TAKE DESPERATE CHANCES

THE great liner lay silent in the moonlight, with no lights visible about her, but thin columns of smoke rose lazily from her funnels. A gangplank was down.

It was decided, that our number should divide into three equal parts. One was to go to the bow and board the craft there by climbing up the line fastening the ship to the pier; this line was in the shadow except at its far end, where the men would emerge upon the deck. The second group was to get aboard at the stern by the same means. And the third detachment was to advance by the gangplank.

The plan worked without a bitch, and soon we were assembled upon the vessel's main deck. No guard was in sight. Hurriedly we explored the upper decks and all the chambers off them. They were empty.

Then, descending simultaneously by companionways forward, aft, and amidship, we began to search the body of the vessel. Still no one could be found.

And this deserted condition of the ship continued until only the stokehold remained to be entered. Here, however, we were certain of finding people.

Leaving three men on deck to guard against surprise, the rest of us crept into the boiler room.

Only two Chinamen were in the place, leisurely engaged in stoking the furnaces. We had them covered with our revolvers before they had any warning of our approach.

In spite of the odds against them, one of the Mongolians leaped forward and had almost struck one of our men with his shovel before a shot killed him in his tracks. The other Chinaman submitted, and he at once was securely bound and dumped into a corner.

Dr. Gresham tried to question the prisoner in Chinese, but all the information he could get regarding the keeping up of steam on the *Nippon* was: "Maybe leave here soon!"

While the astronomer had been thus engaged, Ensign Hallock and some of his men were examining the coal bunkers, and they now reported that the vessel was stocked with fuel for a long voyage.

At this juncture, one of the deck watch came to announce that the moon was sinking near the mountaintops, and that if we hoped to get far down the channel before the light failed we would have to start promptly.

Detailing eighteen men to the firing with orders to get more steam as rapidly as possible—Ensign Hallock and the rest of us rushed to the engine room, where the three apprentice engineers already were at work. Finding everything all right there, the officer proceeded to the steering-room, while some of us pulled in the gangplank.

The astronomer and I next started to find the radio plant, to get into communication with the Mare Island navy yard. But here we encountered a setback; the wireless plant had been removed! Kwo-Sung-tao, we could only surmise, had moved the set to a spot more convenient to the village. So, for the present, communication with the outside world was impossible.

During this brief period of putting the ship in sailing order, none of the sorcerers made an appearance; probably all the men they could spare were exploring the captured destroyer.

Soon steam was up; whereupon Ensign Mailock sent Dr. Gresham to the bow and me to the stern to keep a close lookout, and himself ascended to the bridge and gave the order to start the engines and cast off. Before many moments the leviathan was moving away from the wharf.

The officer had found from the charts that there was a place only half a mile or so upstream where the fiord opened into a bay. There, from all indications, room might be had to turn the ship around and head her down the channel. For this opening he now set his course.

Although we maintained a very slow speed, it was not long before we nosed our way into the bay. Here the walls of the fiord retreated far enough to form a considerable body of water; nevertheless, it was plain we would have close work turning the *Nippon* in such a space. It would be necessary to steam well over against the north bank, where there no longer was any moonlight and the shore line was swallowed up in inky blackness.

Redoubling the vigilance of our lookout, we began the maneuver. Slowly Ensign Hallock swung the huge ship around. Twice it was necessary to stop and reverse the engines, accomplishing part of the turn by backing. In doing so, we had a narrow escape from running into a rocky promontory in the dark.

But at last the liner's head was fairly about and the way seemed clear for our dash down the channel past the *Albatros*. As the officer signaled for more speed, all of us unconsciously steeled ourselves for the climax of our adventure.

But at that instant a deep-toned bell, sounding like the tocsin upon the Temple of the Moon God, began tolling in the distance. This was followed almost immediately by a series of sharp blasts from the whistle of the destroyer.

Now that we had completed the dangerous turn, my duties in the stern were finished, so I ran forward, joining Dr. Gresham, and together we climbed to the bridge.

"The Chinks must have discovered that their ship is gone!" was the greeting the young officer gave us.

He was hardly able to restrain his excitement; the prospect of a brush with the sorcerers seemed to give him great joy.

The steam chant and the tolling of the bell continued, as if intended for a general alarm.

"Must be getting their gang together!" the ensign remarked. "They'll be laying for us now, but we'll give them a run for their money!"

The liner now was beginning to get under considerable headway.

"We're in dangerous quarters until we get out of this stretch of darkness!" the officer announced. "Here you fellows each take a pair of glasses! You, doctor, keep watch from the starboard end of the bridge! You"—indicating me—"go to the port side! Watch like hawks!°

We started, but the command had come too late!

With a dull, long-drawn ripping sound from her interior, the great liner suddenly staggered and listed heavily to port! We were thrown off our feet.

"Struck a rock!" Ensign Hallock shouted, as he leaped up. And instantly be began signaling frantically to stop the engines. Almost in the same breath he yelled: "Go below both of you quick! See what damage has been done!"

As we rushed down from the bridge we could tell from the *feel* of things that the vessel's progress had come to a stop: the *Nippon* was stuck fast!

At the head of the stairs leading to the boiler room we met the seamen, who had been doing stoker duty, rushing up.

"You can't go down there!" they shouted. "The whole bottom's torn out!"

Nevertheless, we leaped past them and continued below. But near the bottom of the stairs we were brought up short. A few lights still were burning, and in their feeble rays we could see huge foaming torrents pouring into the place. Already the floor was awash to a depth of two or three feet, and before we could take our eyes from the sight the flood seemed to rise several inches! At any moment the boilers might explode!

Up the steps we dashed madly.

As we reached the deck everyone was hurrying aft. We joined in the rush.

The tolling of the temple bell and the shrieking of the destroyer's whistle continued in the distance: the Seuen-H'sin was preparing to take up our pursuit!

Then, before we could make another move, the vessel suddenly lurched backward and listed heavily to starboard, with her stern rising high out of the water. Then she began to nose forward under the waves.

The Nippon was sinking!

CHAPTER XI. — A WILD NIGHT'S WORK

"LOWER the boats!" yelled Ensign Hallock.

The coolness, readiness and energy of this young man in any emergency were an inspiration.

All of us flew to obey the command, our number dividing between the two boats nearest the stern. The liner was sinking so fast that in a few moments the boats would be afloat, anyway; nevertheless, we soon had our craft in the water.

"Take that canvas covering!" bawled the ensign. "We may need it for a sail!"

A sailor dragged the canvas into the boat, and we pushed off from the vessel.

The other party had encountered trouble with the davit-blocks, which occasioned a slight delay, and Hallock was just getting his boat into the water when—with a terrific crash, the *Nippon's* boilers burst!

The huge craft broke in two amidship, the central portion of her decks leaping out of the water. The force of the explosion hurled Ensign Hallock and his men—life-boat and all—over the stern amid a hurricane of debris, while our own craft was flung bottom-up with great violence, scattering us all about in the water.

In an incredibly brief time the Nippon slipped from view under the waves, the swiftness of her sinking causing a violent suction that swept us into a whirlpool filled with timbers, broken boats and wreckage of all sorts.

Something heavy struck me on the head and knocked me almost senseless, but I clutched a floating object and hung on in a daze. Presently I heard voices calling not far away and, swimming toward them, I found a couple of men clinging to the life-boat. Others quickly began to join us—among them Dr. Gresham. Soon we had the boat righted and found it undamaged. Someone picked up some oars.

Then we began rowing about the scene of the wreck, shouting and keeping a lookout for other survivors. In this way we rescued seven more men—one of the last being Ensign Hallock, who was dazed from a bad cut on the head.

After a time, believing further search to be futile, we made our way to the north bank of the fiord.

There now were only fifteen of us left—twelve men having perished in the explosion. While we were roughly dressing the wounds of the injured, we began to hear shouts in Chinese from the other side of the water, but the width of the fiord here was such as to make the cries indistinct. As the voices did not draw nearer, we began to believe that the sorcerers pos-

sessed no small boats in which to cross to the scene of the wreck. This gave us a greater feeling of safety, since the only way the sorcerers could get at us for the present was by swimming; and not enough of them were likely to try to constitute a serious menace.

In the distance the whistling and bell-ringing had now died out.

Hastily conferring upon what should be done, we decided to stick to the life-boat and drop down the channel, hoping to get out of the country of the Seuen-H'sin before daylight. This course seemed feasible, since the whole north bank of the fiord the side opposite the village was now in shadow.

We started at once, rowing along silently, close to the shore. Occasionally we heard voices on the south bank, but we made no closer acquaintance with the Chinese.

As we drew near the *Albatros*, we muffled our oarlocks with bits of cloth torn from our clothing, and took every precaution against making a sound.

A few lights were burning upon the destroyer's deck, but otherwise she seemed deserted; possibly the Seuen-H'sin believed we had perished in the blowing up of the *Nippon* and that they had nothing more to fear from intruders.

All at once, as we began to drop below the vessel, Ensign Hallock gave an order to cease rowing. Drawing us close together so we could hear his whispered words, he announced:

"Boys, let's try to recapture the *Albatros*!"

Then, with repressed excitement, he unfolded a plan.

To our ears the ensign's words sounded like a proposal of suicide; but the situation was appallingly desperate, and the upshot of the matter was that we decided to make the attempt.

"Who is to go with you?" I asked Hallock.

Several of the men promptly volunteered, and the ensign selected a muscular seaman named Jim Burns.

Agreeing upon a signal that should inform us when to follow them, the officer and his partner slipped off most of their clothing and, arming themselves only with knives, swam away. In a few seconds they were lost from sight.

From Hallock himself, afterward, I learned the story of their daring undertaking—although I am certain he greatly minimized the dangers they ran.

Reaching the deep shadows beside the destroyer, Hallock and Burns swam forward to the anchor-chain hanging from the bow. There they

waited a time, but, hearing not a sound from above, the officer climbed up the chain and looked over the edge of the deck. No one was in sight.

He signaled Burns to come after him. Then, clinging to the edge of the deck, with their bodies dangling down the side of the hull, out of sight of any one above, they worked their way, hand over hand, back to a point opposite the after companion way. Still none of the Chinamen was in evidence.

The deck was lighted at this point and the rays of other electric lamps poured out of the open companion way; nevertheless, the men swung themselves up, climbed the rail, and darted to the side of the deck house. Leaving Burns here, Hallock crept alone around the corner to the companionway.

Just as he reached the open door he almost collided with a Chinaman coming up the stairs!

Both were taken completely by surprise, but the ensign recovered quickest, and before there was time for an outcry he had the Mongolian by the throat and was choking the life out of him.

Soon the fellow crumpled limply upon the deck. Hallock drew his knife to finish the business—but at that instant there came the sound of voices approaching along the deck.

Seizing the unconscious Chinaman by the arms, Hallock dragged him swiftly around the corner of the deck house to where Burns was waiting.

Would the approaching men enter the companionway and go below, or come on back to the stern? In the latter case they were bound to discover the intruders.

With drawn knives, the two Americans stood ready; the success or failure of their whole enterprise depended upon the next few seconds.

But the Chinamen turned down the steps, and their voices soon died out in the interior of the vessel.

Thus assured of safety again for the moment. Ensign Hallock ended the career of the Mongolian and dragged the body into the deeper shadows in the stern. Then the two men advanced together to the companionway. Everything appeared quiet below.

Down the stairs they noiselessly crept. At the bottom they could faintly hear voices—seemingly many of them—somewhere forward, or else on the next lower level. But they did not hesitate. The officer indicated the door of a compartment only a dozen feet away. They reached it and got inside.

The room had been converted, during this voyage, into a storeroom. Among its miscellaneous contents was a quantity of tear-bombs—grenades that discharge a gas which makes the victim's eyes water until he is temporarily blinded and helpless. To obtain all these missiles they could carry

was the work of but a few seconds, after which the Americans dashed for the steps and started to the deck.

Just as they got half-way up, a couple of Chinamen appeared suddenly in the passage below and caught sight of them. The Celestials uttered loud warning cries and darted after the visitors.

Instantly Seaman Burns, who was behind, hurled one of the bombs to the floor at the foot of the ladder—and then another, and another.

The sorcerers halted a moment, surprised by the missiles and before they could resume their rush they were blinded by tears. Screaming in rage and dismay, they retreated down the passage toward the other voices that were beginning to respond to their cries.

With this, Burns ran on up to the deck.

"Stay here and hold this stairway!" ordered Hallock. "I'll go forward to the other ladder! Don't let any of them reach the deck!"

And the officer ran off.

He reached the forward companionway just as half a dozen of the Chinamen were crowding toward the foot of the stairs. A couple of the bombs hurled among them drove them back. Two more missiles followed; then Hallock slammed the door shut and fastened it.

Running to the rail, he signaled us to advance. In two or three minutes our rowboat was alongside and we were scrambling up the anchor chain.

On the main deck, under the bridge, formerly had been stored a number of rifles, and Hallock now ran to see if these were still there. Luckily the Chinamen had not disturbed them, and the officer soon was back with a loaded weapon for each man.

"The effect of the tear gas must be wearing off below," he announced, "so we can go down now and clean up those devils! But confine all your shooting under decks, where it's not so likely to he beard on shore!"

"And," interposed Dr. Gresham, "don't show a spark of mercy, or we will be certain to pay dearly for it later!"

Leaving six men on deck to keep watch, the rest of us divided and went down fore and aft. The gas still was strong, but no longer overpowering. The Chinese, we found, had groped their way into the engine room. There we came upon them—forty-eight all.

Upon the scene of slaughter that followed I will draw the veil. Thus the Seuen-H'sin had slain our comrades—and we knew that, were our positions now reversed, we should meet the same bloody end. Suffice it to say that within fifteen minutes the last of the sorcerers' bodies had been disposed of overboard.

Once more we were masters of the *Albatross*!

Our first move, we decided, would be to steam down the channel a few miles—where the Mongolians could not immediately get at us. Fortunately, two of the apprentice engineers were among the survivors, and they undertook to handle the machinery.

At the same time, Hallock and most of the crew went to work setting up rapid-fire guns in convenient places to repel invasion, and storing ammunition and hand grenades on deck. A couple of the larger guns likewise were unlimbered, ready for action.

By the time these tasks were completed, steam had been gotten up, and the vessel began its retreat down the channel.

Meanwhile, Dr. Gresham and I hastened to the radio room to summon aid from the Mare Island navy yard near San Francisco.

But barely had the astronomer placed the receivers to his ears and reached forward to adjust the apparatus, than a startling event forestalled his call.

CHAPTER XII. — THE VOICE OF SCIENCE

AT the precise instant when Dr. Gresham seated himself at the radio of the *Albatros*, the great Consolidated News Syndicate, which dealt with newspapers all over the world, was broadcasting a "flash" of terrible import:

An hour ago New York had been wiped out by a stupendous tidal wave!

Details of the disaster still were lacking.

And then, before the astronomer could lift a hand to send his call, some instantaneous and terrific disturbance of the atmosphere blotted out all wireless communication!

What this disturbance might be, or what it might portend, seemed to arouse in my companion the gravest alarm. His face looked ashen as he sat there at the key. Over and over he sought to get Mare Island, but without success: the ether was as unresponsive as if his instruments were dead.

Presently he rose without a word and, motioning me to follow, sought Ensign Hallock on the bridge. Briefly he told the young officer about the destruction of Manhattan, adding:

"Something serious has happened somewhere in the world, since then, completely to disorder the atmosphere. It may be the earth's final struggle for existence. Unless the Seuen-H'sin's power is broken *at once*, the end is near! It is too late to wait for reinforcements. We must tackle the job ourselves—at any cost! The question is: how are we going to do it?"

Hallock thought a few moments, and then replied:

"We can't bomb the place from an airplane, because we brought no airplane bombs. And we can't shell it with the ship's guns without knowing its exact location. Our planes aren't equipped with range finders, either—so it would do no good to try to locate it from the air.

"That," he added with decision, "leaves us no choice but a direct attack!"

"Well," responded Dr. Gresham, "at any cost, we've got to try!"

At once we consulted the ship's charts—and made a discovery.

Not far below our present location, a tributary fiord entered Dean Channel from the left, and with sudden hope we saw that this waterway twisted among the mountains for several miles—reaching a point in one of its windings where it was not more than six or seven miles directly south of the region in which the power plant was hidden.

"There's our chance!" Hallock announced. "If the sorcerers have missed the *Albatros*, they'll think we are on our way out of the country as fast as we can travel. They won't be expecting us to come back so soon—in broad

daylight. We can steam up this side channel to the proper spot and then march across the mountains until we find the plant."

"Good!" assented the scientist. "They are less likely to be on guard against an attack from that side, anyway!"

Day was now beginning to break, which made further navigation easy. In a few minutes we came to the tributary inlet and swung the vessel in between its high, constricted walls.

The ensign was now imbued with marvelous activity. Orders flew thick and fast. A couple of the machine guns were made ready for land transport. Two light mountain mortars and a quantity of ammunition were brought up on deck. A supply of shrapnel hand-grenades was distributed among the men.

Our progress through this tortuous waterway necessarily was slow; nevertheless, at the end of an hour and a half, the destroyer was stopped and we made ready for the final adventure.

It was decided that all fifteen of us should go, because less than that number could not carry our equipment up and down the steep mountainsides, and three or four men left to guard the ship would be utterly useless in the event of an attack.

So with every nerve alert, we struck out through the trackless wilderness.

Three hours later we came upon six large steel conduits which we knew must convey the water power to the plant, and in a few minutes we had followed these to our goal.

Here we found ourselves upon the brow of a promontory directly behind and fully 300 feet above the Seuen-H'sin's workshop. The promontory ended in a sheer precipice, from the outermost curve of which the conduits dropped straight down into the power house. This tremendous fall of the six streams of water supplied the enormous energy to the turbines. The summit of this projecting ridge was fairly level, and for a distance of perhaps seventy- five yards at the end the timber had been entirely cleared away.

Extending out from the brow of the precipice, and resting upon the tops of the conduits where they plunged downward, was a narrow bridge of iron lattice-work which connected all six of the pipes and gave access to the bolts which tightened the steel elbows. Through holes in this grating, iron ladders fastened between the pipes and the granite cliff back of them descended clear to the bottom of the precipice.

A slight rail only three feet high protected the outer edge of this grid—a little hand-hold for the workmen in case of a misstep. From this dizzy balcony it would be possible to drop a stone almost upon the roof of the power house.

After a quick look around. Ensign Hallock chose a spot a little back from the cliff to set up the mortars that were to throw explosives upon the building. We also prepared to place mines under the conduits. But first the machine guns were planted to command the surrounding timber, in case of an attack.

There still was no indication that the sorcerers suspected our presence in their vicinity; so, inasmuch as Hallock said his preparations would take some little time, Dr. Gresham determined to employ the interval in getting a closer look at the power plant.

One of the ladders down the precipice, he had noticed, was in such a position behind its water main that it could not be seen from the building, and he decided to attempt the approach by this means. To my delight, he made no objection to my accompanying him.

As we slipped through an opening in the iron bridge and started our dizzy descent of the ladder which seemed to sway beneath our weight—I felt a thrill of exultation, in spite of our peril, at the thought that at last we were to solve the mystery of the Seuen-H'sin's terrible power over our planet!

The trip was slow and risky, but finally we came abreast of a window in the rear wall of the building, and by stretching around the side of the thick water main we could see into the place.

The workshop of the sorcerers was a long, low, narrow structure directly beside the river. Like the houses back in the Chinese village, it was a mere shell of corrugated iron, its steel framework so bolted together that it could sway with the earth tremors.

In a row down the center of the structure were six huge turbines, operating electric generators.

Along one side of the room was the largest switchboard I had ever seen, while the whole of the other lengthwise wall was flanked with a series of massive induction coils, elaborately insulated from each other and from the ground. Although I knew little about electricity, I was certain that if the combined electrical output of those dynamos were directed through that maze of coils, the resulting voltage could only be measured in the millions—perhaps hundreds of millions!

From one large, enclosed object, supported on steel uprights over the row of induction coils, two electric cables, more than two inches in diameter, ran off through the north end of the building. One of these ended in a tiny structure about eighty yards from the power house. The other ran on up the valley.

But, most curious of all, in the center of the switchboards was an apparatus surmounted by a large clock, before which a Chinese attendant sat constantly. Precisely every eleven minutes and six seconds a bell on this

clock clanged sharply, and there was a bright flash in a long glass tube, followed by an earth shock.

For some time we clung there in the shadows, while Dr. Gresham studied every detail of the amazing workshop. Then, calling my attention to the fact that the place outside the power house, where one of the cables ended, was hidden from view of the attendants inside by a thick clump of trees, the astronomer said he wanted a closer look at this place.

Creeping through the timber, we reached the tiny structure over the cable's end. Not the slightest watch seemed to be kept anywhere about the plant. The door to the house was not fastened, so we entered and looked hurriedly about.

The room was absolutely empty, except for the heavy cable, which came to the center of the floor and there connected with a copper post about four inches in diameter that ran straight down into the ground.

Without lingering further, we crawled back to the ladder and commenced our long climb up the cliff.

Upon reaching the top again, we found the ensign and his men still busy with their preparations for the bombardment. Withdrawing far enough to be out of their hearing, the astronomer turned to me and remarked:

"Well, what do you think of the scientific achievements of the sorcerers now?"

"I don't know what to think!" I replied. "It's utterly beyond my comprehension!"

The doctor chuckled at my dismay.

"Forgive me," he said, "for having kept you so long in the dark. Until today I could never prove my theories—certain as I was of their correctness—and I did not wish to attempt any explanations until I was sure of my ground. But now you have seen enough to understand the solution of the puzzle."

To my delight, the scientist was dropping into one of his most communicative moods. After a moment he went on:

"To comprehend, even in a general way, what the Seuen-H'sin has done, you must understand the principle of resonance.

"Let us start with the swinging pendulum of a clock. What keeps it in motion? Nothing but a slight push, delivered at exactly the right time. Any swinging object can be kept swinging, even though it weigh many tons, if it is given a touch by the finger of a baby at *just the right moment*. By the same principle, the amount of swing can be increased enormously if the successive pushes are correctly timed.

"But we need not limit our illustration to swinging objects. Everything in the world has a natural period of vibration, whether it be a violin string, or

a battleship, or a forty-story skyscraper.

"Fifty men can capsize a twenty-thousand-ton battleship merely by running back and forth from one side of the deck to the other and carefully timing their trips to the vessel's rolling. A child with a tack-hammer can shake down a forty-story skyscraper if he can discover the natural period of the building's vibration and then tap persistently upon the steel framework at the correct intervals.

"Even the earth itself has its natural period of vibration.

"If you exploded a ton of dynamite on top of the ground it would blow quite a hole and jar the earth for several miles around it; and that would be all. But if you set off another ton of dynamite, and then another and another, and kept it up continuously—always timing the explosions to the period of the earth's vibration—eventually the jar would be felt clear through the globe. And if you still persisted, in time you would wreck the world.

"Such is the cumulative power of many little blows correctly timed. The principle of timing small impulses to produce large effects is the principle of resonance.

"But there are other forces in nature which can produce vibration—electricity, for instance. Nikola Tesla demonstrated a number of years ago that the globe is resonant to electric waves.

"Now, suppose some person constructed an apparatus that could suddenly turn a tremendous flood of electric waves into the earth. That energy would go clear through the globe, imparting a tiny impulse to every atom of matter of which the sphere is composed—like a push upon the pendulum of a clock.

"And suppose that person knew the exact period of the earth's vibration, and sent another bolt, and another and another, into the globe—all exactly timed to impart a fresh impulse at the correct moment—to give the pendulum another push, so to speak. Then let him pile electric impulse upon electric impulse, each at just the right second, until the accumulation of them all represented millions of horsepower in electric oscillations. In time, *the world would be shaken to pieces!*

"And—impossible as it sounds—that is the very principle the Seuen-H'sin is using there beneath your eyes! The dynamos furnish the power, and that great battery of induction coils magnifies it to an almost inconceivable voltage. By those cables attached to copper plugs, the impulses are conveyed to the earth.

"Every blow of that tremendous electric hammer is heavier than the preceding one because it has the accumulated power of all the others behind it. With every blow the earth grows weaker—less able to stand the shock. Continued, the planet's doom would be inevitable—if it is not already so!"

I had been listening to this recital with amazement too profound to admit of interruption. When Dr. Gresham finished I sat silent, turning it all over in my mind, and reflecting how simple the explanation seemed. Finally—

"Was it those electric waves being discharged into the ground," I asked, "that Professor Howard Whiteman in Washington mistook for wireless signals from Mars?"

"Precisely!" was the answer.

"And how," I inquired, "was it possible for the sorcerers to discover the exact period of the earth's vibration? That seems little short of superhuman."

"Doubtless you remember the newspaper accounts published that night when we returned from Labrador," replied the doctor. "They told how the electric whispers, when first noticed, occurred exactly two minutes apart; then the interval increased one minute each night until the signals were separated by more than thirty minutes; afterward the lulls altered erratically for some time, until they became fixed at eleven minutes and six seconds."

"Yes," I assented.

"Well," continued the scientist, "those variations simply denoted the experiment of the Seuen-H'sin to ascertain the period of the globe's vibration. If, after continuing their discharges all one night, their seismographs showed no response from the earth, they knew their bolts were wrongly timed, and they experimented with another period.

"Eventually they found that their impulses penetrated the earth with a speed of approximately 709 miles a minute—in other words, in precisely eleven minutes and six seconds the waves passed clear through the planet. This, then, was demonstrated to be the length of time that must elapse before the pendulum—figuratively speaking—could be given another electrical push. You saw just now, on the switchboard down there, the clockwork apparatus which times those bolts."

After a moment's consideration I remarked:

"Your own electrical equipment on board the *Albatros*— those big induction coils and the rest of it—what did you plan to do with that?"

"I had meant to fight the Seuen-H'sin with its own methods," the doctor replied. "I was going to throw a high-power electric current into the earth at intervals between those of the sorcerers'—say five minutes apart. That would have interfered with the acceleration of the vibrations—like setting a second group of men to run across the ship's deck between the trips of the first group. One set of vibrations would have neutralized the other.

"But," Dr. Gresham added, "the time for such methods is past. We must end the whole thing immediately—at one stroke!"

Receiving a signal from Ensign Hallock that he was ready, we started to rejoin the ship's party. But before we had gone a dozen steps we were rooted to the spot by a new terror!

Off in the east, where the snow-covered peaks lifted into the sky, suddenly burst forth an awful crashing sound, as of a colossal cannonade—a ponderous and unbroken thunder-roll, terrible as the enormous tumult of the day of doom. As our gaze followed the nightmare sounds to the edge of the world we beheld the lofty mountains oscillate, crack, disjoint, and crumble into seething ruin.

The noise that accompanied this destruction came roaring and booming across the intervening miles—a stupendous and unearthly commotion, shattering the very atmosphere to fragments.

For a minute Dr. Gresham stood petrified. But as the enormity of the cataclysm became evident, an unconscious cry, almost a groan, escaped him:

"Too late! Too late! The beginning of the end!"

Suddenly he wheeled—almost livid with excitement—to the naval officer and screamed at the top of his voice:

"*Fire!* For God's sake destroy that power plant! *Fire! FIRE!*"

CHAPTER XIII. — PLAYING OUR FINAL CARD

IN their astonishment at the terrible upheaval, Ensign Hallock and his men had left their posts and crowded toward the end of the promontory, a few feet away from the mortars. At Dr. Gresham's command to fire, most of them leaped to obey the order.

Instantly the woods behind us sprang into life as a horde of Chinamen dashed from cover, charging straight at us!

From the size of the attacking force, it was evident our presence had been known for some time and our capture delayed until a sufficient number of the sorcerers could he assembled to insure our defeat: there seemed to be scores of the blue-clad figures. Most of them were armed with rifles, although some had only knives and a few iron bars which they wielded as clubs.

The distance across the clearing was not much more than 200 feet, and the Chinamen advanced at a run—without any outcry.

But before they had traversed a quarter of the space Ensign Hallock recovered from his surprise and, with a few terse commands, led his crew into action. Dashing to the machine guns, the seamen threw themselves flat on the ground; and while some manned these weapons, the rest resorted to their revolvers. In two or three seconds the booming of the distant cataclysm was augmented by a steady volley of firing.

With deadly effect the machine guns raked the advancing semi-circle of Mongolians. As the foremost line began suddenly to melt away, the rest of the sorcerers wavered and presently came to a halt. They now were not more than a hundred feet from us. At a command, they all dropped down upon the ground, the ones with rifles in front, and began to return our fire.

I had drawn my revolver and joined in the fight—and so had Dr. Gresham beside me. But in our excitement we had remained on our feet, and I now heard the astronomer shouting at me: "Lie down! *Lie down!*"

Even as I dropped, my hat was knocked off by a bullet; but, unharmed, I stretched out and continued shooting.

Pausing to slip a fresh magazine of cartridges into my automatic, I suddenly became aware that a vast wind was starting to blow out of the east; the very air seemed alive and quivering.

The Chinamen still outnumbered us heavily, and all at once I realized—chiefly from the lessening of our fire—that their rifle attack was beginning to take effect. Glancing about, I saw five or six of the seamen lying motionless.

At this juncture one of the machine guns jammed, and while its crew was trying to fix it the yellow devils took toll of several more of our men. I now saw that only six of us were left to fight.

Simultaneously I became half conscious of a strange, mysterious something going on about us—a subtle, ghostly change, not on the earth itself, but in the air above—some throbbing, indefinable suggestion of impending doom—of the end of things.

Snatching a glance over my shoulder, I saw arising upon the eastern horizon a black, monstrous cloud of appalling aspect—a spuming billow of sable mist—twisting, flying, lifting into the heavens with tremendous speed. And each moment the wind was growing more violent.

Was this, after all, to be the finish? Was the world—the white man's world, which we had fought so hard to save—to go to smash through these yellow devils' fiendishness? Now that we had come within actual sight of the machinery that was the cause of it all, was our task to remain unfinished?

With a terrible cold fury clutching at my heart, I crawled quickly forward, discharging my revolver steadily as I went, to lend a hand with the disabled machine gun.

But as I reached it Ensign Hallock dropped the weapon, with a gesture of uselessness, and moved quickly back to the mortars. Out of the corner of ray eye I saw him trying to fire the things, and a wave of fierce joy seized me.

But the task caused the naval officer to half raise himself from the ground, and as he did so I saw him clutch at a bleeding gash on his head and fall forward; then he lay still.

An instant later the Chinamen leaped to their feet with a loud cry and charged upon us. They, too, were greatly reduced in numbers, but there were only four of us now, so nothing remained but an attempt at retreat. As we did so we began hurling our hand grenades, all the while moving slowly in the only direction we could go—toward the brink of the precipice.

Suddenly, above the crack of the rifles and the exploding of the grenades, an enormous roaring burst forth in the east—a sinister screaming of immeasurable forces, moaning, hooting, shrieking across the world—the weird, awful voice of the wounded planet's stupendous agony.

This new terror attracted so much attention that there was a momentary pause in the sorcerers' onslaught, and in that brief lull I noted that our grenades had wrought terrible havoc among the Chinamen, reducing their number to a mere handful. Dr. Gresham saw this at the same time, and shouted to us to let them have it again with the missiles.

Apparently sensing the purport of this command, the Chinamen sprang forward, seeking to engage us at too close range for the grenades to be used. But several of the missiles met them almost at their first leap, and when the hurricane of shrapnel abated, there remained only three of the yellow fiends to continue the attack.

But at the same time I made the grim discovery that on our side Dr. Gresham and I alone survived!

With the realization that it had now come to a hand-to-hand encounter, I braced myself to meet the shock as the trio darted forward. I somehow felt that nothing mattered any longer, anyway, for so tremendous had become the earth-tumult that it seemed impossible the planet could resist disruption many minutes more.

Nevertheless, the passions of a wild animal surged within me; a sort of madness steeled my muscles.

One powerful, thick-set Chinaman leaped upon Dr. Gresham and the two went down in a striking, clawing test of strength. A second later the remaining pair hurled themselves upon me.

I whipped out my revolver just as one fellow seized me from the front, and, pressing the weapon against his body, I fired. In a moment he relaxed his hold and crumpled down at my feet. The other chap now had me around the neck from the rear and was shutting off my wind. Round and round we staggered, as I vainly sought to loosen his hold. Before long everything went black in front of me and I thought I was done for—when I heard faintly, in a daze, the crack of a revolver. Quickly the grip about my neck fell away.

When I began to come to myself again I saw Ensign Hallock sitting up on the ground, his face covered with blood, but wielding the revolver that had ended the career of my last adversary.

At the same time I saw that the officer was trying desperately to train his weapon upon something behind me. Looking about, I saw Dr. Gresham and his opponent rolling over and over on the ground, almost at the edge of the precipice, struggling frantically for possession of a knife. Because of their rapid changes of position, Hallock dared not shoot, for fear of hitting the scientist.

Just then the Chinaman came on top for an instant, and I leaped forward, aiming my revolver at him. The trigger snapped, but there was no report. The weapon was empty.

Less than a dozen feet now separated me from the wrestlers, when the Celestial suddenly jerked the knife free and raised it for a swift stroke.

With all my strength I hurled the empty revolver at the yellow devil. It struck him squarely between the eyes. The knife dropped and he clutched at his face, at the same time struggling to his feet to meet the new attack.

Freed from the struggle, Dr. Gresham's figure relaxed as in a swoon.

Instantly I was after the Chinaman—without a thought of his bull-like strength. I was seeing red. The furious joy of the primeval man-hunter—the lust for blood—turned my head. My one idea was to kill.

Leaping over the prostrate scientist, I flung myself at the last of the sorcerers. He had retreated three or four feet, and now stood at bay upon the iron bridge that ran along the top of the water mains, overhanging the precipice. As I dashed at him he stepped quickly aside. I missed him—and

my heart leaped into my throat as I stumbled across the perilous eyrie and brought up against the outer rail, which seemed to sway.

I staggered, seized the rod, and saved myself. Far, far below, jagged rocks and the roof of the Seuten-H'sin's power house greeted my gaze.

And at the same time—although I was not conscious of paying attention to it—I became sensible of the fact that the monstrous cloud above the horizon was soaring swiftly, beating its black wings close to the sun—and that a weird twilight, a ghostly gloom, was settling over everything.

From the distance, too, still came that appalling uproar. As I recovered my balance the Chinaman bounded at me. But his foot caught in the grating and he stumbled to his knees. Instantly I threw myself upon him. My knee bored into the small of his back; my fingers sank into his throat. *I had him!* If I could keep my hold a little while the life would be strangled from his body.

In spite of his disadvantage, the fellow staggered to his feet. And there above the void—upon that narrow steel framework, protected only by its leg-high rail—we began a life-and-death struggle.

I hung on, like a mountain lion upon the back of its prey, while the Chinaman lurched and twisted this way and that. Once he staggered against the railing, lost his footing, swung around—and I hung out over empty space, a drop of fully 300 feet. I thought the end had come—that we would topple off into the void. Hut his mighty strength pulled us back upon the grating—the whole slight structure seeming to sway and creak as he did so.

I tightened my grip upon his throat, digging my fingers into his windpipe, until I felt the life ebbing out of him in a steady flow. My own strength was almost gone, but the primitive desire to kill kept me clinging there tenaciously.

At last he began to weaken. In his death throes he lurched about in a circle—until his foot slipped through a manhole above one of the ladders, and he fell across the rail with a choking moan. With me hanging upon his back he began to slip outward and downward, inch by inch.

I knew the end had come. He was falling—and I was falling with him. But thoughts of my own death were smothered in a wild rejoicing. I had conquered this yellow fiend! Everything grew blurred before my eyes as we sagged toward the final plunge into the gorge.

Suddenly my ankles were seized in a stout grip, and I felt myself being dragged back from the sickening void. With this, I loosened my hold upon the Chinaman's throat, and his body went hurtling past me to its doom.

Another instant and I was off the rocking bridge, upon solid ground, and Dr. Ferdinand Gresham was shaking me in an effort to restore my senses.

He had recovered from his own fainting spell just in time to save me from being dragged over the cliff.

Swiftly I drew myself together. The weird twilight was deepening. But a few feet away I beheld Ensign Hallock busy at the mortars and mines, pre-

paring to touch them off.

He motioned to us to run. We did so. In a moment his work was finished and he took after us.

Back along the ridge we fled, away from the danger of the coming blast.

A couple of hundred yards distant and about fifty feet below us, a bare promontory jutted out from the hillside, affording an unobstructed view of the whole region—the crumbling mountains upon the horizon, the power plant at the base of the cliff, and the bare space behind us where the mines were about to end the career of the sorcerers' workshop.

We started to descend to this plateau—when suddenly I dragged my companions back and pointed excitedly below, exclaiming:

"Look! Look!"

There in the center of the promontory, seemingly all alone, stood the arch-fiend of all this havoc the high priest of the sorcerers, Kwo-Sung-tao!

Apparently the old fellow had chosen this spot whence he could view in safety his followers' attack upon our party. He had not heard my outcry behind him, and remained absorbed in the Titanic upheaval of the distant mountains.

As I looked down upon his shriveled figure, a wave of savage joy swept over me! At last fate was strangely playing into our hands!

Quite unsuspecting, the most menacing figure of the ages the master mind of diabolical achievement, the would-be "dictator of human destiny"—had been cast into our net for final vengeance!

Just then the mortars boomed, and two charges of high explosives went hurtling toward the roof of the power house.

Kwo-Sung-tao wheeled and stared off toward the opposite promontory. Seeing nothing, he hesitated in alarm. He did not look around in our direction.

Another instant and the explosives fell squarely upon the roof of the building, and with two frightful detonations—so close together that they seemed almost as one—the whole structure burst asunder, vanished in a flying tornado of debris. For a few moments nothing was visible save a tremendous geyser of dirt, steel, concrete, and bits of machinery.

While the air was filled with this gust of wreckage, my gaze sped back to the leader of the Seuen-H'sin.

The old man stood still, petrified by this sudden destruction of all his hopes and work. What agony of soul he was enduring in that moment I could only guess. His mummified figure seemed suddenly to have shriveled unbelievably—to be actually withering before our eyes!

Just then the mines under the water mains went off, ripping the conduits to tatters—and the immense hydraulic force, suddenly released, roared

down the precipice, tearing the ground at the bottom of the gorge away to the foundation rock and obliterating the last scrap of wreckage!

Almost at the same moment Dr. Gresham left us and plunged down the slope toward the high priest, as if to settle the score with him alone. Recovering from our surprise, we followed rapidly.

Apparently sensing the danger, Kwo-Sung-tao suddenly glanced around. As he beheld Dr. Gresham he pulled himself together and I saw a look of malignity come over his face such as I never before nor since have seen upon a human countenance! It was as if he sought to blast his enemy with a glance!

The demoniacal fury of that gaze actually caused the astronomer to slacken his rush.

Promptly the old sorcerer's hand darted beneath his robe and came out with a revolver. But before the weapon could be aimed I had snatched a hand grenade and hurled it at the Chinaman. The missile flew over him, exploding some feet away; but a bit of its metal must have hit the old fellow, inflicting a serious wound, for he dropped the revolver and clutched at his side.

As he did so he turned his eyes upon me—and the blood seemed to freeze within my veins! Not to my dying day shall I forget the awful power of that look!

But only for a second did this last—for I had already drawn another grenade and was in the act of hurling it. This time the bomb fell directly at the feet of the high priest and burst with deadly force.

Even while the old man's eyes were boring through me with that unearthly fury, Kwo-Sung-tao was blown to fragments!

An instant later the sun vanished, and a ghostly semi-night fell like a thunderbolt!

IT was several days later when Dr. Ferdinand Gresham, Ensign Hallock and I returned to the Mare Island navy yard at San Francisco. And there, for the first time, we learned that the world remained intact and was out of danger.

When we had ascertained that we three were the only survivors of our expedition, we had started wandering over the mountains through the semi-darkness until we found the destroyer. Unable to navigate the vessel, we had taken the hydroplane, which Hallock knew how to handle, and started south. Engine trouble had prolonged our trip.

Back from the grave, as it seemed, we listened with tremendous elation to the story of the wounded planet's convalescence.

That last terrible upheaval, just before the destruction of the sorcerers' power plant, had seemed for a time to be the actual beginning of the end. But, instead, it had proved to be the climax—after which the earthquakes

had begun rapidly to die out. Scientists now declared that before long the earth would regain its normal stability.

With our return, the story of the Seuen-H'sin was given to the public. So universal became the horror with which that sect was regarded that an international expedition proceeded into China and dealt vigorously with the sorcerers.

The tremendous changes that had been wrought in the surface of the planet presently lost their novelty.

And New York and other cities that had been destroyed, or partly destroyed, speedily were rebuilt.

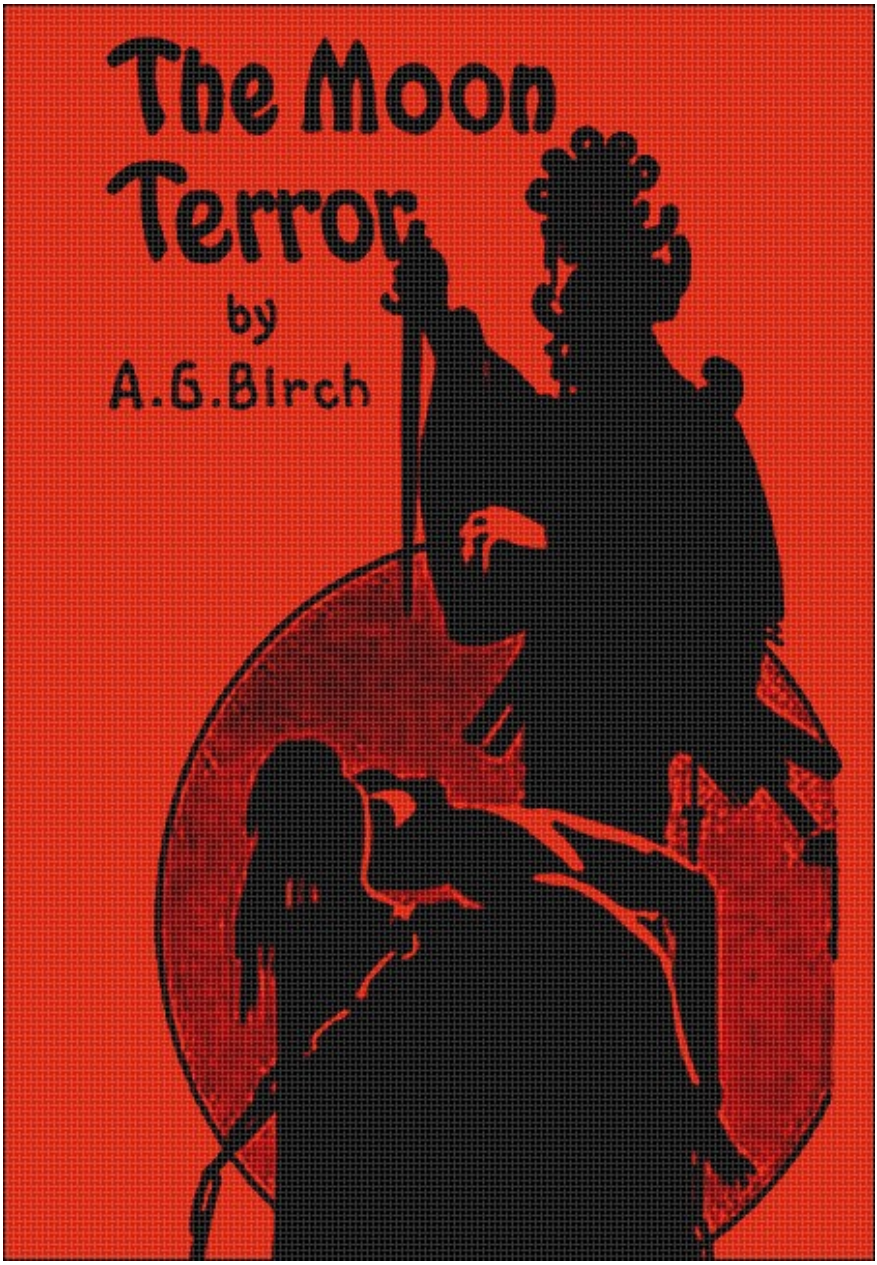
Here I must not omit one other strange incident connected with these events.

One evening, nearly two years after our encounter with the sorcerers, Dr. Gresham and I were sitting at the window of his New York apartment, idly watching the moon rise above the range of housetops to the east of Central Park.

Suddenly I began to stare at the disk with rapt interest. Clutching the astronomer by the sleeve, I exclaimed excitedly:

"Look there! Odd I never noticed it before! The face of the Man in the Moon is the living image of that Chinese devil Kwo- Sung-tao!"

"Yes!" agreed Dr. Gresham with a shudder. "And it makes my flesh creep even to look at it!"



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THE END